plishments of some great women? What messages are we giving young readers about the status of women and about the seriousness of women's work/identity? Second, and perhaps most importantly, there is a sense of tokenism to this series that is disconcerting. Why women writers, women politicians, women scientists, or women musicians? Why not a series on writers, politicians, scientists, or musicians that includes women and men?

That such questions should be raised by a professor of women's history is almost sacrilegious, but the questions merit some consideration. Certainly one of the reasons for the existence of women's history courses in universities is the lack of reference to women in mainstream history texts. Is this still the case at the elementary level as well? The *Women in Profile* series promotes the notion that there are scientists, and then there are women scientists, women called Jocelyn, Rachel, and Margaret. If the aim of this series is to inspire young girls by showing them role models, should this goal not transpire in a context that does not render the role models exceptional, unusual, far-fetched? The series resembles too closely the old Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew dichotomy. Very few boys read Nancy Drew; will many of them pick up a book on *women* musicians? Yet, boys, too, need to appreciate the potential of both sexes.

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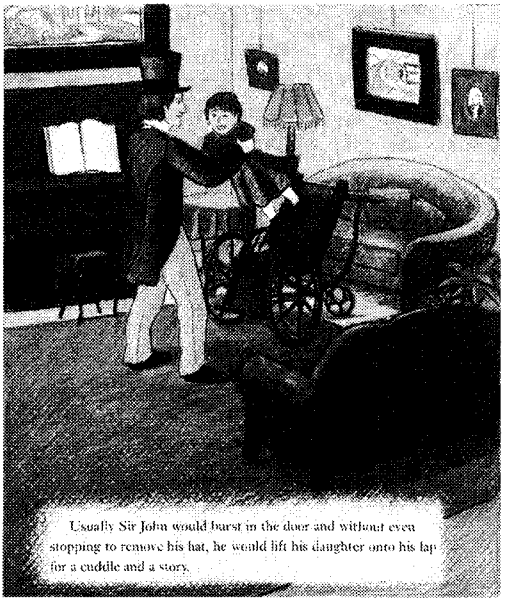
Prime Ministers, Baboo and Canadian History Brought to Life

The Kids Book of Canadian Prime Ministers. Pat Hancock. Illus. John Mantha. Kids Can, 1998. 55 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-473-9. ***Baboo: The Story of Sir John A. Macdonald's Daughter.*** Ainslie Manson. Illus. Bill Wand. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1998. 32 pp. $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-329-3.

According to its critics, political history has become an intellectual pursuit of the past. It is often claimed that this approach to history has provided too narrow a focus for a proper understanding of past events. It is further alleged that political history — especially Canadian political history — is dull and only remotely related to everday realities — obviously unsuitable material for stimulating a lively interest in history among the young. *The Kids Book of Canadian Prime Ministers* written by Pat Hancock (illustrated by John Mantha) and *Baboo: the Story of John A. Macdonald's Daughter* by Ainslie Manson (illustrated by Bill Wand) do much to dispel such myths about Canadian history. They bring the history of Canada's prime ministers and

their families to life by relating them to the wider historical context in a colourful and meaningful way.

A comparison of the two books is rather difficult given the different age groups of the intended audience. While Hancock's detailed explanation of the lives and contributions of Canada's prime ministers is geared to a readership of eight- to twelve-year-olds, Manson's far more simplistic account of the life of John A. Macdonald's handicapped daughter, affectionately known as Baboo, appeals to a younger age group (four- to nine-year-olds). Richly illustrated by John Mantha, Hancock's book provides a detailed analysis of Canada's system of government and an excellent overview of each prime minister's career. Hancock does an admirable job of explaining representative democracy, cabinet government, and other difficult concepts to a young audience in simple, accessible language. Depending on their importance in Canadian history, each prime minister merits between one and five pages of historically-accurate description, which is accompanied by vivid illustrations of the leader, his main associates, and, in some cases, family members to personalize the historical figure. A box of "quick facts" is included to provide the key points of each prime minister's career, in addition to a well-chosen quotation indicating his outlook on Canada. In such a way, a great deal of information is provided on each prime minister without giving the impression that all of these useful and fascinating tidbits have been crammed in. Some readers may chuckle at Sir John Abbott's quotation that "I am here very much because I am not particularly obnoxious to anyone." Boxes marked "Did You Know ..." provide interesting trivia on several prime ministers such as the fact that Mackenzie King was Canada's



longest-serving PM and the only one with a PhD. Complex historical events such as the Northwest rebellion, the Boer war, and the October crisis are explained in simple, direct language. The inclusion of a time line and index at the end of the book provide useful tools for the avid young historian.

Manson's picture book on the life of John A. Macdonald's handicapped daughter provides a touching glimpse of Macdonald's home life and relationship with his wife and Baboo. Although the prose is not particularly gripping for a young child, the inclusion of Macdonald's letters to his daughter remedies this weakness somewhat and brings the subject to life. In fact, they are perhaps the most sensitive part of a narrative which jumps from descriptions of Baboo's home life to Macdonald's knighthood, from her much-prized gift of a typewriter to her father's parliamentary career. Youngsters may not remember these various aspects of life with a prime minister's family, but they will get a good sense of the Macdonalds' love for their child.

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Flights of the Imagination

McCurdy and the Silver Dart. Les Harding. University College of Cape Breton P, 1998. 126 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-920336-69-8.

Many children still respond to airplanes as they did eighty years ago. At the sound of engines in the sky, they bound through the screen door and into the backyard, excitedly speculating on where the airplane might be going. Only later do they lose this sense of wonder, and come to associate flying with lost luggage, crowded departure lounges, and debilitating jet lag. Douglas McCurdy belonged to an earlier age, and Les Harding's charming book reminds us what it was like to live at a time when aviation was regarded with unbridled enthusiasm. McCurdy was the son of a distinguished Cape Breton family whose hometown of Baddeck had the good fortune to become the summer residence of the great inventor Alexander Graham Bell. The Bells grew fond of young McCurdy and, when he returned to Baddeck from university, he was brought into the Aerial Experiment Association, organized for the sole purpose of building a flying machine. In this, the AEA succeeded: McCurdy became the first person to pilot an airplane in Canada, and went on to add a string of other achievements to his credit. When he died in 1961, he was widely regarded as one of the greatest aviation pioneers in the world.

Harding's account is unembellished, and eschews the purple prose