

paroisse de Beloeil fut originale non pas parce qu'elle était moins riche que Saint-Denis ou Saint-Charles, mais parce que c'est là qu'on observe dans toute son acuité la faiblesse du *leadership* et la paralysie par la peur.

En somme, un petit livre plein de faits qui soulèvent bien des interrogations, notamment sur la vision de Greer. Incidemment, la citation tirée de la lettre adressée, soit-disant le 5 mai, au capitaine Dufresne de Beloeil par Eusèbe Blanchette de Saint-Hyacinthe, lui transmettant un ordre menaçant du général Brown, ne peut avoir été écrite que dans les jours précédant la bataille de Saint-Charles (p. 25).

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J. I. Little — *The Child Letters: Public and Private Life in a Canadian Merchant-Politician's Family, 1841–1845*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. Pp. ix, 177.

Della Stanley — *A Victorian Lady's Album: Kate Shannon's Halifax and Boston Diary of 1892*. Halifax and Boston: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 1994.

Even in today's world of computers, demographic and census analysis, and what is called "the structural methodology" employed by social and family historians, the gems of historical research remain the diaries and family papers of "ordinary" folk. A journal or a collection of letters enables an historian to give faces and feelings to what are often nameless groups. They remind us that those whom we often consider actors on an historical stage — the merchant, the politician, or the Victorian woman — were real people with fathers and wives, friends and family obligations. They were people who went to the doctor, worried about money, bemoaned the weather, and coped with everyday concerns. They were people whose lives, actions, beliefs, and motivations were, in the end, never as simple as we at first presumed, and they often do not quite fit our carefully argued analyses and generalizations. This becomes particularly evident when diaries, journals, and personal correspondence are presented as texts in their own right. Such is the case with both monographs considered here, *A Victorian Lady's Album*, edited by Della Stanley, and *The Child Letters*, compiled by J. I. Little.

A Victorian Lady's Album presents the complete 1892 diary of 18-year-old Kate Shannon, the second youngest child of a relatively affluent Halifax judge. Like many others of her sex, class, and rank in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century, Kate seems to have kept a diary as a matter of course. What for Kate was unique about this year and what makes the diary so valuable and intriguing is that she decided to "flavour [her] bare record of facts" and to use the diary to record her thoughts and feelings, sometimes as a private confessional. Certainly, the journal does chronicle Kate's daily activities — helping in the house, taking long walks, accompanying her mother to meetings of the WCTU, skating, conversations with

friends and family, and writing botanical reports. The diary also records, however, Kate's emotional as well as physical passage from adolescence to young womanhood. When Kate was finally convinced to put up her hair, for example, she noted, "I didn't want to a bit but they [her mother and cousins] all seemed to think it was high time I did" (p. 60). Far more serious for Kate was the painful realization that childhood friendships were fragile. Kate recorded her bewilderment, growing resentment, and finally deep hurt as she watched her two best friends, Millie and Winnie, become increasingly involved in other relationships.

The flavour of Kate Shannon's eighteenth year, which is so evocative from the journal entries, is certainly enhanced by the presentation of the volume. Stanley has transformed the diary into a traditional Victorian lady's album, copiously illustrated with photographs (unfortunately unidentified), reproductions of picture postcards and calling cards, and other material, including sketches apparently drawn by Kate herself. Together with Stanley's brief introduction, these provide for the uninitiated reader a vivid sense of the sights, sounds, and smells of Halifax and Boston at the end of the nineteenth century.

There are a few problems with the presentation. At times, the lack of a "list of characters" or detailed annotations and explanations of particular events, organizations, institutions, and places referred to in the diary is intensely frustrating. More troubling, perhaps, is that Stanley is too quick in her introduction to present Kate as an almost stereotypical Victorian. Certainly, as Stanley points out, Kate was primarily interested in her friends and family, "not in weighty social, economic and political concerns of the public arena" (p. viii). But I question whether the journal really reflects as sharp a division between the public and private world as Stanley posits. For all that Kate Shannon was a respectable, young, middle-class woman, she was also part of a wider world and a world in transition. Kate recorded, matter-of-factly, her visits to the doctor and dentist and an extended journey she and her mother made, without male accompaniment, to Boston. Her growing unease about the relationship with Millie and Winnie was personal; there was no indication that Kate considered that they were challenging gender or social norms by attending college. It must be remembered that *A Victorian Lady's Album* is intended for a general readership. Judged both within this context and as a valuable resource for further study, the *Album* works. So too, in a very different way, does J. I. Little's edited volume, the *Child Letters*.

Marcus Child was a merchant-politician from Stanstead, Lower Canada/Canada East. The volume reproduces, in their entirety, the almost daily correspondence between him and various family members, letters written while Marcus was in Kingston, attending as a member of the colonial legislature in the early 1840s. Most of the letters were written by Marcus himself. However, a significant portion are from Lydia, his wife, Elizabeth and George, their children, and a few from other family members.

