

DESLANDRES, Dominique, John A. DICKINSON, and Ollivier HUBERT (dir.) — *Les Sulpiciens de Montréal. Une histoire de pouvoir et de discrétion, 1657–2007*, Montréal, Fides, 2007, 670 p.

In 21 essays, this extensive and sumptuously illustrated book covers the 350-year history of the Messieurs de Saint-Sulpice in Montreal. The Sulpicians were priests and missionaries, of course, but also educators, administrators, seigneurs, musicians, artists, urban planners, builders, and even librarians, to name but a few of the roles the seminary and its members filled over the centuries. The links between Saint-Sulpice and Montreal run deep, to the very beginnings of the settlement, and to the height of Montreal's religious power in the first decades of the twentieth century. The institute defined the early history of the city in its double role as seigneur of the island and religious leader of the community. It helped to build the city, shaped it, and educated its youth and its leaders. This is as much a book about Montreal as it is one about the Sulpicians.

The purpose of the book, state its three editors, is to provide a “scientific study that does not seek to glorify . . . , to give an account of the relations that link a group of religious men with a city over the long term” (p. 16). To this end, the editors have gathered a group of 16 scholars who write on subjects ranging in matter and tone from a prosopography of the 650 priests who have belonged to the Séminaire de Saint Sulpice de Montréal from 1657 to today (Ollivier Hubert), to the economic role of the Séminaire in the city (John A. Dickinson), and studies that focus on the community's contributions to cultural life (Jacques Des Rochers, Élisabeth Gallat-Morin, Paul-André Dubois). The book itself is beautifully crafted, including 48 full-colour plates and numerous black and white images. It is as much a visual representation of the community and the city as it is a written history. To achieve this final product, the Sulpicians opened their archives to the researchers involved in the project. Like the articles presented here, these are a rich deposit of information on the economic, social, cultural, and religious history of the institution and of Montreal, Quebec, and Canada.

Yet, as Dominique Deslandres shows in chapter 3, members of the community itself have displayed a remarkable reluctance over the years to celebrate their work or that of their institution. Historically, discretion was the primary characteristic of the public face of the Séminaire and of those who were closely affiliated with it. Any effort to illuminate the foundations and workings of their identity and power, therefore, encounters great challenges. In many ways, then, this collection redresses a great lacuna in historical knowledge by affording professionally trained historians the chance to delve into the history of an organization not known for its openness. Deslandres writes about the relationships of the Sulpicians with other religious orders in Montreal (chapter 12), and Sherry Olsen about their connections with Saint Patrick's and the Catholic Irish of the city (chapter 11). Ollivier Hubert and Christine Hudon examine the role of the seminary in the education of youth and the clergy (chapters 14, 15, and 17). In

a fascinating and richly illustrated section entitled “stratégies culturelles sulpiciennes,” several authors explore the connections of the Séminaire with books, literature and libraries, music, ritual and liturgy, and architecture and religious space.

As in any book that aims towards a broad study of a single entity over a long period of time, some aspects of that history are bound to receive more attention than others. Here the interests and concerns of the fathers themselves naturally draw to the fore. As a result, it is the discretionary character of the Sulpicians that gives the book its flavour more so than their relationship with, and use of, power. Over the course of the work, power is more implied than scrutinized. It is the shadowy background to the social and cultural work of the institution, while the history and contributions of the Sulpicians are discussed without, for the most part, reference to larger historical processes. The result is that the fathers and their institution often appear as the exception, almost outside history. Yet the Sulpicians were more than priests, artists, musicians, and educators. They were also businessmen, politicians, and, during the French regime, missionaries. Despite articles by John Dickinson on the Sulpicians as property owners and seigneurs (chapter 7) and by Jean-Claude Robert concerning their impact upon the spatial development of the island of Montreal (chapter 6), little mention is made of their administration of justice during the seventeenth century, their financial administrations, or the nature of their relationships with temporal authorities either during or after the French regime. The Sulpicians had a lengthy history as missionaries at Kenté on the north shore of Lake Ontario in the 1680s and to the Iroquois at La Montagne and later at Lac des Deux Montagnes, but only one article out of 21 focuses on this aspect of the Sulpician vocation, and none deals particularly with Sulpician relationships with Native peoples or Aboriginal perceptions of the Sulpicians as missionaries, landlords, authorities, or opponents, to name but a few issues linked to the ethnohistory of Christian missions.

The great strengths of the collection, to my mind, are the contributions it makes to the cultural history of Montreal, the questions the authors open up for further exploration, and the archival material revealed by their research. The Sulpician past is significant, not just for the history of Montreal, but also for understanding North America’s colonial past and relationships between religion and colonization, ecclesiastical institutions and power, and authority and religion over a long period of time. The implications of Sulpician power are intriguing and deserve prolonged attention. The editors and authors have done a marvellous job of presenting a readable, accessible, and stunning collection of significant historical research, valuable in itself, but infinitely more valuable for the further research it is bound to provoke.

Timothy G. Pearson  
*Université de Montréal*