

from the Irish districts. At the same time, changes in shipping routes brought increasing numbers of Irish to Lowell. They expanded into traditionally non-Irish areas and were joined, after 1845, by huge numbers of poor Famine emigrants. The Irish became "visible symbols of deteriorating standards" in the town (99).

Anti-Irish feeling culminated in the sweep to power of the nativist "Know Nothing" Party in the state and the local elections of 1854. The Irish responded to Yankee hostility by gathering more closely around their new priest, Fr. John O'Brien, a strong-minded administrator who strengthened the Catholic Church's institutional presence by establishing a convent and separate schools for girls, and building a huge gothic revival church symbolic of a new Irish Catholic identity. Irish Lowell continued to be an impoverished and highly transient community — in the 1850s, there was an 87 percent turnover — but this fluidity was countered by the strong Catholic institutional presence. Mitchell echoes Kerby Miller in noting that O'Brien's success was in part due to the "narrow, provincial, and...pessimistic" nature of Catholic philosophy, which promised less than had the old compromises, accepted persecution as part of man's earthly existence, and advocated social separatism. Yet, the Irish were also patriotic Americans in their own way and rallied to the colours, in 1861.

In common with many students of Irish Americans, Mitchell equates "Irish" with "Irish Catholic", and the reader could quite easily come away with the impression that there were no Irish Protestants in Lowell. However, they do turn up in the statistical tables at the rear (159), where Mitchell notes relief granted by the town to forty Irish Protestants and forty-four Irish Catholics, in 1859; and to twenty-three Protestants and forty Catholics, in 1860. This is the only place Irish Protestants are mentioned in the book, but the statistics themselves suggest that they accounted for a substantial proportion of the poor, and one wonders whether they might not have accounted for an even greater proportion of the shopkeeping middle class. Consideration of the relationships between Irish Protestants and Catholics and between the Protestants and the town's ruling elite are significant omissions. In noting that twenty-three of twenty-five Irish Protestant applications for relief were successful in 1860, whereas only forty of seventy-eight Irish Catholic applications were, Mitchell's table perhaps hints that the Protestants and Catholics may have been perceived and treated differently. Consequently, the reader is left wondering whether the Irish were a cause for concern to Lowell's American population because they were Irish, because they were Catholic, or because they were poor.

With this major exception, the story Mitchell tells in painstakingly researched and clearly presented. He works considerable pertinent detail into a reasonably short book (155 pages of text). I wish we could have seen a cartographer's name in the acknowledgements; the maps are terrible scribbles that detract from an otherwise fine volume.

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Lois G. Schwoerer — *Lady Rachel Russell "One of the Best of Women"*: Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Pp. xxviii, 321.

Biography is a difficult historical form. On the one hand, there is the need to remain true to one's subject, to tell the story of a life in all its uniqueness and historical setting. On the other hand is the equally pressing need to make sense of that life, to situate it within a context of understanding and to see how it conforms to the patterns of other contemporary lives. For what can biography tell us that is worth knowing? Beyond the sense of playing God, of encompassing a person's life within one's brain, from beginning to end, what is the historical value of such an exercise? These are some of the reflections raised by reading Lois G. Schwoerer's *Lady Rachel Russell "One of the Best of Women"*.

Lady Rachel Russell, wife of the Whig "martyr" William Russell, is interesting both for the ways she was typical of her time, place and class, and how she went "against the time" and managed to widen the sphere of action usually allowed to women. Married but childlessly widowed by the age of thirty, she nevertheless managed to find marital happiness and domestic fulfillment with a younger man, and maternal satisfaction in her three children, having avoided both the frequent pregnancies and multiple infantile deaths that plagued so many contemporary women. A woman of strict principle and considerable theological interest, she arranged her children's marriages without consulting them overmuch, most concerned about the financial situation of their spouses. A woman who spent the forty years after her husband's execution in mourning, she filled those decades with involvement in national and local affairs as a dispenser of patronage, advice and influence. She is, therefore, exactly the sort of person whose life makes the right kind of historically interesting biography, telling us as much about the limits of the possible as the compromises and limitations of the typical.

Having praised the subject of this book, a few things must be noted about its execution. In the main, the writing, though clear and precise, is very tentative. Now, it is surely far better for an historian in doubt to acknowledge and explain the grounds for such a difficulty, or to point out where evidence is just too scanty for certitude. It is, however, rather disquieting to have pages of texts with statements about what the protagonist *might* have thought, *may* have felt, or *probably* did. And though it cannot really be considered a fault, it would have been refreshing to have had a break from the strict chronological account of Lady Rachel's life, and have been presented with more of an account of her times. Especially useful would have been a fuller treatment of the scope and nature of female activity among the aristocracy in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England. How typical was Lady Rachel's education, courtship and marriages? How many other aristocratic women were involved in estate management, had books dedicated to them, and were entrusted with family strategy and management? Were other aristocratic women friendlier with members of their own sex, or was Lady Rachel typical in preferring male correspondents? And how did the lives of aristocratic women compare with women of other classes? These questions go largely unanswered, perhaps in part because of a lack of detailed information about the lives of English female aristocrats. Till much more is known, works such as Lois G. Schworer's *Lady Rachel Russell* will be an important contribution toward such a much-to-be-desired new genre.

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Norman Séguin et François Lebrun, éd. *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-campagnes au Québec et dans la France de l'Ouest, XVII^e-XX^e siècles : actes du Colloque franco-québécois de Québec, 1985*, Trois-Rivières, Université du Québec, Centre de recherche en études québécoises, 1987.

Depuis 1979, des historiens québécois et français spécialistes d'histoire rurale travaillent de concert pour une meilleure compréhension de leurs sociétés respectives. Cette perspective comparatiste est bienvenue; les historiens s'enfermant trop facilement dans des cadres étroitement nationaux. L'approche comparative permet, entre autres, de peser le poids respectif des institutions, des cultures populaires et de l'environnement physique sur la constitution et l'évolution du tissu social. L'ouvrage dont il est question ici rassemble quarante communications présentées au Colloque de 1985, regroupées en quatre sections. Ce genre de publication souffre généralement de deux faiblesses : les textes sont de qualité inégale et ils manquent d'homogénéité. *Sociétés villageoises* a relativement bien évité ces deux écueils. Les différentes communications sont de bonne tenue. Deux des quatre parties sont suffisamment homogènes pour permettre au lecteur d'en tirer une conclusion d'ensemble. La première partie intitulée « Patrimoines fonciers et structures agraires » oppose un pays de terroir plein, la France, à une région de colonisation, le Québec. En France, le système de transmission des terres avait pour but premier de garder le patrimoine intact. Cette contrainte déterminait la structure sociale