

argues that "everything worked" because a "socialist good sense" ... did attain and still retains a fair measure of popular acceptance in Canada" (125).

Be warned: Mackay's essay is dense, but readers will receive two rewards after making the intellectual slog. The first is David Frank's lively discussion of Canadian workers in films. His conclusion is hardly startling: "visual history will benefit from greater collaboration between historians and film-makers" (437). His selection of films, however, is wide-ranging, and he teases out the working-class experience in unexpected places. For example, in *My American Cousin*, a film that is focused upon a girl's crush on her foreign cousin, he looks at the "itinerant pickers" (434) in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. The second reward, and the only essay

centred on British Columbia, is Becki Ross's study of burlesque and striptease in Vancouver from 1945 to 1980. As she notes, her SSHRC-funded study generated much criticism in the mainstream press and on radio talk shows, being generally considered a waste of taxpayers' money. Yet Ross convincingly argues that striptease can and should be seen as a form of labour. Moreover, she shows how striptease both reflects and reinforces discourses of prostitution, race, and sexuality.

Collections of articles are prone to being uneven, and this one is no exception. Yet rather than conclude on a negative note, let me emphasize that the good essays far outweigh the few weak ones. This collection is worth buying, and, at twenty dollars, readers will get, ahem, a good return on their investment.

*School Leadership:  
Essays on the British Columbia Experience, 1872-1995*

Thomas Fleming, editor

Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books, 2001. 427 pp. Illus. \$34 paper.

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FROM FIGURES OF prominence to hassled administrators, from people of moral force to persons uncertain of the merit of their work, this book opens with the fallen image of our school leaders. *School Leadership* contains fourteen well articulated chapters (eight of which were published previously by the editor as author) and is divided into two parts, according to a military metaphor. Part 1

is the perspective from "headquarters," the central view from Victoria; Part 2 is the perspective "from the field," the realities of principals and others who faced the challenges of providing schooling in a frontier society. Clearly, school leadership is seen as distributed among community leaders, politicians, teachers, parents, and others. The contributions of superintendents, principals, and women are featured,

although the roles of independent school educators, Aboriginal people, and minorities receive only passing mention. Since a single page cannot do justice to over 400, I'll comment directly on just four of the chapters.

The initial article offers an account of Alexander Robinson, the relatively unacknowledged superintendent of education from 1899 to 1919. Depicted as a gentleman-scholar, at the start of his tenure he presided over a scant ministry of six persons and a province with only 500 teachers. Using the technology of written correspondence, he made vast numbers of personnel and material decisions in order to address the problems facing boards and educators flung across thousands of square miles. The substantial challenges of his job are revealed in a lively and captivating manner, but what remains unclear is why he went to work each day. What particular vision of education did he hold dear? What directed him? What inspired him? Apparently, his letters do not tell us.

A later chapter, on principals, describes the public regard for secondary headmasters who were often well educated and prominent community figures. They demanded high levels of scholarship and stringent discipline from their charges. In contrast, elementary principals did not usually have degrees; nevertheless, they were respected and frequently illustrious women, such as those featured in this chapter. As is true of the characters in many good stories, some of the characters in this book succeed, some falter, and some fall into unjust misfortune. The graphic descriptions of the difficult physical conditions within which learning took place, and class sizes that approached fifty students, reminds us that teaching, then as now,

had many demands besides the direct education of the young.

Another chapter consists of the oral history of a mid-twentieth-century principal. His tale, which includes surprises (such as discovering the meaning of a "superior" school), introducing young boys to urinals, the problem of sabotage, and the perplexities of time-tabling, gives a remarkable sense of the uniqueness of the time. It parallels the issues facing today's educators in the province's upcountry schools. This person's account is eloquently narrated; has a modest and disarming tone; and shows the care, versatility, and resolve demanded of the role of principal.

The concluding chapter offers a panorama of how education has changed since 1872. It presents a summative (rather than a normative) view of loosening central control, the disappearance of consensus, and the affirmation of local directions. Some changes are circular: school boards become district boards and then school boards once again. Perhaps this chapter could have offered a vision of the future through focusing upon elements of the past. Are we happy with universalized, standardized, professionalized, bureaucratized, and unionized public education? Will we return to certain aspects of nineteenth-century schools, with their close community ties?

The stated intention of this book is to "describe" rather than "prescribe" the real world of leadership practice" – and "describe" it does. The reader is left to deduce his or her own definition of school leadership. When selecting their material, the editor and authors have used their unstated conceptions to include educational initiatives and large dollops of stewardship, but there are few hints of what leadership is and what it is not. What does emerge clearly

is the relative unanimity of most participants in education. As we near the end of our second Elizabethan era and consider the realities of September 11th, we may profitably look back to those who sought to bring unity to a fragile land. Perhaps they can help current school leaders recapture some of the conviction that is expected to be part of educational leadership.

This volume can serve many worthwhile purposes. It provides a springboard for fine discussions for at least

three sets of persons: (1) those who are interested in social history and who want to affirm the struggle of women and acknowledge their contributions, (2) those who wish to manage schools, and (3) those who are captivated by society building and the rich cultural history of British Columbians. Well crafted, scholarly, and readable, this volume makes an important contribution to the story of school leadership in British Columbia. I recommend it to all.