

our bonnets. Mary took the fur of one of the mantilas that Miss Randall had put on very sillilly and put itt on double.”

Parry or her editor should have stepped back from their noble effort long enough to realize they were losing perspective. Someone should have cut back to the most relevant details of Eleanora’s life, made the commentary less cumbersome and ridden with exclamation marks, thereby producing a less confusing and more effective book.

Still more effective would have been a fictionalized treatment of Eleanora’s invaluable diaries. Such an approach could have maintained the central story, but in a way that would have been easier to read, and more likely to achieve the goal of interesting young people in Canadian history through Eleanora’s story. Relevant accompanying material could have been added as appendices.

It is heartening to see Canadian authors attempting to make history intimate and interesting to today’s young readers. In future, perhaps they will also remember to treat that history as a good story.

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## CAROLINE’S DIARY

**Eleanora’s Diary: The Journals of a Canadian Pioneer Girl.** Caroline Parry. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1994. 219 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74096-2.

I had seen Caroline Parry lecture and perform before I read one of her books, so I was not surprised at the rich complexity of *Eleanora’s Diary*. Parry introduces, edits, and annotates the previously unpublished diary of Eleanora Hallen (1823-1846), one of eleven children of a poor curate from the Midlands district of England. She highlights one year of the diary. This is 1835: the year that Eleanora and her family travelled to their new wilderness home in Simcoe County, Ontario. Parry illustrates the diary with contemporary photographs and old drawings, paintings, and advertisements. Added to the sparse original text, this massive amount of detail helps evoke the time and places about which Eleanora wrote. In presenting these details, Parry plays at least three roles, and somehow out of the complexity comes a celebration.

In her role as a teacher, Parry instructs with many probing questions and a few pithy lessons. Always Parry is wondering about the “little unknowns” of which Eleanora’s journals are “full.” Why did Eleanora start her diary on April 1, 1833? Why did her family emigrate? What was her first Christmas in Canada really like? Now and then, Parry offers a pedagogically firm conclusion: “As much as we can assemble the pieces and try to make a good picture of times gone by, we can never be sure we have recreated the past absolutely accurately.”

In her role as an entertainer, Parry paces the text to the short attention spans of young people, offering a brief diary excerpt, then an aside, then an artifact. For

example, the following excerpt is followed by a rhetorical question.

[June 12, 1833] In the evening the Lewis [family], Mrs. & Miss and all the little ones came; they stayed to tea.... While they were here Miss Holmes played [the piano] and George and Sarah sang, then we went out of doors and played Prison Bars, but before we were done they had to leave.

The question is boldfaced: "But what about toys — didn't she like to play with them?" Then comes a chatty answer that begins, "Of course the Hallen children like toys!" Then come drawings of a toyshop *circa* 1836 and a Victorian toy called a "cosmorama."

As an historian, Parry is a co-discoverer, almost a peer rather than an authoritative adult. She begins her introduction to the book by admitting that she too keeps a diary, "and it's very private!" She uses informal diction (contractions, expression like "a lot of") and can even make up a word, as when she refers to Eleanora's large, rambunctious family as "zooeey." Parry records history by presenting herself as an ordinary individual (rather than a learned historian) attempting to reconstruct the past from clues left by another ordinary individual. Parry has written the story of how Caroline Parry befriended a long-dead child and learned a great deal about history. *Eleanora's Diary* is a celebration of that child's brief life. It is also Caroline Parry's public diary of discovery.

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## LIVELY HISTORIC FICTION

**Yesterday's Children.** Joyce Barkhouse. Illus. Kevin Sollows and Cheri Killam. Lancelot Press, 1992. 92 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88999-522-2.

*Yesterday's Children* is a collection of twelve fast-paced stories set in historic Atlantic Canada. The book, which is an Our Choice selection by the Canadian Children's Book Centre, features the adventures of children and young adults from a variety of backgrounds. Sylvia Creighton, a slave, outwits the privateers who attack her master's home in "Heroine of Lunenburg." Madrine Bourge, in "Secret Mission," warns neighbouring Micmacs of an upcoming raid. In "Strange Encounter," a Beothuk boy comes in contact with Norsemen in Newfoundland. Two young German pioneers, searching for food, venture into an evil place in "The Apples of Hufeisen Bucht."

Some of the stories end with a short note on interesting aspects of pioneer life. A few stories have endings that may leave mature readers confused about the fictional/non-fictional existence of the characters. (Was there really a girl whose cow supplied milk to the Seymour Street survivors of the Halifax Explosion? Was there really a slave in Lunenburg who outsmarted the privateers?) Such questions, however, will not interfere with a child's enjoyment of these stories. Even children who are normally bored by history will be interested in this lively book.

**Susan Merritt** is the author of *Her Story: Women from Canada's Past*, *Her Story II: Women from Canada's Past*, and *The Stone Orchard*.