

George Nowlan: Maritime Conservative in National Politics. MARGARET CONRAD. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986. xviii, 357p. ISBN 0-8020-2600-1 \$37.50 cl.

At Edmonton in his 1958 Presidential Address to the Canadian Historical Association, Dominion Archivist W. Kaye Lamb opined that: "The number of biographies of Canadians that are in any sense definitive can be numbered on the fingers of one hand." In the three decades since Lamb's pronouncement we may well have advanced to the second hand. Whatever the progress, Margaret Conrad's biography of George Nowlan merits a place on the first hand of any Canadian biographical calculation.

The preface of the work sets the stage for the reader. Herein are summarized the political philosophy of George Nowlan, his concept of regionalism which reminded this reviewer of the lines penned by Lewis Carroll: " 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.' " Regionalism, however, was George Nowlan's stage and the author precisely delineates the parameters of this stage. Details and precision were not the chief concerns of George Nowlan; this characteristic often led to difficulties. There emerges from the pages of the book a trinity of tensions which constantly pulled at Nowlan: firstly, a family/career tension best exemplified by the role of Miriam Nowlan; secondly, a Nowlan/Stanfield relationship, which at times appears to have had a territorial frostiness about it; and finally, a necessity to try to balance competing and sometimes contradictory provincial and federal party interests.

George Nowlan's career in politics spanned some forty years, from 1925 as a twenty-seven year old freshman MLA in the Nova Scotia government of Edgar Nelson Rhodes, through the political purgatory Nova Scotia Tories faced between 1933 and 1956, to the ensuing federal malaise of the Diefenbaker administration. Nowlan, as Robert Stanfield notes in an elegant forward to the book, "brightened the day for generations of Conservatives whose normal diet was gloom."

Margaret Conrad sketches the peaks and the valleys of the Nowlan career through a skilful use of the Nowlan Papers, interviews with many of his contemporaries, and a thorough examination of all relevant ancillary sources. Written in a chronological format, the book remains an arresting read due to the coherence the author achieves within each chapter; this is aided in particular by the comparative themes that are woven into many chapters. (See, for example, chapter 9, "Shaking the Tree," and Nowlan's attempts to pacify and unite internecine factions in British Columbia, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island.) George Nowlan thought, and was, physically big. His oratorical outpourings could lift and carry an audience like a Fundy tide; his verbal obfuscations could remind one of a thick Fundy fog. Details were for others. His was the pursuit of large, if sometimes undefined, goals. Thus after the debacle of the 1953 federal campaign, Nowlan, as National President of the PC party, could wonder where the party had obtained such a dreadful platform. In the early years of their political relationship, this indifference to detail appears to have grated on the youthful leader of the Nova Scotia Conservatives, Robert Stanfield. (See *Nowlan* pp. 99 and 108 for examples.) But people did not remain long annoyed with Nowlan. He worked hard, played hard, and developed a tremendously loyal following, many of whom recognized his shortcomings and loved him the more for them.

The strength of the book may well lie in its pre-1957 material, in its detailing of the tensions which existed between the provincial and federal wings of the Conservative Party, which from 1933 to 1949 was nearly moribund at both levels of Nova Scotia politics. If the rooms of the old Roy Building could talk, what tales they might tell. Rod Black, Ralph MacDougall, Harry MacKeen, Richard Donahoe, C.D. Smith, and others — were men who sustained themselves and the party through some of its darkest hours. But the opposites did attract and Nowlan's work at the federal level during the 1960 DOSCO crisis may have saved the Stanfield government from defeat in the provincial election of that year. Even more significant may have been the tariff concession he saw through cabinet in 1963 which helped entice Volvo to establish a car assembly plant in Nova Scotia.

Politics, for George Nowlan, was a hard taskmaster. Miriam Nowlan's role in her husband's career was supportive, and indispensable. George Nowlan was already a provincial candidate when she married him in 1923. Life was hectic and by 1936, with five young children, a family debt of some \$4,000.00, and a husband out of office and struggling to rejuvenate his law practice, her health collapsed. She recovered, and never complained, at least publicly, about her husband's continued political involvement. By 1954 her family had grown and her husband was an opposition member in Ottawa. Unfortunately, the family finances now stood more than \$17,000.00 in arrears. And what of Ruby Meabry, Nowlan's Ottawa secretary/executive assistant? Some of Conrad's best writing centers on the role which these two women played in Nowlan's life and career.

Archivists, an erudite readership indeed, might have hoped for a little more information on the Nowlan Papers themselves. Were they packed by Ruby Meabry and shipped to Wolfville immediately after Nowlan's death? How extensive is the material? Has there been any weeding and what are the present access restrictions, if any, on use of the collection?

There are some typographical errors which distract from an otherwise very fine publication. A.S. MacMillan appears as Macmillan; Donahoe and McInnes are misspelled, at least consistently, as Donohoe and McInnis; Parrsboro is incorrectly placed in Colchester County; Hedley House appears incorrectly as Headly House; and 1953 appears as 1913. The foregoing are the minor blemishes which seem to creep into many good works. They annoy but they do not detract from the overall merit and significance of it. Minor distractions aside, this work merits national recognition. It represents the most complete scholarly study of a major regional spokesman presently available for examination. As Nowlan recognized, this country is but the sum of its parts. When the biographies of other regional spokesmen appear, this book will be the benchmark against which they will be measured.

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Lily: A Rhapsody In Red. Volume 2. The King Years. HEATHER ROBERTSON.
Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1986. 327 p. ISBN 0-88862-954-00 \$24.95.

If to have a sense of history is to view the past as remote and different from the present, unreachable except by flimsy paper bridges, then the heroine of Heather Robertson's *Lily* is often ahistorical. For her the past can be right here, crowding in, affecting the present and future: