

## *The Canada Company and the Huron Tract 1826-1853: Personalities, Profits and Politics.* By Robert C. Lee

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ers, servants, and immigrants she met along the way. She noted that the democratic spirit caused servants to be relatively well treated and averred that "Americans do not mean to be other than civil. Their manners arise from considering everybody on an equal footing." Noting many blacks in American and Canadian jails, she laid it down to lack of education rather than anything innate.

What does this volume add to the bookshelf of colonial women's diaries? One picks up Susanna Moodie for an impassioned rendering of character and incident, Catherine Parr Traill for serene practical advice, Anna Jameson for early feminism. Millicent Mary Chaplin's account, while briefer, has a wider scope, recording travels through New York, New England, Upper and Lower Canada, and the Maritimes. A refreshing change from Victorian invalids, this fifty-year-old stays on her feet in a squall. One day she rises at five a.m. for a four hour coach ride, then a hike in the Catskills, dines with forty people at a lodge, then off to a waterfall in a coach "outstretched hands holding on to each side to prevent being shaken to pieces," back in a wagon when other tourists commandeered her coach, then downriver to Manhattan trying to sleep on a bench on the deck. The society too moves at a fever pitch; she frequently passes through bustling villages that did not

exist ten years earlier, and notes the wagons of westbound immigrants. The stars are still vivid above Manhattan, the peaches already divine in St. Catharines. She clucks over callous Gaspé ladies weeding their gardens in silk stockings and lace gloves snatched from shipwrecks when they should have been rescuing the survivors instead. She arrives at Saratoga when banished *patriote* Louis-Joseph Papineau and future Canadian statesmen Louis Lafontaine and George-Etienne Cartier are there, the latter already having second thoughts, telling her newspapers exaggerated the disturbance. She compared "freedom and ease and smart appearance" south of the border to the "more homely but respectable and respectful manner and demeanour" north of it. Here is a well-read and judicious commentator on Canada and the northern United States circa 1840. Historians of travel and leisure and students of penal institutions will be particularly interested in her detailed descriptions of hotels, conveyances, attractions, and of practices at Kingston and American penitentiaries. With much to say about class, race, gender, imperial attitudes and daily life, the book will intrigue the general reader and the historian alike.

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## *The Canada Company and the Huron Tract* 1826-1853:

*Personalities, Profits and Politics.*

By Robert C. Lee. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004 303 pp. Illustrations. \$26.95 softcover. ISBN 1-896219-94-2.

**T**he origin of the Canada Company is well known. In the 1820s, the reserve lands established by the Constitutional Act of 1791 were proving

politically embarrassing, and there was a need to produce revenue to conduct the business of the state, specifically to compensate people for losses during the War

of 1812-14. There was no real alternative to the Company's proposal because the Corn Laws limited exports to the British market, and increased taxation was judged to be inimical to settlement and development. To the propertied, many of whom would design the system under which the colony would operate, the disposal of the resources of the state seemed both appropriate and logical. The proposal included annual payments and offered government the possibility of independence from the legislative assembly. Ultimately, the Clergy reserves would be excluded from the final agreement, and suitable compensation (the 1.1 million acre Huron Tract) had to be paid the company. The company received its charter in 1826, the directors accepting sixteen terms which Lee outlines including a purchase price of thirty-eight pence sterling per acre, payment over sixteen years and the right to abandon the contract for such land as it had not taken up by 1843. It had done very well indeed.

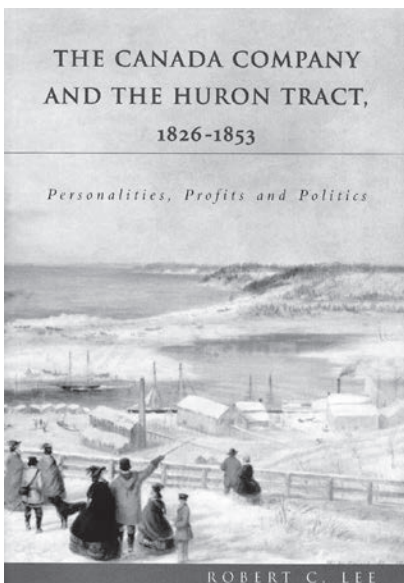
Thereafter, Lee describes the probabilities of success for the company because,

in spite of the received wisdom, this was not absolutely certain. In doing so he seeks to demonstrate the problems that arose because of the personalities and predispositions of specific commis-

sioners operating at a considerable distance from London and because of changing dynamics in Canada, including the need for infrastructure to promote sales. Additionally, the company found itself in competition with the state, which continued to make free grants or with state institutions such as the Clergy Corporation. Inevitably, there would be claims that commissioners operated independently.

Lee illustrates this in the lives of the first commissioners, especially Galt and Jones. Galt regarded his personal position as on a par with the lieutenant-governor and operated in a manner that alienated his directors in Britain, and upset officialdom by his political and social insensitivities. In one case he threatened their power, and in another he withheld required payments from the British government! Jones, appointed commissioner in 1829, promoted a rival railroad to that approved of by the British directors!

