

SANDWELL, R. W. – *Canada's Rural Majority: Households, Environments, and Economies, 1870-1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. Pp. 258.

Until at least the early twentieth century in northwestern Europe and North America (and long after that elsewhere), a large majority of the world's population was rural, yet these people were mainly visible to historians through the eyes of outsiders (in documents representing the views of government officials, the upper classes, travel writers, critics, and religious institutions, for example). This view contributed to a powerful (and tenacious) stereotype that rural worlds were simple and homogeneous, populated by undifferentiated stock characters from central historical casting (a timeless tradition-bound peasantry, a virtuous yeomanry, hardy pioneers). In an effort to get beyond such understandings, some historians began seeking perspectives from within, rather than outside, rural society, drawing on hitherto little-used sources and reading familiar documents from new angles. The result has been to reveal the variety and complexity of rural worlds and to bring the agency of rural people to the fore.

A leading figure in these new approaches in Canada, Ruth Sandwell is very well qualified to synthesize rural experience in Canada for a series that aims to present “the main themes and interpretations” to non-specialists. This is no small subject, as it involves some 80 per cent of the Canadian population in 1870 and about 50 per cent in 1940. One example of the complexity is that virtually all of Canada's Indigenous peoples lived in rural contexts at the start of the period, and most still did 70 years later. Another is that rural society encompassed more people than the “farmers, hunters, gardeners, fishers, miners, loggers, and cannery workers” on whom the book concentrates (quotation from the book jacket). Even without considering all the others (for example, blacksmiths, carpenters, tanners, millers, teachers, village bank managers, insurance agents, equipment dealers, railway station agents, feed and seed dealers, clergy, doctors, innkeepers), the diversity of experience of the targeted groups was enormous.

After acknowledging that “rural life in Canada... varied dramatically from one place to another” and noting the “dramatic changes” that marked her period (p. 7), Sandwell makes a reasonable decision to focus primarily on “commonalities and continuities” (p. 9). Thus she stresses the importance and implications of working mainly outdoors, the hard physicality of that work (for men, women, and children), and the household basis of the rural economy (when men worked away seasonally, as many did, family was commonly the reason for doing such work). Secondly, the skills, knowledge, and adaptability of rural people are fundamental to understanding them; calling them “traditional,” for example, misses their readiness to change as circumstances warranted. Thirdly, she emphasizes three economic pillars by which most rural households sustained themselves: self-provisioning (producing for their own consumption), producing for sale in the market, and working away from the farm or household for wages. As long as all three were available, there was a basis for independence, and that in turn helps to explain why many rural families persisted in conditions that seemed, to outsiders at least, to offer a lower standard of living than could be obtained elsewhere.

Central to the entire work is Sandwell's deep engagement with environmental history. She organizes her discussion by region, beginning on the Canadian Shield. Subsequent chapters address the St. Lawrence lowlands, the Prairies, the mountains, and finally the coasts (an especially ambitious chapter). Discussions of the physical settings frame an account of the economy that could be built in each, followed by careful accounts of the implications for daily and seasonal living. Although overlapping themes are given their main treatment in the chapter in which each is particularly central, this approach cannot avoid a good deal of repetition. All regions experienced many elements of the main narrative, including technological change, the growth of larger capitalist enterprises, and the booms and busts of the international trade cycle; as well, there were many similarities among regions at the household level of organization and production.

