

Sir John Beverley Robinson, Bone and Sinew of the Compact. PATRICK BRODE. Toronto: the Osgoode Society in conjunction with the University of Toronto Press, 1984. x, 326 p. ISBN 0 8020 3419 5 \$14.95.

Patrick Brode has produced a valuable work which fills a long-standing gap in both Upper Canadian biography and the history of jurisprudence. It reads well, is well researched, and presents a reasonably balanced view of John Beverley Robinson. The book is the fourth in a series of five monographs published to date by the Osgoode Society.

Robinson was a controversial figure throughout his life, and although Brode is sympathetic in his treatment of the man, this work does not attempt to apologize for the attitudes and actions of one of the leading members of the Family Compact. It is obvious that a great deal of effort went into the research. Brode brings to the final product a masterful use of source material in a very readable style. In chronicling Robinson's personal and public lives, the author presents the story of an important legal official, written by a lawyer who uses professional insights to good effect. The development of Robinson's legal and political careers are traced from attorney-general at the Ancaster Bloody Assizes through leader of the government in the Legislative Assembly to chief justice and retirement in the Court of Error and Appeal.

Throughout the work Brode contends that the "government of Upper Canada was not dominated by an entrenched oligarchy; rather, the imperial government founded an oligarchy to assist it in governing the colony." The lieutenant governor, according to Brode, "chose men of ability, influence, and compatible ideas to assist him in the day-to-day affairs of government." The relationship of patronage and the existence and prosperity of the Family Compact is denied at the provincial level, but is acknowledged and indeed pointed out at the local district level. This perhaps is the single greatest weakness of the book; it makes the choice of quotes for the subtitle seem out of place. It ignores the patron-protégé relationships found throughout the ruling oligarchy which Robinson himself experienced. Early in his career Robinson received the favour of Chief Justice William Dummer Powell, who assisted him in his rise to power. John Strachan, his former teacher, remained a close ally. While it is true that Robinson was a man of great ability, it is equally true that his climb in political, judicial, and social standing was initially aided by those already in power, and that he in turn was able to help others.

Brode does succeed in making a compelling argument that the Family Compact did not go beyond patron-protégé relationships; so that there was no conspiracy of the ruling oligarchy to protect and enrich itself as a group; individuals merely pursued their own rise in status. It is clearly pointed out that the provincial government, with all of its patronage power, revolved around the lieutenant governor and, through him, the imperial government. The author documents the distrust of democratic institutions by the oligarchy due in large measure to the Loyalist composition of that group.

One of the finest aspects of the book is its analysis of Upper Canadian jurisprudence over Robinson's half-century in legal offices. The Alien Act and the union of the two Canadas and Robinson's thoughts and actions regarding them are explored in detail. The notion of the general good over a particular good is demonstrated in Robinson's decisions on claims against the railways in the twilight of his career. Brode is to be congratulated for the insight into the judicial process of the day gained by his use of Robinson's Judge's

Book for the 1830s. The reader is allowed to understand the chief justice's decisions through notes kept by Robinson while hearing cases at the district assizes.

Finally, *Sir John Beverley Robinson* is just plain good reading. Brode's command of the narrative form, combined with his scholarly use of archival and secondary sources, presents the reader with an excellent biography. While not written by an historian, the quality of the work is such as to make it indispensable to anyone seriously interested in Upper Canadian history. This is Patrick Brode's first major work; it is sincerely hoped that it will not be his last.

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The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton: A Study of Wealth and Influence in Early Upper Canada, 1776-1812. BRUCE WILSON. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1983. ii, 248 p. ISBN 88629 0090 \$9.95 pa.

The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth. BRIAN C. CUTHBERTSON. Halifax: Petheric Press, 1983. v, 174 p. ISBN 0-919380-43-3 \$11.95.

Both Bruce Wilson's *The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton* and Brian Cuthbertson's *The Loyalist Governor* examine the careers of prominent but not particularly well-known figures in the life of early British North America, and each argues for increased recognition of the importance of his subject. Both attempt to move beyond the experience of an individual to draw larger conclusions about the evolution of colonial society and to consider the question (if only somewhat implicitly in Cuthbertson's case) of what agencies were central in that evolution.

Further similarity between the two works is limited however. Wilson, who is an archivist at the Public Archives of Canada, offers a sophisticated, convincing, and revisionist interpretation of early Upper Canadian history as revealed through the experience of the Niagara peninsula. Cuthbertson, formerly an archivist at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, presents a conventional biography of Sir John Wentworth in which (not atypically of the genre) hard analysis eventually gives way to the author's admiration for his subject. Wilson's analysis of the career of pre-1812 Upper Canada's most prominent private citizen says much about the extent to which commercial systems which predated the creation of the colony were of greater importance than the formal structure of the state or conservative ideology in the development of its most populous region. Cuthbertson's treatment of the "Loyalist Governor" argues, in the best tradition of the "great man" view of history, that Wentworth exercised a decisive influence on the evolution of Nova Scotian society during the Napoleonic era and was, in fact, the "Father of the Province."

In tracing Wentworth's career from pre-Revolution New Hampshire, where he was a scion of the colony's leading family and governor between 1760 and 1775, to post-Revolution Nova Scotia, where he served as governor between 1792 and 1808, Cuthbertson provides an account that is carefully researched and not unbalanced in its details but which overreaches the evidence in an attempt to establish its larger conclusions. The picture of Wentworth that emerges is not without elements that justify