

Joy L. Santink, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of His Department Store*

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Santink, Joy L. *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of His Department Store*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. 319 pp., illus. Cloth \$35.00, ISBN 0-8020-2720-2.

In the past 15 years much has been written about the history of retailing in modern industrialized countries. Various writers have discussed the phenomenon of the rise of the department store in England, France, and the United States. In this first in-depth study of a Canadian department store, Joy Santink sets herself two tasks: to answer the question of how Eaton's was transformed from a small dry goods store to a department store—and perhaps pinpoint the reason why Timothy Eaton succeeded where other retailers failed—and to examine the “social, institutional, and metropolitan implications of the store's activities both within the retail industry and within the larger social community.” Santink achieves her goal of tracing the store's rise in the context of changes in Canadian business in the late nineteenth century, but falls far short of examining the social, economic, and also the cultural issues that are so inextricably bound up in the history of retailing in any industrialized country.

Joy Santink drew from the Eaton Company archives (to which she was granted access by the present Chair of the company) to trace the Eaton store's development from its establishment in 1869, when the term “department store” was almost unknown, to Timothy Eaton's death in 1907. By that time, department stores like Eaton's, Bloomingdale's, Macy's, and their European counterparts were firmly established as profitable businesses and important social institutions. Santink examines Timothy Eaton's career as an entrepreneur from his apprenticeship to a retailer in his native Ulster to his position as a wealthy man who had integrated production and distribution through his factories and stores. Santink takes care to place Eaton's activities in the context of the period, outlining the conditions under which he left Ulster as well as the improvements in production and transportation which made a department store possible in the late nineteenth century. She effectively and clearly discusses important innovations such as inventory turnover and the principle of one price and cash sales only,

which we learn Eaton was not—contrary to Canadian legend—the first to employ. Despite these achievements, Santink's emphasis on Eaton's personal attributes as the cause of his success masks much about the environment in which he operated.

It is clear that Santink sees Timothy Eaton as the primary reason for his store's success; she makes frequent references to his determination and strength of character. This is after all an historical biography (and at times, a celebration) of a man who succeeded in amassing a fortune where others failed. The quotations Santink chooses to head her chapters reinforce this perspective: many are biblical references chosen not only for their appropriateness to such a religious man, but also for their celebration of individual will and determination; other are self-flattering quotes by Eaton himself. While Eaton was undoubtedly a very ambitious and hard-working man, the primary factors which enabled him to amass his wealth—notably the poor wages of women retail workers and the sweating system employed by Eaton and other manufacturers—are relegated to the status of “subsidiary themes.”

While students of Canadian business history have reason to be grateful that Santink has published this book, it has serious problems, most importantly the lack of a broad interpretive framework. Such a framework would place Eaton's in the context of the growth of a new culture of consumption, rooted in a modern understanding of the world. What did it mean for the lower classes to be able to walk freely into a store without the obligation to buy? This obligation, Santink reminds us, existed in Europe until the mid eighteenth century. What did the ready availability of goods formerly considered luxuries mean for social and economic relations in Canada (and in the United States and Europe)? Santink makes the intriguing comment that “retail stores in a sense serve as mirrors of society;” she refers to “classless” (mass-produced) clothing and the “democratization of luxury” effected by mass production and distribution in Europe, Great Britain, and North America, but does not take these ideas any further. The book's illustrations show crowds waiting to enter the store on bargain day, and Santa Claus in the

store in 1907; these photographs speak louder than the text on the place of department stores in our culture. Santink has read authors such as Stuart Ewen and Rosalind Williams who write about modernity and the development of a consumer culture, but she has neither drawn out the substance of their arguments nor constructed an effective critique of their work.

Joy Santink has succeeded in extracting a fascinating story from the Eaton archives, and

in illuminating many points of Canadian business history. The book would have been far stronger if her secondary research had been wider ranging, to include more consideration of the interplay of business, class and culture in advanced industrial economies. The analysis which would incorporate archival research within a larger conceptual framework remains to be done.

Norman J. G. Pounds, *Hearth and Home : A History of Material Culture*

LUCE VERMETTE

Pounds, Norman J. G. *Hearth and Home : A History of Material Culture*. Bloomington et Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 1989. X + 437 p. 189 illustrations, 3 tableaux, bibliographie, index. 57,50 \$ U.S. ISBN 0-253-32712-1.

Le titre de ce livre donne l'impression qu'il y sera question de l'histoire de la culture matérielle, et plus particulièrement du foyer. Cependant, il faut comprendre que le sens de *hearth* retenu ici est plutôt celui du cœur d'un pays et non pas de l'âtre comme tel. La même observation est valable pour le mot *home*, dans le contexte adopté par l'auteur. En fait, Norman Pounds consacre une grande partie de son imposant texte aux questions agricoles spécifiquement reliées à la production et à la qualité de l'alimentation. Toutes sortes d'autres considérations s'y rattachent : l'hygiène et les maladies, la vie sociale des villages et la vie privée, la démographie et l'urbanisation des sociétés, la consommation et la notion de progrès. On touche aussi à la production des outils et des vêtements ainsi qu'à la construction des habitations. Mais la relation entre démographie et agriculture n'est jamais très lointaine et on y revient invariablement. C'est manifestement le thème majeur de cet ouvrage.

Le début du livre se concentre sur l'évolution préhistorique de l'agriculture à partir du Moyen-Orient, puis sur sa diffusion, particulièrement au temps des Grecs et des Romains, à travers l'Europe. La majeure partie de l'ouvrage, plus de 250 pages, est consacrée à l'Europe pré-industrielle. On y trouve de nombreuses descriptions d'objets et de leur utilisation. C'est une source fort utile pour

situer l'époque principale de l'introduction et de l'utilisation d'un objet ou d'une technique. Enfin, une cinquantaine de pages traitent des révolutions industrielles et agricoles du XIX^e siècle.

Les exemples choisis par le professeur Pounds se rapportent principalement à l'Europe du Nord : l'Angleterre, la Scandinavie, l'Allemagne ainsi que l'Europe de l'Est, surtout la Pologne. La France y est aussi relativement bien représentée mais, curieusement, l'Italie post-romaine n'y est guère abordée. Quant aux pays de la péninsule ibérique – pourtant les premiers à diffuser la culture matérielle occidentale en Amérique et en Asie à partir de la fin du XV^e siècle – ils sont à peu près ignorés. Les cultures non-européennes font piètre figure dans cette histoire de la culture matérielle et même la Chine est restée figée durant 1500 ans, car ses paysans ont utilisé sensiblement les mêmes types d'instruments agricoles, selon l'auteur. Quant aux sociétés pré-colombiennes de l'Amérique, mise à part leur contribution à l'alimentation (le maïs, la pomme de terre), l'évolution de leur culture matérielle n'attire pas l'attention, pas plus d'ailleurs que celle des colons européens qui vinrent se joindre à elles. Voici un autre thème majeur de cette étude : tous les non-Européens sont redevables aux importants progrès amorcés dans le nord de l'Europe.

Cette étude est essentiellement une démarche personnelle et très empirique de l'auteur, qui donne son interprétation des progrès de la civilisation à travers les progrès de la culture matérielle. Sa très grande familiarité avec les sources de l'Europe du Nord et de l'Est est évidente dans l'articulation des