

proofreading, the series usefully fills a gap between general history textbooks and the historical fiction we examined earlier.

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Entrepreneurs, Politicians and a Slice of Nineteenth Century Life

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The Firebrand, William Kilbourn. Clarke, Irwin, 1956, reprinted 1977. 259 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-7720-1176-6.

The Tiger of Canada West, W.H. Graham. Clarke, Irwin, 1962, reprinted 1965. 317 pp. \$3.25 paper. ISBN 0-7720-0215-0.

Northwest to the Sea, Marjorie Wilkins Campbell. Clarke, Irwin, 1975. 230 pp. \$12.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-1027-8.

The early decades of the nineteenth century were turbulent times in Canadian history. Fierce economic competition and the high risk of entrepreneurial investment challenged even the mightiest of the British North American colonies' commercial leaders. The records of the local councils and of the legislative assemblies of Upper and Lower Canada testify to tempestuous political battles. Poor quality colonial administration and the heightening indifference of both the British government and colonial élites to the wishes of colonists fanned the fire of a new reform spirit. The troubled times tested the mettle of any businessman or politician who hoped to shape the destiny of the Canadian colonies. The struggles endured by three such men have been chronicled in separate, meticulously researched historical biographies. William Kilbourn, W.H. Graham and Marjorie Wilkins Campbell have developed thought-provoking assessments of the prevailing social milieu of William Lyon Mackenzie, Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop and William McGillivray. Although all three biographies can be labelled "popular histories", each author's engaging narrative shows painstaking, serious academic research. Individually or collectively, these works are an entertaining resource aid for the teaching or study of Canadian social history.

Each of the three biographers chose to recount the trials and tribulations of a Scottish immigrant who was drawn to Canada by a sense of high adventure and a hope for a bright, lucrative future. Of the trio of Scots, William Lyon Mackenzie distinguished himself as the most flamboyant and the most cantankerous. In recent years, Mackenzie's story has surpassed the others in its ability to attract critical academic attention. The preface to *The Firebrand* acknowledges that Kilbourn's personal interest in Mackenzie derived from his study of the editor-politician in Canadian history. Funded by a McMaster University grant, Kilbourn's 1956 biography is one of the first detailed twentieth century studies of the instigator of the illfated 1837 rebellion in Upper Canada. In his introduction Kilbourn wryly attributes the previous neglect to the fact that the battle at Montgomery's Tavern ended in "comic ignominy" thereby prompting even the most ardent Canadian nationalist to try to forget it. In bringing Mackenzie's tale out of obscurity, Kilbourn has succeeded in creating a biography capable of withstanding the test of time. Despite the passage of twenty-five years, Kilbourn's balanced judgement and careful research have saved *The Firebrand* from being unceremoniously dismissed by revisionist inquiry as invalid or outdated.

Kilbourn provides a compelling appraisal of the events precipitating William Lyon Mackenzie's chosen role as champion of the common man in the Upper Canadian political arena. With an almost callous disregard for the safety and financial security of his large family, Kilbourn's Mackenzie abandons a profitable drug and book-selling business to become a self-employed journalist and a controversial politician. Kilbourn recognizes Mackenzie's popular appeal and the worsening 1830's political and economic conditions which caused radicals and moderates alike "to be driven to despair" (p. 127). Yet he berates Mackenzie for being the creator of his own destruction. Throughout the pages of *The Firebrand* Mackenzie's all-too-frequent outbursts of uncontrolled temper and irrational, sometimes bizarre, behavior undermined both the credibility of his cause and his ability to be a decisive leader. Kilbourn's thesis of self-destruction is particularly well borne out by the events surrounding the 1837 standoff at Montgomery's Tavern as well as by the exiled Mackenzie's disastrous attempt to launch an American-based invasion of Upper Canada.