Uncertainty was characteristic of the system in the early years, especially in 1829, the year of Galt's dismissal. In the belief that the company could in fact fail and have to surrender its charter, the company was restructured under the aegis of Edward Ellice, the son-in law of the British Prime Minister and a major corporate investor and land speculator. Not one but two commissioners were appointed: Thomas Mercer Jones and William Allan. This seemed a sensible adjustment at a time when shareholders were wary of the Canadian operation and anxious about a call for renewed capital investment. In these circumstances it was thought that the company might renegotiate the initial agreement, abandoning responsibility for the remaining scattered reserves, concentrating upon the Huron Tract and in this way reducing its management costs. Fiscal stringency and reduced management costs were, in fact, a constant feature of company operations throughout



its history, and especially in this time frame when, as the author points out, the company was unable to set prices above those of the state and state institutions. In the light of such competition, share value plummeted to more than an eighth of its actual value and in 1828 revenues ran at forty-three per cent of expenditures. However, the government was resolute in holding to the original agreement.

Uncertainty persisted throughout the 1830s because the company appeared linked to the Family Compact, required increased expenditure on infrastructure to promote its enterprises, and because cholera in Upper Canada and improvements in the British economy reduced emigration and thereby sales. It persisted even after the rebellion of 1837. In 1839, as Lee points out, land sales produced a minute deficit of about £237 (0.2 per cent). This was met by the usual cuts in expenditures and in personnel, including the departure of William Allan, by enforcement of the government-legislated requirements of statute labour, and by concentrating efforts upon the Huron Tract.

Allan was succeeded by Frederick Widdler who introduced a much heralded rental scheme and, as a result, sales increased almost five fold between 1841 and 1843. Land was leased at a progressive rate over twelve years starting at five pence per acre in year one and ending at forty pence in year twelve; generally rents were set at six per cent of the total value of the land but at any point during the lease the land could be bought for an agreed price, and premium. This scheme marked a turn in fortunes for the company. It increased the price of leased land beyond that sold on time payments and understandably permitted conversion to leasing. In this way the asking price for such land was now set at 13s/10d compared to purchased land

which sold at 11s/10d – that is, more than twice what the government was asking for adjacent properties on a cash basis. Its success allowed the company to face struggles with municipal councils over taxation and continued competition. By 1849, though the company still had overdue accounts of £170,000, and arrears in rent of £35,000, it was meeting all of its expenses in Canada and had a surplus of £123,287. So by mid-century the company, through successive adjustments, was profitable.

This work, which traces the history of the company from its 1826 charter until liquidation in 1853, is a revised and extended version of the author's MA thesis. It adds to an established literature on the Canada Company, which includes the work of the Lizars, Karr, Timothy, and most recently Hall. Using extensive archival materials, the book is admirably written in a style which, because of the constant threat of failure, correctly emphasises the dynamic. One is grateful for this insight because there has been considerable emphasis on the negative capitalist nature of a venture seemingly endowed with the resources of the state to guarantee success but, even then, unable to make a profit for many years, and yet seeking renewed privilege. No doubt Robert C. Lee, the historian, possesses an empathetic understanding of such enterprises because he was for many years a trade commissioner and therefore appreciates this company as an economic enterprise. Such a trajectory might seem to have equipped him to make the judgment on the role of the company in Upper Canadian development but this is left to the reader, as is the social consequences of the company's actions, though admittedly this is not an explicit objective of the work.

We have to be grateful for this work, which is conceptually clear and well illustrated with well-placed maps, photo-

graphs, portraits, and diagrams. With its publication it is clear that there is need to redefine the field. We still know little about the timing of acquisition by the company or about the pattern of its holdings on the ground. The whole issue of whether the existence of such large amounts of property in the hands of such a corporation inhibited the development of particular areas, and the extent to which the company made unconscionable profit, is still largely unexplored. (Clarke, pp. 424-42) With the insights provided by Lee and others, it is to these topics that our collective work should now turn.

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## *To the Outskirts of Habitable Creation:*

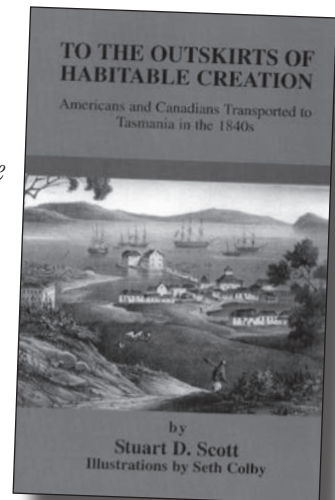
*Americans and Canadians transported to Tasmania in the 1840s.*

By Stuart D. Scott. New York: Universe Inc., 2004. 490 pp. Illustrations. US\$30.95 softcover. ISBN 0-59532412-6.

## *Convict Words:*

*Language in Early Colonial Australia.*

By Amanda Laugesen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xxiv + 208 pp. US\$22.95 softcover. ISBN 0-195-51655-9.



The events associated with the 1838 Rebellion (or "Patriot Wars") in Upper Canada and the subsequent transportation of North American political prisoners to Van Diemen's Land occurred over 165 years ago. Even after all this time there is continued interest in this topic from the past, which links Canadian and Australian history. In the last five years

six major works dealing with this aspect of our heritage have been published. The first four – by Douglas, Duquemin, Graves, and Pybus and Maxwell-Stewart – have now been followed by two more that merit reading, and are the focus of this review: Scott's *To the Outskirts of Habitable Creation* and Laugesen's *Convict Words*.

Scott's work is a major contribution