Sandwell's sympathy for her subjects is evident throughout, as she seeks to understand their decisions and strategies. To tell their story, she relies heavily on the views of observers and actors (the latter often filtered through memory, however). Given the purpose of the series, the rarity of explicit citation of current historians is striking; even when she touches on a specific debate, the text usually speaks of "historians," without citing any. That tendency will not trouble specialist readers, who will be interested in how the book addresses the challenges of its subject, or general readers, to whom an evocative account of the rural past should have great appeal. But descriptive sources introduce unresolved inconsistencies and too often reinforce myths that research has challenged. Both problems are exemplified in the assertion that "most rural people lived in households largely isolated from others" (p. 4) and in quotations from sources claiming that "every household was completely independent" (p. 133) or that all a family purchased were "a few items ordered twice a year from the Eaton's catalogue" (p. 127). These views are contradicted not just by other historians but by the book's own arguments. Seeing central Canadian farms after 1870 as "new mixed farms" (p. 76) that represented a shift from an earlier "concentration on wheat" (p. 95) ignores modern research, including the standard account of Canadian GNP for the period, which provides data for 29 categories of agricultural products beginning in 1870 (when wheat accounted for just 14 per cent of total "farm revenue" from sales and on-farm consumption). It would also strengthen the argument to recognize that such farms' sales of "butter, eggs, pigs, poultry, and maple syrup" (and other products) reflected planning of production and marketing rather than being a simple "surplus ... left over from household production" (p. 92).

The book rightly emphasizes the continuing strengths and vitality of the rural economy, even through the Great Depression. For a review in *Histoire sociale*, however, it should be noted that, had historical rates of natural increase of the Canadian farm population (about 3 per cent per year, a rate that would double a population in about 25 years) continued and had all stayed in the countryside, there would have been two to three times as many rural Canadians in 1940 as there actually were. On the one hand this gap points to a demographic transition that the book's emphasis on large rural families leaves obscure, and on the other it points to the hemorrhaging of people from rural areas that preoccupied commentators

during much of the period. Despite the claim by one of Sandwell's sources that people who settled on the Canadian Shield "had no other choice" (p. 47), there clearly were alternatives, notably going to the United States. Making sense of why a few chose to go to the Shield, whereas most did not, would help in seeing the world as rural people did. That we can see so much about their choices and the lives they made is a high tribute to Sandwell's accomplishment in integrating a very complex body of material.

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SAVARD, Stéphane, et Jérôme BOIVIN (dir.) – *De la représentation à la manifestation. Groupes de pression et enjeux politiques au Québec, XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles.* Québec, Septentrion, 2014, 448 p.

Au moment d'écrire ces lignes, les juristes de l'État québécois poursuivent leur mouvement de grève lancé le 24 octobre 2016. Alors que leur convention collective est échue depuis le 31 mars 2015, ces juristes ont mis en œuvre un certain nombre d'activités afin de mettre davantage de pression sur le gouvernement de Philippe Couillard et de s'assurer l'appui de l'opinion publique. À ces fins, ils ont diffusé des communiqués de presse auprès des médias d'information et organisé un certain nombre de manifestations, autant de stratégies typiques des groupes de pression, au Québec et ailleurs.

Pour qui s'intéresse un tant soit peu à l'actualité politique québécoise, l'activité des groupes de pression ne saurait passer inaperçue, eux qui se comptent par milliers selon André Bernard (p. 11). Pourtant, à ce jour, les historiens québécois se sont somme toute assez peu intéressés aux groupes de pression, laissant aux politologues le champ libre sur ce terrain. Aussi est-ce afin de combler cette lacune que Stéphane Savard, professeur au Département d'histoire de l'Université du Québec à Montréal, et Jérôme Boivin, candidat au doctorat en histoire à l'Université Laval, ont réuni une quinzaine d'auteurs – issus pour la plupart d'universités québécoises, mais également ontariennes – et leur ont demandé de se pencher sur ce phénomène, en fonction de leurs intérêts de recherche respectifs. Formés tous deux auprès de Martin Pâquet, professeur au Département des sciences historiques de l'Université Laval, qui signe d'ailleurs l'épilogue de cet ouvrage, Savard et Boivin voient dans l'étude des groupes de pression une manière d'accéder à la culture politique aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, et de mieux la comprendre, au Québec et même au-delà.

Après avoir brossé un tour d'horizon des études sur les groupes d'intérêt et les groupes de pression aux États-Unis et en France en particulier, Boivin et Savard portent leur attention sur le Québec dans un chapitre introductif fort éclairant. D'entrée de jeu, les auteurs distinguent les groupes d'intérêt et les groupes de pression, lesquels, tout complémentaires qu'ils soient, n'en sont pas moins