

Census (pp. 21–35, *passim*). It remains to be seen how the more noticeable presentation of Brown's thesis in book form will influence historians. This is true of many of his postmodernist assertions, but no historian of culture and society, religion, and temperance can ignore their fundamental implications.

Gerald Wayne Olsen
Nipissing University

Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan — *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. xii, 368.

It all began with the petitions: Madeleine de Verchères' 1699 letter describing her defence of the family fort and requesting a small pension from the Minister of the Marine; and James Secord's 1820 plea to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland for a pension as recompense for his own service and as a reward for his wife Laura's intrepid trek to warn the British of an impending American attack. In and of themselves, neither of these missives was at all unusual; petitions for financial help to reward service or heroism (real or invented) must have flown around the colonies like chaff, so much so that, as Cecilia Morgan observes wryly, "it would have been surprising had the Secords not tried to barter patriotic services for material rewards" (p. 123). But these two requests for aid stood out from the crowd and had a tremendous impact, if not on the much-impertuned officials who received them, then on the historical memory of the societies that followed in their wake.

As Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan argue in this fascinating if slightly uneven book, both petitions might well have been forgotten had their subjects been men; it was the gender of the subjects that set them apart from countless other petitioners and made them so useful to the myth-makers who invented and reinvented their stories. Indeed, the gendered nature of both myths is a key theme of the study. Verchères, because she was a woman, was always slightly lower in the firmament of French-Canadian heroes than Dollard des Ormeaux. Nevertheless, she had great utility and could be constructed as an object lesson in civic duty and personal courage by *nationaliste* historians and polemicists looking for heroic figures to symbolize New France's survival in the face of incredible odds. Her cross-dressing was played down, in the printed accounts and in the monument erected to her memory in 1913, to allay fears that the implied upsetting of gender roles was permanent. Rumours of her licentious and shrewish character, however, proved more injurious to her iconic status.

The Secord myth was also deeply gendered. In iconic terms, she existed in the shadow of arguably the greatest male hero of the War of 1812, Sir Isaac Brock, and the presence of her husband in the mythology further guaranteed that Laura was safely domesticated (the addition of the cow to the story was another means to ensure that Secord's story was read in the context of pioneer domesticity). Within these constraints, she emerged as a woman whose story had tremendous didactic value, as a conveyor of Loyalist values, a symbol of latent anti-Americanism, and an

emblem of whiteness and femininity. Given the centrality of Secord to any reading of Ontario's history in the early twentieth century, it is ironic that her long-term notoriety ultimately rested on the popularity of boxed chocolates rather than on the efforts of various historical societies.

Quite apart from the richness of the evidence, the book (or rather the two-books-within-a-book, for there is unfortunately little effort to explore the myths comparatively — the epilogue, on the Aboriginal presence in both myths, gives us a hint of how effective such a comparative analysis might have been) is a valuable exercise from a methodological standpoint. Coates's technique is to break down the Verchères myth into its constituent parts (the symbolism of the fort, the heroine's mother, the meaning of the scarf), and then draw shades of meaning from those parts. This deconstruction yields some interesting interpretations, such as the sexual sub-text in the myth and the degree to which Madeleine was cast as a Canadian Joan of Arc, but what Coates gains in depth of analysis, he loses in continuity. The section on Verchères is a little scattered, and we sometimes lose sight of the larger historical forces that might have shaped her story.

Morgan, on the other hand, addresses the Secord myth in its entirety, first setting the context (the historiography of colonial narratives of Loyalism and the War of 1812) and then discussing the evolution of the myth within that framework. Here, we have a beautifully written and impeccably structured analysis that adroitly places the Secord myth into the intellectual history of the society which spawned it. She is particularly convincing on the relationship between professional (read male) and amateur (read female) historians in shaping the myth. W. S. Wallace's demolition of Secord was based in part on his assumption that, because she was looking for a handout from the government, she had clear economic reasons to embellish her story. However, as Morgan argues persuasively, Wallace never seemed to realize that the American documentary evidence he valued so highly might have been embellished as well, for different but equally compelling reasons.

What Verchères and Secord actually did is ultimately less important than what their boosters said they had done, for it is the collective memory, rather than the actuality, of their deeds that matters. In her *Heritage Minute*, Laura Secord dashes through the forest, splashes through swampland, and scrabbles up a scree before being found by some obviously concerned and solicitous native warriors. Madeleine de Verchères has no *Heritage Minute* (at least not yet); as Colin Coates argues, she has been all but forgotten, even by French-Canadian nationalists who were once her most enthusiastic boosters. The reason for this seems entirely too mundane, and is hinted at in the commercial failure of a line of tinned food called Madeleine which was produced in the town of Verchères in the 1950s. Morgan points out that, in ensuring Laura Secord's historical longevity, "the work of a candy company was ultimately more important than that of the state" (p. 12). In this, she is surely right, even if it is somewhat troubling that the survival of an historical icon in Canada depends, as much as anything, on its utility as a marketing tool.

Jonathan F. Vance
University of Western Ontario