

**Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained, 1956-62.** PETER STURSBURG. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ©1975. xv, 278 p. ill. ISBN 0 8020 2130 1 \$15.00.

**Diefenbaker: Leadership Lost, 1962-67.** PETER STURSBURG. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ©1976, xv, 212 p. ill. ISBN 0 8020 2225 1 \$15.00.

Interviewing has long been one of the principal ways of collecting information from people; recording the interviews with a tape recorder is of course a relatively recent phenomenon and offers historians additional insights into the past.

To gather source material for *Diefenbaker: Leadership Gained 1956-62* and *Diefenbaker: Leadership Lost, 1962-67*, Peter Stursberg took advantage of the tape recorder in a novel and imaginative way. He interviewed fifty-six people who were close to Diefenbaker during his ascendancy to the Progressive Conservative leadership and his years as the Prime Minister of Canada. The 120 hours of recorded interviews were transcribed and the books consist of edited extracts of these interviews arranged around particular themes and specific events. Stursberg has supplied only sufficient editorial comment to provide the background and context.

The participants tell their own stories with Stursberg making little effort to weave a uniform narrative. The impressions sometimes vary dramatically; the "facts" occasionally contradict each other. The mind, in remembering both recent and distant events, has a convenient self-justifying tendency. Thus the recounting of the same events by different participants shows us the range of emotions and priorities with which people now see the event. The complexity of human affairs emerges instead of the simple tic-tac-toe of much political journalism.

Indeed, it is in the remembering of controversial events that Stursberg's oral history demonstrates its greatest strength. The chapters "Leadership Gained" and "The Road to the Coliseum," which deal with Diefenbaker's winning the party leadership and "Leadership Crippled," "Clandestine Meetings" and "The Caucus After," in which the disintegrating morale is remembered, are the most fascinating in the two volumes. Where no controversy surfaces, the volumes become tedious. The chapters in which leading cabinet ministers recall the accomplishments of their government quickly degenerate into a series of mutual congratulations or into endless petty gossip.

Liberal reflections, notably those of Paul Martin and Jack Pickersgill, present another fascinating and varied view of Diefenbaker and his government. In particular, the James Coyne affair is much more complete with frank Liberal recollections alongside those of the Tory participants.

Although the permission to make use of the thirteen hours of interviews with Diefenbaker was withdrawn, Dief's presence remains very much at the centre of the book.<sup>1</sup> He emerges as a more complex and intriguing figure than the stereotype and perhaps even more interesting than his self-portrait. None of his colleagues dismiss, seriously dislike or distrust Diefenbaker and the image they present does not beg for our respect as *One Canada*, Diefenbaker's memoirs covering the years 1895 to 1965, sometimes does.

Stursberg's effort perhaps more truly deserves to be called *oral history* than do most works described by the term. Allan Nevins at Columbia University in the late 1940s

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1 The taped interviews are being preserved by the Sound Archives Section of the Public Archives of Canada, while complete transcripts, of which approximately fifteen per cent was published, are held by the Manuscript Division. Most of these materials will be available for research after 31 December 1980. The recordings of Diefenbaker are one exception: they will be available only after his death.

pioneered the use of this term while doing interviews with notable persons for later research. The term has gained wide acceptance though the process is often neither oral — the finished product being a written document, the transcript — nor history. Rather, it is research from which history can subsequently be written. Although Stursberg has given us a printed document rather than an oral one — the interviews themselves could surely make a marvellous radio documentary — he has stayed as close to the oral original as the medium allowed.

Stursberg has done the job of an historian in evaluating and arranging his evidence to assemble an account of the Diefenbaker years. He does not pretend that it is a final or definitive historical assessment, having relied on only one type of evidence. Nonetheless, he has served us well on two accounts: he has produced a fascinating account of recent events in which the directness and vitality of the first-person account were allowed to survive (as much as was possible on the printed page), and has provided an invaluable resource for later historical research.

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**Bear: A Novel.** MARIAN ENGEL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, ©1976.  
141 p. ISBN 0 7710 3080 0 \$7.95.

In the last number of *Archivaria*, a short article outlined some of the problems facing an archivist on a field appraisal. Marian Engel's novel *Bear* graphically describes a situation not considered, imagined, or as yet experienced by the author of that article. The novel brings lines from the poem "Eurynome" by Jay Macpherson to mind:

Come all old maids that are squeamish  
And afraid to make mistakes,  
Don't clutter your lives up with boyfriends:  
The nicest girls marry snakes.

*Bear* demonstrates that there are other alternatives for the nicest archivists. Engel's main human character is an employee, female, of a Toronto Historical Institute who becomes professionally and personally involved with a bear, male, during a field appraisal on a Northern Ontario island.

The lady, named Lou, is a former newspaper person who has joined "the least parasitic of the narrative historical occupations." For perhaps the first time in literature, an archivist is the central figure in a novel. The reader is presented, however, with a somewhat vague and at times inaccurate picture of the archival profession. Although situated in Toronto, Lou's Institute seems more likely the type to serve a local historical society: its holdings consist mainly of Sunday school certificates, old emigration documents, envelopes of unidentified farmers' Sunday photographs and withered love letters. Yet its resources are certainly not small-town. The Institute draws upon legal and political assistance that would make most Canadian repositories envious. The very fact that the Institute is able to afford a staff member working on an appraisal out of the building for an entire summer is probably incredible to most archivists. There is little attempt by the author to establish the purpose or the size of the repository. In short, the Institute is a composite which does not really resemble an archives as it exists today.

Lou is herself a composite, a combination of archivist, librarian and museum curator. She has been sent to Cary Island to appraise the contents of a house built by Colonel Cary in the last century and to determine the suitability of the island as a research centre. The limitations of a field appraisal become apparent to Lou when she discovers an autographed