

A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918–1939. ROBIN JARVIS BROWNLIE. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2003. 204 p. ISBN 0-19-541891-3.

At the outset of *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918–1939*, historian Robin Jarvis Brownlie states that her intention in writing this book was to investigate the history of colonialism in Canada as reflected in the relationship between the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and the First Nations peoples of Canada, with particular emphasis on the interwar years in Ontario. Evolving out of a doctoral dissertation written during the Oka Crisis of 1990, the book is present-minded in its intention to illustrate how the current plight of First Nations communities developed historically, and concludes that the legacy of colonialism in Canada is alive and well. Brownlie hopes that explaining the historic reality of First Nations and Canadian relations will “forge more positive relations between Canada and First Nations peoples” (p. xxii). There can be no reconciliation, she argues, without understanding how we have arrived at our present situation.

Numerous works have been written investigating the evolution of Department of Indian Affairs policies such as the *Indian Act*, band governance, social welfare and traditional fishing rights, and their effects on First Nations communities. Other scholars have examined DIA policy through the lens of prominent DIA officials, like Duncan Campbell Scott,¹ and Laurence Vankoughnet.² Brownlie fills a gap in the literature by turning the lens around and examining how the abstract policies dictated by DIA headquarters were implemented at the local level by Indian agents and discusses the concrete effects these policies had on inhabitants of two specific Indian agencies. Moreover, she examines how the responses and resistance by First Nations communities, including prominent community activists such as Francis Pegahmagabow and John Manitowaba, directly influenced the extent to which Indian agents implemented, as well as supported, official DIA policy. Brownlie’s work suggests that the tension between DIA policy and the complexity and specificity of the socio-economic reality of First Nations communities, is best reflected in the manner in which the agent implemented policy at the level of local reserves.

For case studies, Brownlie selected Indian agents John Mclean Daly of the Parry Sound Agency (1922–1939) and Robert John Lewis of the Manitowan-

1 See Brian E. Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (British Columbia, 1986).

2 See Douglas Leighton, “A Victorian Civil Servant at Work: Lawrence Vankoughnet and the Canadian Indian Department 1874–1893,” in A.L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier, eds., *As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies* (British Columbia, 1985), pp. 104–19.

ing, Manitoulin Island Agency (1915–1939), both located in the Georgian Bay region. The choice was made partly for convenience, as the two agencies were located close to the University of Toronto, making oral interviews and the examination of local sources more readily accessible. More importantly, the records for these two agents were the most complete DIA agency records available for interwar Ontario. It also helped that both agents served in adjacent agencies for extended periods of time, making them suitable subjects for comparison.

Brownlie argues that the Indian agent's role was to serve as a conduit between band members of reserves and the DIA. As well, the agents were responsible for implementing DIA policy within the agency, informing DIA officials of conditions and developments on the reserves, enforcing the *Indian Act*, along with performing routine administrative functions within the agency relating to the political and economic situations on each reserve. This was a position of great power. The *Indian Act*, she observes, provided the agents with "broad powers to shape the individual lives, exert political control over aboriginal affairs, and apply sanctions to those who dared to defy their authority" (p. 34). In fact, by 1933 DIA official policy prohibited any direct contact with DIA headquarters, making all band members on reserves direct all inquiries, complaints, and demands to the local Indian agent who would in turn deal with headquarters.

Brownlie reveals how the personalities of these two agents affected the manner and extent to which DIA policies were enforced. In particular, she concentrates on the policies of enfranchisement; education; Indian governance; treaty and aboriginal rights; and social welfare. Agent Daly, in Brownlie's opinion, was a "confirmed paternalist" (p. 154) whose outlook was coloured by his belief that First Nations were culturally and racially distinct from Canadians. This resulted in his acceptance of the notion of traditional aboriginal rights, in particular when it involved traditional harvesting rights. John Lewis of the Manitoulin Agency, on the other hand, did not embrace the notion of traditional aboriginal rights. His liberalist leanings made him reluctant to provide financial/material relief to reserve band members within his agency, arguing that able-bodied men should perform relief-work, rather than receive social assistance for nothing, because this would lead to dependence. Work was very difficult to find during the depression of the 1930s, especially for aboriginals. Brownlie notes that both Indian agents used their power of granting social assistance as a tool to enhance their control over the aboriginal community, often using it as a means to punish those who challenged their authority. This is still a particular sore point in the memory of those communities.