Like Mackenzie, "Tiger" Dunlop passed from the Upper Canadian scene a disillusioned shadow of his former self. Graham's *The Tiger of Canada West* offers an affectionate epitaph for "Dr. William Dunlop, sometime member of the Provincial Parliament, late superintendent of the Lachine Canal, father of Huron County, but

above all, a man of the frontier" (p. 3). Stirred by the many legends associated with Dunlop, Graham sought to acquaint Canadians with the endearing wit of the man, his very chequered, yet influential career, and his proud membership in the Goderich-based Colbourne Clique. In the final analysis, Graham's biography offers a sad commentary on the uneven hand of fate. Rather than making a grand exit, Dunlop died "at age fifty-six, worn out by a strenuous life, confused by the changing times and bewildered as the great frontier, the land of his dreams" vanished (p. 3). Once opposed to Mackenzie's political posturings, Dunlop himself forfeited economic security to begin a political crusade against his former employer, the Canada Company and against members of the Family Compact to whom he attributed "nine-tenths of the disaffection which disrupted the peace" of Upper Canada (p. 195).

Although written by an advertising executive rather than a professional historian, Graham's account offers an excellent, capsulized discussion of colonial politics and the malfunctioning political system. It lays the blame for slow economic growth squarely at the feet of an indolent, complacent governing groups (p. 131). Graham also takes delight in candidly discussing the problems of courtship and marriage in the backwoods. He gleefully submits that the promiscuity allowed during courtship and the difficulties in obtaining legal marriage shocked the newly arrived immigrants of the 1820's (p. 80).

Owing to William McGillivray's untimely death in 1824, his political career was far less colourful than those experienced by Dunlop or Mackenzie. McGillivray's primary importance revolves around his pursuits as a merchant adventurer. Consequently, *Northwest to the Sea* contains a great deal more business history than *The Firebrand* or *The Tiger of Canada West*. The McGillivray biography is Campbell's fourth work on the subject of the North West Company and its fur trading exploits. Her stirring tale underscores the tragedy of the arbitrary merger of the Northwest Company into the vast Hudson Bay Company monopoly. A victim of rash British colonial administration, William McGillivray also retires to relative obscurity an embittered man.

Campbell effectively sets William McGillivray apart from his contemporaries in the Montreal élite. Although McGillivray's rise to power in the Northwest Company stemmed from the watchful patronage of his uncle Simon McTavish, McGillivray's shrewd business sense enabled him to pit "private enterprise against a powerful monopoly" (p. 220). Under his guidance the Company continued to make contributions to New World geography.

McGillivray's Nor'Westers "explored and traded their way from the tiny canoe depot on the St. Lawrence to the Pacific, from whence the fabulous riches beckoned" (p. 220). However, the pressures of business never caused him to relinquish his familial responsibilities. Unlike some of his peers, McGillivray did not cast off his illegitimate Métis children as disinherited "bits of brown stuff" (p. 34). Instead he made provision for the education and financial well-being of his children born on either side of the blanket.

Both students and teachers of Canadian history have long lamented the fact that Canadian history lacks the American's long list of folk heroes. In his introduction to *The Firebrand* Kilbourn comments that the Laurentian shield and the Group of Seven are not substitutes "for a race of gods and heroes." However, the biographies written by Kilbourn, Graham and Campbell present fascinating stories which offer some respite from this Canadian dilemma.

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They Built Canada: Historical Biography for Canadian Children

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We Built Canada, Keith Wilson, series editor. Toronto: The Book Society of Canada, 1976-1981. 16 volumes with various authors. 44-84 pp. ISBN 0-7725-5285-5300-o/x.

Canadian biography suffers from neglect in the Canadian junior and senior high school curriculum. Seldom do our children learn about Canadian heroes, past or present. In this vast and diverse country students should be encouraged to realize they share common roots and common heroes. A nation, after all, is the sum of its people. In order to fill this gap, the Book Society of Canada began publication in 1976 of the "We Built Canada" series. The list is expanding. To date, it consists of sixteen books in English, three in French and five