

près des clientèles populaires. Comme si la nécessité d'une scolarisation minimale avait emporté la conviction d'une très forte majorité; en revanche, l'optimum scolaire pouvait se formuler en de multiples variantes, à la mesure des divergences d'intérêt et de conception qui composaient la trame sociale.

Dans un article intitulé « Aspects of Neglect: The Strange Case of Victorian Popular Education » (*Oxford Review of Education*, 1977, pp. 57-69), H. Silver souhaitait la gestation d'une histoire de l'école qui, rejetant les présupposés jusque là charriés, se fixât deux objectifs fondamentaux: un éclairage moins partiel du pan négligé de la réceptivité populaire à la présence de l'école sous toutes ses formes; une vision plus compréhensive de l'interpénétration de l'école et du milieu ambiant. Muni de prémisses et d'outils forcément limitatifs, J. S. Hurt s'est avec bonheur avancé sur la première voie; plus complexe, le second cheminement reste toujours à suivre, si instruction et éducation doivent retenir l'historien du social.

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DOUGLAS MCCALLA. — *The Upper Canada Trade 1834-1872: A Study of the Buchanans' Business*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Pp. viii, 231.

Studies of Canadian business firms are not overly numerous and too many of the ones we have are amateurish, self-congratulatory accounts of successful, or at least persistent, companies. Professor McCalla's book is therefore a most welcome contribution to the field. The Buchanans' business has been defunct for over a century and his analysis of it is expert, judicious and dispassionate. The Buchanans' business was of course ultimately a failure and, as Professor McCalla rightly notes, this fact in itself makes the firm worth studying, for bankruptcy was the common fate of many businesses in the nineteenth (as well as in the twentieth) century.

The book is a business "case study" but it is much broader in scope than a day-to-day account of a merchant enterprise in operation. (Though that too would be useful the documentation evidently does not exist.) The "Upper Canada Trade" was really a transatlantic trade. Professor McCalla's book is concerned with both the European and the North American end of the trading process. He discusses, in relation to the Buchanans, the British imperial system and British sources of capital, and he demonstrates the shifting nature of British mercantile concerns — shifting physically from port to port as some declined and others prospered, and shifting in the interest which British traders took in a variety of overseas areas and commodities, as they were perceived to be of rising or declining value. The book is equally good on the nature of the Upper Canadian economy. Here Professor McCalla stresses the importance of the import function and casts some doubt on the value of a "staples" interpretation, particularly in the early settlement period. He traces the expansion of the Upper Canadian economy pointing out along the way economic peaks and valleys which are not always the same as those which contemporaries, or later writers, believed they were. He puts strong emphasis on one particular economic low point, the depression of 1857, which he

believes marked the end of the first great expansionary period and had a devastating impact, producing problems which were much more difficult to surmount than any similar previous occurrence.

The story of the Buchanans themselves as told by Professor McCalla, is also highly instructive. The importance to a company of the personal factor comes through loud and clear, in both a positive and a negative sense. Professor McCalla's account makes it quite obvious that Peter Buchanan was the mainstay of the family firm, until he was accidentally shot by his bumbling nephew in 1860. On the other hand it is made no less obvious just what an incompetent *poseur* Isaac Buchanan really was, despite a Canadian reputation, mostly self-engendered, as a leading businessman, politician and economic theorist.

Isaac Buchanan's career and the fortunes of the Canadian business as described by Professor McCalla provide in fact a good example of the importance, then as now, of a successful "image". Despite Isaac's habitual neglect and mishandling of the firm, he, and it, were able to maintain a consistent public façade of expertise and solvency, not only among other businessmen and politicians and the public at large, but in the opinion of the supposedly sharp-eyed Mercantile Agency, which as late as 1866 was still giving the business an A1A1 rating, which on the evidence, was totally undeserved. There is an evident warning here which Professor McCalla ought to have made even plainer. Nineteenth-century business historians ought not to put too much weight on the assessments of such credit rating organizations as the Mercantile Agency or R. G. Dun and Company.

But no author no matter however generally successful, can satisfy everyone. There are two, somewhat interrelated, complaints which can be made about *The Upper Canada Trade*. First, for those of us whose claims to an expert grasp of economics in general and accountancy in particular are essentially fraudulent, Professor McCalla's explanations of trends and transactions are frequently all too brief and all too technical. Secondly, Professor McCalla has succeeded too well in compressing the doctoral dissertation on which the book is based into a pared down version of 159 pages of text. Almost everything that does not deal directly with the business itself has been ruthlessly ignored — Isaac Buchanan's political career, his extensive writings and his even more extensive dabbling in railways are barely touched upon. Even the conclusion, where Professor McCalla might have been expected to relax a bit, while thoughtful and thought provoking, is almost cryptic. Still, better a good short book than a bad long one. On the whole, *The Upper Canada Trade* deserves far more praise than blame.

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LINDA KEALEY, ed. — *A Not Unreasonable Claim. Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979. Pp. 233.

Aside from its rather apologetic title, *A Not Unreasonable Claim* has not much to apologize for. Comprising nine articles connected by time period, Canadian content, the theme of reform and Linda Kealey's useful general and individual