

Book Reviews

Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier, by Patrick A. Dunae. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981. Pp. 276; \$16.95.

Gentlemen Emigrants is an important book drawing attention to a significant aspect of Canadian history. "Gentlemen emigrants" were, as Patrick Dunae points out in his introduction, Canada's "well-born, well-educated British settlers." The term appeared in Britain in the 1870s in response to conditions in that country. The Industrial Revolution had resulted in a large increase in the number of families able to provide offspring with the education of a gentleman, but not in a socio-economic structure able to meet their expectations as adults. Acquisition of genteel status, it was generally agreed, began with attendance at an exclusive "public" school inculcating suitable habits of speech and dress, standards of behaviour, and the self-confidence that comes from occupying a superior position in the society. Suitable occupations for a gentleman were, however, limited. While the professions, finance, company management and agriculture were acceptable, a gentleman could not engage in trade or work with his hands, even in the skilled crafts. Therein lay the rub: as Dunae demonstrates, an insufficiency of employment existed in Britain itself to satisfy all those having been given, through a "public" education, the expectation of a genteel lifestyle.

Emigration in order to maintain status as a gentleman became increasingly common in the decades preceding the First World War. The number who came to Canada can be approximated from statistics alluded to by Dunae (p. 2). Between 1870 and 1914 over 150,000 adult males leaving Britain for British North America gave as their occupation "Commerce, Finance, Professional, Students," a category equated by Dunae with genteel status. While 15,000 to 25,000 such individuals came in each of the last three decades of the century, fully 90,000 arrived in the years of concerted Canadian immigration, 1900-14.

Gentlemen Emigrants provides a graphic introduction to this significant facet of Canadian socio-demographic history. Principally through vignettes of settlers with a good story to tell, Dunae traces both the experience of individuals and the larger phenomenon. The first two chapters, centring on the Moodie family (of Susanna fame) in Ontario in the 1830s and on the Cornwalls and their contemporaries in the British Columbia interior in the 1860s, set the scene for an incisive discussion of conditions in Britain promoting genteel emigration. Subsequent chapters describe the adventures of "public school" boys searching out suitable occupations in Canada in the 1870s and 1880s, of "high-class cowboys" in the Alberta foothills in the 1880s, and of genteel eccentrics and big game hunters in British Columbia in the 1890s.

The second half of Dunae's study focuses on limitations inherent in genteel emigration and on measures taken to mitigate their effect. Gentlemen emigrants were not only educated to believe in their superior position in society, but in many cases left Britain precisely in order to ensure preservation of that special status. Expectation and reality did not always coincide in Canada. The problems of adaptation faced by "public school" boys living on a regular "remittance" from home until settled in agriculture receive special attention from Dunae. He argues that by 1900 Canadian antagonisms to their often flamboyant lifestyle had become acute:

No longer were these gentlemen regarded as energetic, innovative pioneers; rather, they were viewed as disreputable, languid fops. In fact, attitudes had changed to such an extent that by 1900 the term "gentleman emigrant" had virtually disappeared and been replaced by a new, derogatory term — "remittance man." (p. 124)

Dunae examines three kinds of genteel response: group agricultural settlements created in 1882 at Cannington Manor, Saskatchewan, and in 1910 at Wallhachin, British Columbia; the scheme whereby British gentlemen farmers settled in Canada advertised in Britain their willingness to accept fellow immigrants as farm pupils, or "mud pups," for a fee; and initiatives by British public schools to create their own training farms in England and Alberta.

Unfortunately for historians of British Columbia, the strength of Dunae's analysis centres on the prairies. There his range of primary evidence is extensive, his perception of the changing nature of the host society acute. Dunae's attempt to encompass British Columbia within the same conceptual framework is, by contrast, disquieting. A primary concern with agriculture, valid from the prairie perspective, leads him to do

no more than acknowledge in passing the role of gentlemen emigrants in colonial Victoria while detailing the exploits of a handful in the interior. Dunae's second chapter on British Columbia is equally concerned with high adventure at the expense of the main chance: fruit farming, which provided the focus for very extensive genteel settlement, is dismissed in a page and a half, whereas seven are given the exploits of three big game hunters. More seriously, Dunae assumes that gentlemen emigrants lost their significance in British Columbia after 1900 simply because they apparently did so on the prairies. Amidst two dozen pages demonstrating his general contention are precisely two pieces of evidence referring to British Columbia: an 1890s ballad, published in 1962, lamenting the incompetence of a "young British rauncher," and two anecdotes, published only in 1933 and 1976, concerning an ignorant Englishman who sold liquor to an Indian in the Kootenays and another lost without a proper cup from which to drink (pp. 130 and 133).

Having demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the positive contribution of genteel emigration was over by 1900, Dunae largely ignores the events of the decade and a half preceding the First World War, when well over half the total number of gentlemen emigrants arriving between 1870 and 1914 came to Canada. It was in these years that attention in Britain turned from the prairies and Ontario to British Columbia as the most suitable destination for middle- and upper-class settlers. Between 1900 and 1914 the proportion of British born in British Columbia grew from a quarter to a third even as its overall white population tripled. The contribution of gentlemen emigrants in creating "the orchards of British Columbia" was certainly not, as Dunae suggests (p. 123), over by 1900. Moreover, genteel emigration into the province extended far beyond the "public school" boys and eccentrics on whom Dunae concentrates his attention. Many were middle-aged professionals whose first career had proven unsatisfactory, others young married men with a family to support. Emigration was, for such individuals, not taken lightly. If most did attempt to live in British Columbia much as they would have in Britain itself, to do so in a province with a very strong British heritage was not that idiosyncratic. Their lifestyles in British Columbia justify neither condemnation as primarily "exiles and ne'er do wells" (p. 130) nor their dismissal from historical consideration on the basis of attitudes expressed toward "public school" boys on the prairies.

To suggest that Dunae has minimized the role of gentlemen emigrants in British Columbia is not, however, to doubt his central thesis that they

made a far more significant contribution than hitherto appreciated in the development of Canadian society. Rather, by generalizing for the whole from only a part of the phenomenon, he simply understates his case.

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British Columbia: Historical Readings, edited by W. Peter Ward and Robert A. J. McDonald. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981. Pp. xii, 692; no index.

Books of readings rarely stir the blood. They are usually printed by ambitious publishers to take advantage of a captive student market and reluctantly assigned by professors to prevent studies from ripping apart the journals in the library. Burdened by the necessity of being comprehensive, representative, balanced and packaged for tutorial use, readers tend to be overstuffed and often quite confusing. Made up for the most part from unedited academic articles, collections of this sort can be quite tedious, however excellent some of the individual pieces might be. The effect is that of reading the back issues of a journal all at one sitting.

Some editors are more ambitious and ingenious than others. The reader format has been used to stake out a new field, sum up research on a problem, demonstrate prevailing controversies, or focus on important issues in a field. In some readers the individual pieces form a coherent whole or illustrate different approaches to a central theme. Often an ideological harmony binds the essays together. Sometimes a brilliant editor imposes a new order on existing literature. Peter Ward and Robert McDonald's ambition, as stated in their all too brief preface, is more modest: "to provide college and university students with a textbook reflecting the interests of the province's most recent historians." They shrink from providing an interpretive framework of their own; they do not classify or count; nor do they hint at an emerging synthesis. Instead they merely select and sort, letting many authors and many voices speak for themselves.

Most of the essays included in this collection will be familiar to readers of this journal. Eleven of the thirty-one pieces were originally published in *BC Studies*. Eleven come from journals as diverse as *Explorations in Economic History*, the *Canadian Historical Review*, *Plan Canada* and