

DAVID S. MACMILLAN, ed. — *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1497-1971*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972.

This volume of sixteen essays is a work of fine scholarship. Fifteen essays are concerned with the history of the Canadian business community, and the one dealing with an American railroad provides a comparative aspect. It is fortunate that David S. Macmillan, the editor, found good historians (John Gilchrist, James Pritchard, J. M. S. Careless, Gerald Tulchinsky, T. W. Acheson, Michael Bliss, J. Lorne MacDougall, Douglas McCalla, R. C. Overton, Patricia Roy, O. W. Main, Frederick H. Armstrong, John H. Archer, Alan Wilson, Richard Rice) to participate in this co-operative and worthwhile enterprise. What they have written in this book is neither in the muckraking tradition nor in simple praise of prominent Canadian merchants. All their efforts have been channelled into an attempt to give us a reliable picture of men in business.

The contributors' thoughtful comments on various aspects of the Canadian business community suggest that the writing of business history in Canada is in competent hands. Important new ground is broken in the analyses of the early Victoria business community. Peter Buchanan's connection with the Great Western Railway of Canada, the Canadian businessman and his enemies, the Scottish mercantile circles of Montreal, Halifax and Saint John, the mid-nineteenth century Montreal business community, the B.C. Electric Railway, and the late nineteenth-century industrial élite of Canada. Critical appraisal is offered in the discussions on the problems and traditions of business history, the approaches to Canadian business history, and Canadian business records. Valuable insights are contained in the treatments of commerce in New France and Newfoundland fishermen; and some interesting points are raised in the brief accounts of George Stephen, the Canadian nickel industry, and the Wrights of Saint John.

A great deal of research lies behind most of the essays on Canadian topics. The authors have made effective use of new materials unearthed in the archival holdings in Canada as well as those in the United Kingdom. They are clearly familiar with the best business histories that have been produced in Canadian, American and British universities over the last half century. As their essays reveal, they have drawn inspiration from the works of writers like H. A. Innis, William Miller, E. C. Kirkland, Robert Wiebe and Thomas C. Cochran. It is worth noting that a number of the contributors, during their student days at the University of Toronto, were significantly inspired by J. M. S. Careless to explore promising areas of business history. His own admirable essay in this volume ought to be read by anyone who is interested in a serious study of Canadian businessmen.

One of the collective achievements of the essays is the light which they throw on some of the characteristics of the business community of nineteenth-century Canada. Prudent and successful Scottish merchants were a dominant feature of this community. The financial and commercial affairs of leading Canadian entrepreneurs were closely related to a complex network of internal and external metropolitan connections. It was not unusual for the business élite of towns and cities to take an active interest in local non-economic activities. Though they took delight in their profits, many businessmen came to see their surroundings as hostile to their endeavours, and their fear of failure often led to broken health.

Individual essays have certain weaknesses. For example, Rice's essay provides information on the economic activity of William and Richard Wright, but tells us nothing about the personalities of these men. In the essay by Macmillan—a study that illuminates the workings of Montreal, Halifax and Saint John business groups—Montreal, Halifax and Saint John remain shadowy places. The volume as a whole, however, is of considerable merit.

Henry C. KLASSEN,
University of Calgary.

* * *