For any political historian, the letters are invaluable. As editor Jack Little outlines in his carefully crafted introduction, Child was a "moderate reformer whose ambitions tended to be limited to his local constituency" (p. 27). Marcus Child's letters chronicle his views about proposed legislation, the concerns of his constituents, and

his social and political contacts with members of the government. Among other things, Child recounts the antipathy of Kingston residents to members of the assembly and the debates, as seen from the “back benches”, over moving the capital. It is clear that Child took his duties to his constituents and to his colony seriously. He also took considerable pride in what little political influence he could exert. As Little perceptively states, the correspondence provides a view of political affairs from someone who was at “the margin of power” (p. 4) — a perspective not often available to the historian.

Although Marcus Child could be seen as representative of any local politician in the mid-nineteenth century, the collected correspondence weaves a far more complex and intricate picture. Despite weeks and months away from home and his business, he continued to maintain a strong attachment and commitment to both. His own letters clearly outline his preoccupation with the state of his business and the health and well-being of his wife and children. Frequently, Child complained when his wife and children did not immediately respond to all his letters. His wife Lydia and daughter Elizabeth often answered that they had little new to report. Moreover, as Elizabeth wrote to her father in late November 1843, “Just bethink yourself, my dear Father, of the mighty difference there is, between the Seat of Government, and this quiet place ... and how much more material you have at your command out of which to manufacture an epistle, than your loving wife and affectionate daughter” (p. 116). For Lydia and the others at home, there was little time to write, and family letters tended to be reports about the state of the store, health of the family, and the day-to-day concerns of managing and working in the household. As Little emphatically states, “the greatest value of the Child letters lies in their combination of politics with family” (p. 5).

The publication of the Child correspondence is an invaluable contribution to furthering our understanding of the colonial period. What makes this volume so very fine, however, is the contribution of the editor. The introduction is a nuanced discussion and analysis not only of the letters, but also of the issues that they raise. Little places the Child papers firmly within a sophisticated understanding of the impact that gender and class had on those individuals and families who were part of the burgeoning colonial middle class. The introduction weaves the story of the Child family into the broader tapestry of colonial politics, economics, and society. This is done without losing any sense that Marcus Child and his family were real folk — concerned about their souls, their personal relationships, and their pocket books. To make what initially seem to be rather dense letters more accessible, Little also provides a separate family chronology and detailed cast of characters. The extensive footnotes accompanying the letters also add considerably to the volume and the window they provide onto the life and concerns of a rising middle-class family in the Canadas in the mid-nineteenth century.

To compare Little’s *The Child Letters* and Stanley’s *A Victorian Lady’s Album* is perhaps somewhat unfair. They are intended for two different audiences: *The Child Letters* is an obviously “scholarly” production; *A Victorian Lady’s Album* is more of a coffee-table book. Both, however, are part of that renewed interest in the lives and times of “ordinary” folk. Although the subjects are divided by geography,

time, age, gender, and occupation, both volumes not only provide the reader with an interesting read, but are also in themselves an invaluable source for future research.

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David G. Burley — *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp. xii, 309.

This is a study of the bourgeoisie (the word is used twice on the dust jacket, though cautiously in the text) or the entrepreneurial class in Brantford from 1830 to 1881. Many of the studies from which it takes its origin concentrate so strongly and so sympathetically (it appears) on the formation of the working class that they do not readily yield the proper intellectual structures to deal with the working class's economic superiors. The problem is: what criteria "best describe those who are left over in society once the working class has been extracted"? (p. 8). The code-word self-employment, as used in David G. Burley's study, defines an essentially coherent group, though with some uncomfortably ragged edges, as it includes a number of day labourers who worked for themselves while excluding lawyers.

Within these limits Burley follows the fortunes of some 1,100 individuals using sources such as the census, the R. G. Dun & Co. records, assessment rolls, wills, and Brantford's rich heritage of nineteenth-century local history, including the five-volume biographical dictionary *The Canadian Album* (Brantford, 1891–1896). While Brantford's population grew from a few hundred over the half century of study to more than 10,500, and its economic base changed from servicing the local farm community to metal fabricating, flour milling, and the manufacture of carriages and farm machinery, the self-employed increased markedly in relative numbers but declined as a percentage of the whole population. "If Brantford, Ontario, was in any way representative of broader social and economic developments, then in the 1860s and 1870s business became a more restricted and elitist activity, and class relations and class structure became more clearly defined" (p. 6). Success in business was becoming more difficult as improvements to transportation destroyed the isolation that had once protected small, locally oriented businesses; success, even in small-town Brantford, was becoming more and more a matter of "national" success. Increasingly, too, the potential risers found their way blocked by an entrenched older generation who, if we may judge by their representatives, attributed their own success to character while ignoring the advantages they had gained from setting deep roots in the community before their competitors arrived.

The quantitative method as used in these pages is essentially welcoming and friendly, although a few among the many graphs throw out spirited challenges to the mathematically ill-prepared. So far as one can glimpse the self-employed as people, they seem predominantly a pinched and joyless lot — or is this solely