

REVIEW OF**MICHAEL BOUDREAU AND BONNIE HUSKINS, *JUST THE USUAL WORK': THE SOCIAL WORLDS OF IDA MARTIN, WORKING-CLASS DIARIST.* MONTREAL & KINGSTON: MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2021.****Gail Campbell**

Few historians are as fortunate as Bonnie Huskins, who inherited not only her maternal grandmother's diaries for 1945 to 1992, but also a treasure trove of additional documents: household bills and receipts, records of vehicle and appliance purchases, union cards and voluntary association memberships, mortgages and deeds, insurance and pension records. Drawing on this supplementary documentation to tease out key themes in the diaries, Huskins and fellow historian Michael Boudreau bring history to life as they examine the tensions and interplay between change and continuity in working-class families in postwar Canada.

The authors' approach to the use of diaries is grounded in a wide-ranging exploration of the secondary literature. In an insightful discussion of the challenges involved in writing about a grandmother, they conclude that "a personal connection to one's historical research is a positive location, for it permits us to replace an indifferent 'spectator knowledge' with a more engaged 'passionate scholarship'" (22). Adopting "a feminist approach called life writing" as their organizational framework, they note that Ida's diaries have an intergenerational component, because her daughter Barbara occasionally offered suggestions and, in later years, collaborated with her mother in writing the diary. Their approach involves further intergenerational collaboration, with Huskins representing "the third generation in this life writing project," and her partner, Boudreau, providing the necessary social distance, as they worked together to situate the diaries within the context of other primary and secondary sources to provide "a valuable lens into the nature of family, labour, and community in postwar Saint John" (24).

Deftly illustrating the interpretive benefits of their approach, Boudreau and Huskins present "a series of critical essays" that draw on studies of postwar prosperity, industrial production, consumer culture, the emergence of the welfare state, secularization, and gender relations to situate Ida Martin and her family within the frame, and to expand our understanding of the ways ordinary people experienced and responded to such significant change. And, having acknowledged that postwar growth and the consolidation of the welfare state had profound societal effects, the authors persuasively argue that working-class families continued to function within informal communal and familial economies.

Part of a rural-to-urban migration during and after the Second World War, Ida and Allan (AR) Martin remained embedded in a strong network of kin and community. Ida, the family banker and investor, contributed to the family economy in traditional as well as modern ways. In analyzing AR's contribution, the authors engage with an extensive scholarly literature on longshoremen and working-class masculinity that rarely touches on men's families. Using Ida's diary to superimpose the perspective of working-class women, they provide a compelling portrait of AR, absorbed into the very male culture of longshoring, and of Ida, who accepted that culture, even as she sought to contain or control it. In the "intersecting geographies of daily social life wherein opportunities for heterosociability existed alongside active homosocial recreational networks" (78), the Martins' heterosociability revolved largely around family, while Ida and AR had quite separate homosocial communities. AR's community

involved his fellow longshoremen and truckers, while Ida's revolved around the Baptist church (which, for their daughter Barbara, offered both hetero- and homosociability). Despite declining church attendance during this period, for devout members like Ida, churches continued to provide both a vibrant social network and an outlet for reform activism.

Although New Brunswick wages remained among the lowest in the country, they did increase more than the cost of living in this period, enabling the Martins to participate in an emerging consumer culture. Vehicle ownership became a common experience for working-class families and the Martins purchased a truck, which AR used to engage in casual work, and, later, a car, which offered Ida a new level of independence once she learned to drive. The purchase of a television initiated a new era in family life, as watching TV replaced going to the movies. And for Ida, watching the news brought greater political engagement: she reported signing petitions and writing letters to politicians. Perhaps, the authors suggest, diaries may reveal "the more complex relationship of women to their wider social and political communities" (105).

Addressing the changes and continuities associated with aging and widowhood in modern Canada, the authors recognize that Ida, who received a pension from her husband's union, as well as OAS and CPP benefits, was a relatively privileged working-class widow. Nonetheless, her story puts a face on the difficult adjustments the elderly must make following the death of a spouse, and Ida's experience was not unlike that of other widows living in urban centres across the country (105).

As always, the reader is left with questions. Sorting out Ida's siblings proves difficult, especially because they are sometimes referred to by their given names and sometimes by initials. And, because the essays are discrete, potential queries remain unanswered. How to reconcile downstairs tenants in the 1940s in a house purchased in 1949? Did Ida stop taking in boarders when the mortgages were paid off? Was the change in AR's drinking habits related to the Pentecostal Church or to his retirement? Such niggling questions remind us that diaries tend to engage the reader in the minor details of the diarist's life.

It is our good fortune that Ida Martin—wife, mother, grandmother, household manager, sister, aunt, friend, worker, Christian, temperance advocate, and devoted diarist—kept daily diaries and that these have survived. "Just the usual work" enriches our understanding of working-class families and family life during the postwar period. Ida Martin's diaries provide a unique perspective on postwar Saint John. By situating the diarist within her social context, Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau have looked beyond the seemingly mundane to find the significance of the patterns and rhythms of daily life.

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