

Keefer's life was dramatic only in relation to his work and Murphy concentrates on that. There is one fascinating chapter on the Keefer family and their engineering contributions.

Fitzhenry & Whiteside is to be commended for this series and this particular crop of fourteen titles. They are attractive, easy to read, do not in general "talk down" to the younger reader and attempt to give a balanced view of the often controversial characters. They are generally reference works rather than straight "fun reading" but some of them transcend the limits of the standard format to become just that!

Sandy Lessner is a Librarian at Central High School of Commerce in Toronto.

FLAWED BIOGRAPHIES

Laura: a portrait of Laura Secord, Helen Caister Robinson. Dundurn Press, 1981. 240 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-919670-53-9; ***Emma Albani: Victorian Diva***, Cheryl MacDonald. Dundurn Press, 1984. 205 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-919670-74-1.

The story biography may offer readers a judicious mixture of narrative and exposition to help clarify events and interpret character. Carefully balancing fact and fiction is an art. However, this artistic licence is dangerously susceptible to abuse by biographers.

Laura strays too far from fact in its attempts to create a lively picture of a famous person in her historical setting. Added to this licence is a style verging on the overly romantic and coy. An example of Laura's conversation with her husband-to-be is typical of the book's style:

He folded her in his arms and kissed her again. "Can we be married soon, my darling? We need each other, you and I". Laura's smile was shyly mischievous as she let her fingers caress his black hair. "That, Mr. Secord, is a matter you must settle with my father", she said with mock primness.

Laura's famous walk to Beaver Dam to alert the British to an impending attack from American troops during the War of 1812 seems almost anticlimactic after fourteen long, wordy chapters. Laura Secord's place in history seems diminished by the writer's unsuccessful attempts to reveal other aspects of her nature and her family life.

With the failure of this story biography to present a many faceted portrait of Laura Secord or to capture the era's atmosphere one turns with respect to the well-known Canadian Series' *Laura Secord* for an honest and not uncolorful biography.

A second biography in the Dundurn series, on Emma Albani, makes less effort to fictionalize, but does not succeed in creating a strong sense of the subject's major contribution to her field.

Emma (Lajeunesse) Albani was one of Canada's first internationally known opera singers. Born in Chambly, Quebec, in 1847, she later moved to Albany, New York, where she made her singing debut in 1868. In 1870 she changed her name from the "mundane" Lajeunesse to the more "romantic" Albani at the suggestion of her elocution teacher. Studies and concerts in Paris launched her career which took her to the opera houses of Europe and brought her friendship among musicians, composers and royalty until her celebrated farewell concert in October, 1911 in London, England. Her international fame was recognized by the country of her birth when in 1980 Canada Post released a commemorative stamp on the fiftieth anniversary of her death.

Not written as a junior biography, this book might be of special interest to young musicians. Although well researched, with excellent notes, bibliography, chronology, illustration and photography credits and index, the book is, unfortunately, in great need of editing. The text is wordy, deviating into minor issues, gossip, long meandering vignettes of Jenny Lind, Sir Arthur Sullivan, Wagner, Adelina Patti and others. The impact of her accomplishments as a Victorian Diva is consequently diminished. The author does capture the atmosphere of Victorian times against which Emma struggled in her rising career. Insight into the world of operatic stars is gained through the author's attention to the ambitions and rivalry of fellow singers, the role of the music critic and the unique adoration of opera fans. Personal glimpses of Albani's marriage to Ernest Gye and family life are few and secondary to her musical accomplishments.

Emma Albani's special friendships with Queen Victoria and King Edward VII add color to her already international stature, yet most Canadians have never heard of her. This book, with better editing, might have been an excellent reminder of Emma Albani's contribution to Canada's national heritage and to the musical world.

Publishers do need editors, if they are to satisfy our real need for good biographies of Canadians.

Joan Weller has taught children's literature at several Canadian universities. Past President of IBBY — Canadian Section and a member of the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Award Committee, she is currently Head of West Branch Ottawa Public Library.