Personalities aside, both agents pursued the two main objectives of all DIA activities – the formalized policy of assimilation and the unofficial policy of control over the lives of First Nations peoples. Brownlie boldly states that

“Indian agents in the 20th century were a primary source of oppression for aboriginal people. These officials acted in ways that reinforced the subordination, marginalization, and disempowerment of First Nations peoples” (p. xii). Under this paternalistic system all meaningful control over the lives of aboriginal peoples were placed under the “fatherly eye” of the Indian Agent. Perhaps, Brownlie’s most interesting insight is the paradox between the department’s goal of the assimilation of First Nations into Canadian society at the level of the unskilled working class and the reality of a racial barrier imposed by Canadian society that was “unwilling to accept them as equals, as fellow citizens, coworkers, neighbours, and friends, or for that matter, potential marriage partners” (p. 148).

Although Brownlie discusses the limitations the source material imposed on her research, there are other concerns that should be addressed. First, her main source for records relating to the Parry Sound Agency are the research notes of the late Franz Koennecke, who examined and made selected copies of the Parry Sound agency records in the late 1970s during the course of his own research into the Parry Island reserve. At that time, the original agency records could not be located by DIA, despite numerous requests by Mr. Koennecke. A letter from the Minister of Indian Affairs to Mr. Koennecke confirmed that the records were “lost” and that all efforts by the department to locate them had failed. As a result, there was no reason to expect Robin Brownlie to pursue these records; she correctly notes that the records were never transferred to the former National Archives of Canada (NA) (now Library and Archives Canada – LAC). Oddly enough, during the writing of this review, what should turn up on my desk here in the LAC, where I am an Indian Affairs portfolio archivist than a notification of the pending transfer from LAC’s Ottawa Federal Records Centre of the Georgian Bay District Office Records – the missing records that had been placed in dormant storage by DIA in 1976! Since records held in dormant storage at federal records centres are under full departmental custody, it remains a mystery why DIA had such trouble locating these records. While it is doubtful that the material in this accession contradicts the conclusions of Brownlie’s research, nevertheless, it should be noted that these records do expand the scope of available primary sources as they contain material pertaining to Parry Sound agency reserves and not just Parry Island. Researchers should also note that all agency correspondence prior to 1903 was destroyed when the Parry Sound Indian agent’s office burned to the ground.³

Secondly, while it would appear that Brownlie was able to locate the major-

3 Letter from A.D.M McNabb, Indian Agent, Sault St. Marie, to J.D. McLean, Assistant Deputy and Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 1922. Library and Archives Canada, Records Relating to Indian Affairs, RG 10, Accession 2003-0021-6, box 7, file 1/1-6 -10, Methods and Procedures – Records and Documents, Transferred to Archives, 1899 to 1959.

ity of DIA records pertaining to the Manitoulin and Parry Sound agencies, she complains that “those Parry Sound agency documents that have been transferred to the NA are dispersed through files, organized by topic rather than agency” (p. 170). This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how Indian Affairs created and organized their records. Its first central registry system (1872–1923), the Red and Black Series, was a straight numeric docket file system that utilized superscripts to identify Indian agencies, where letters were cross-referenced in letter registration books and subject register. By 1920, DIA had introduced a duplex numeric central registry subject-based system for headquarters records that was organized along agency responsibility codes. Any records pertaining to the Parry Sound Agency, for example, were located under agency responsibility code twenty-two. Moreover, no uniform central registry system existed in the agencies until 1950; prior to this time, each agency had its own informal filing system that usually consisted of letterbooks for outgoing correspondence and Shannon files for incoming correspondence. It should also be understood that when DIA records are transferred to LAC, the original order, as well as file numbers, are maintained in accordance with the archival principle of respect des fonds. Nevertheless, when the researcher understands that the arrangement structure of the Indian Affairs records transferred to the LAC is based on office of creation, this makes locating records much easier.

While the book’s appendix provides the reader with the texts of the *Bond Head Treaty* (1850), the *Robinson Huron Treaty No 61* (1850), and the *Manitoulin Treaty* (1862), the inclusion of a bibliography would have been a useful resource for those interested in this field of inquiry.

This book is essential reading, not only for academics, but the general public as well. Those who read *A Fatherly Eye* will find it a rewarding experience. Brownlie provides the reader with a well crafted, albeit at times strongly opinionated, argument about the legacy of colonialism for Canada’s First Nations communities. Furthermore, she is correct in her assumption that only through an understanding, as well as an admission of Canada’s colonial legacy, can there be any movement towards reconciliation and the forging of new positive relations between First Nations and Canada. How can informed decisions be made without such a understanding? Hopefully, Brownlie’s book inspires more work into this underdeveloped field of research.

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