

workers unless new laws were passed” 33-4), but there are also dangling modifiers and problems with inconsistent hyphenation.

Books in the *Famous Canadians* series have an appealing format with many photographs and a manageable bibliography. If the material is presented in an interesting way, the books should succeed in their stated aim of acknowledging the role of “our local heroes and heroines,” thereby increasing “awareness of our Canadian heritage” (General Preface).

Paul Bunyan is obviously a hero of a different kind, a ubiquitous distillation of history and legend (the historical elements survive in Bunyan’s “realistic” vocation and in the way his exploits are grounded in space and time). In Tom Henry’s exuberant retelling, coupled with the stark, dramatic illustrations of Kim La Fave, Bunyan is successfully transplanted to Canada’s West Coast as the cloudless version of the Old Frontier. He fits well there, being the unwitting creator of such landmarks as Puget Sound and the Sooke Potholes, not to mention El Nino.

Henry is sensitive to and respectful of early twentieth-century writers who developed the Bunyan myths, particularly in his portrayal of Paul, who — part child, part adult — transcends the physical world (as children would), becoming the child’s projection of ultimate power — a power that is nonetheless sanctioned by admirable inner traits, such as a sense of fairness and justice. Henry juxtaposes a simple, direct style with an imaginative flair for hyperbole, as in his description of Bunyan’s pet, Babe the Blue Ox, who “tipped the scales at more than the combined weight of all the fish that got away”

Henry’s most obvious contribution to the manifold folklore is in the way he adapts the legends to reflect the Canadian perspective, often gently mocking Canada’s institutions in the process. Although intended for children aged eight and up, *Paul Bunyan on the West Coast* would likely be better appreciated by older children. (Non-westerners, children and adults, may miss a few of the “in” jokes, but can certainly enjoy this work).

Ultimately, what is most appealing about Henry’s book is the storyteller’s ability to communicate the joy and wonder of his art in a way that empowers his readers.

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SKETCHY PRIME MINISTERS

The Prime Ministers of Canada. Gordon Donaldson. Toronto: Doubleday, 1994. x + 380 pp. \$18.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25454-7.

The Prime Ministers of Canada, by Gordon Donaldson, discusses the lives and political careers of the twenty persons who have served in our highest political post. The objective of the book is “to sketch the story of Canada through the personalities of its elected leaders” (vi). The book has strengths, but it is also badly flawed.

Its major strength is Donaldson's writing style. The prose flows freely and each chapter is laced with interesting, illuminating and often amusing anecdotes. The combination of a good popular style and substantial anecdotal material holds the reader's interest and makes one anxious to proceed to the next chapter. An example of an interesting anecdote is the story of Arthur Meighen's (Prime Minister 1920-1921 and 1926) overcoat, "a garment so old and disreputable that his colleagues once stole it from him on a train and threw it out the window. A railwayman found it on the track and returned it; Meighen wore it for several more years" (105).

The volume is marred by two major weaknesses. The first is a problem with balance. For example, the chapter on Wilfrid Laurier (Prime Minister 1896-1911) focuses almost exclusively on Anglophone-Francophone relations and Canada's relationship with the British Empire. These closely-related themes are very important and merit attention. But, the chapter contains no real discussion of Laurier's railway policy or the impact of the wheat economy on the nature of Canada during the Laurier period. One cannot have anything like a balanced understanding of Laurier's prime ministership without some understanding of the role of railways and wheat. Another balance problem relates to the amount of attention given each prime minister. On the basis of what logic does Wilfrid Laurier, one of our greatest prime ministers, receive twenty pages while John Turner (Prime Minister 1984), a not very significant historical footnote, rates twenty-four? Or, why does Robert Borden (Prime Minister 1911-1920) arguably the most important Conservative prime minister in this century, receive nineteen pages while Joe Clark (Prime Minister 1979-1980), the least important Conservative prime minister of the century, receives twenty-eight pages — one of the longer chapters in the book?

The second major flaw relates to accuracy. The book is riddled with errors. For example, the author refers to Brian Mulroney's (Prime Minister 1984-1993) 1988 election victory as "an impressive second-term majority for any prime minister and the first for a Conservative" (342). John A. Macdonald (Prime Minister 1867-1873 and 1878-1891) won consecutive majorities in 1878, 1882, 1887 and 1891. Robert Borden managed majorities in 1911 and 1917. The International Workers of the World did not run the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 (100) and Edward Blake, an important Liberal leader did not "come out for commercial union with the United States ..." (50). The errors listed above illustrate a general problem that harms the utility of the book.

If what is wanted is a quick snappy read, by all means go to *The Prime Ministers of Canada*. However, if the objective is to understand Canadian political history, readers are advised to go elsewhere.

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