

George Heriot: Postmaster-Painter of the Canadas. GERALD FINLEY. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. xx, 310 p. ISBN 0-8020-5584-2 \$37.50.

A biography of George Heriot, Deputy Postmaster General of British North America from 1800 to 1916, is long overdue when we remember that the Post Office has been vital to Canadian development and that Heriot was a complex and influential man at the centre of public life at a crucial time in our history. After a brief introduction which deals with Heriot's boyhood, Gerald Finley leads the reader through the development of landscape painting and the Picturesque as an aesthetic as well as practical art form. As an example of the latter, he discusses military artists who created the pictorial records needed to wage war more effectively. As a result, an accomplished water colourist like Heriot, far from fitting the struggling artist stereotype, managed to do very nicely as the beneficiary of judiciously applied patronage. He kept body and soul together in his early years with a variety of government posts which culminated in his appointment as head of the General Post Office in British North America.

Upon assuming his duties, Heriot inherited one of Canada's earliest and most effective communication networks. He seems, however, to have taken the appointment more in order to forward his interest in painting than to improve the postal system. In fact, one cannot but think that he might be more appropriately dubbed "Painter-Postmaster." There is nothing in anything he published or painted which offers a hint of his official functions. Finley tells us that Heriot did not allow his official functions to intrude on his artistic work until just before the War of 1812. That makes little difference to the art historian, but is distressing for the postal historian since the official records of Heriot's time were lost in a disastrous fire in the Quebec Post Office in 1841. Nevertheless, Heriot's art is a goldmine of information for historians. His paintings contain a unique pictorial record of British Americans in the early nineteenth century.

The book strikes a balance between art history and general history. The art historian will appreciate the general historical detail and the generalist or interested reader will not be put off by the necessary technical comments on Heriot's artistic progress and ability. In fact, Finley's description of the way in which Heriot's style changed as his personal situation advanced gives the general historian an entrée into methods of gleaning information from paintings when other sources are not available. The only disappointment with the book is that although Heriot painted with water colours, the most subtle of the media through which to depict the nuances of colour, not one of the ninety-three illustrations is in colour. One of Finley's earlier works on this topic contained some very effective colour plates. It is a shame that economy deprives us of any examples of Heriot's work in colour. In other respects, the book is up to the normal high standard of the University of Toronto Press.

Finley's success makes this reviewer hope that similar treatment will be accorded to artists like James Pattison Cockburn and Mary Millicent Chapman since the gaps in our printed and written records may be narrowed by documentary art. Finley has done excellent detective work in locating many of these records. Archivists cannot but be pleased that so many still exist and impressed by Finley's ability to track them down. Judging from the long list of credits he provides, he owes much of his success to a great many archivists.

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