

Armstrong, Christopher and Nelles, H. V. *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977. Pp. ix, 214. Illustrations. \$12.95

Patricia E. Roy

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unquestionably develop character and create a relaxing atmosphere, it is debatable whether readers need to know that Blake McKelvey was a newsboy, an errand boy for a fish market, a taxidermist's assistant, a book salesman, and a machine tender before turning to history (p. 34); or that Dick Wade's dad, formerly a country lawyer, moved to Chicago and became president of the Eskimo Pie Company--"one of [Stave's] favorites" (p. 159).

Despite these quibbles, the aim of the book is to "search for the meaning of the making of urban history" (p. 25) and in this it is largely successful. The comments on influential books, the footnotes and bibliographies, the descriptions of research sources and techniques, and the cornucopia of ideas for future projects, now all collected in one volume, make the book invaluable as a basic jumping-off point for any graduate seminar in urban history.

Alan A. Brookes
Department of History
University of Victoria

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Armstrong, Christopher and Nelles, H. V. The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977. Pp. ix, 214. Illustrations. \$12.95.

Professors Armstrong and Nelles first outlined the Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company to the Canadian Historical Association meeting in 1973. Delivering it in their inimitable vaudevillian style, Armstrong and Nelles succeeded in entertaining an audience and in overcoming the tedium so often inherent in the study of the relationship between municipal politicians and public utility companies or in an examination of the sabbatarian movement. In this greatly expanded version, Armstrong and Nelles have again sought to entertain "by telling a story about certain intrinsically amusing events" (p. vii) but they have not fulfilled their earlier promise. They have used a generous number of Bengough cartoons and doggerel verse from Grip and other Toronto papers to advantage but much of their humour depends on the assumption that "the Saints," who favoured blue laws, were silly rather than sincere. Thus, their humour is often strained. The best example of this is the basic premise of their title. The "revenge" of the Methodist bicycle company (C.C.M.) was brief, as the authors admit. The bicycle craze which cut into street railway earnings was short-lived and C.C.M. was soon in serious financial difficulties while the Toronto Railway Company went on to prosper (pp. 171-2).

The volume begins with a vivid word picture of Toronto in the late 1880s and 1890s describing the city's physical setting, its chief characters and its moral righteousness. A good selection of photographs supplements it and, despite the absence of a map, the authors do whet the reader's appetite. Alas, the reader soon encounters indigestible courses.

In the preface, the authors compare themselves to small boys who cannot resist the temptation to take an alarm clock apart. Like many small boys with dismantled clocks, Armstrong and Nelles do not quite succeed in putting things back together again.

Although the book deals only with Toronto during a nine year period, it is incredibly complex. There are at least five main subjects: municipal politics, municipal corruption, municipal reform movements, the relationship of business and local government, and the sabbatarian movement. In addition, there are two important subsidiary themes: class conflict, especially applying to the relationship between organized labour and businessmen, and religious differences, particularly between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Compounding the confusion is a mass of detail and an unsatisfactory system of organization. Just as the reader thinks he has sorted out the leading characters and arguments on the Sunday car question, for example, he is thrown into a chapter detailing yet another squabble between the street railway company and the city council. Moreover, the authors, by deliberately relegating their "sermonizing" (p. vii) or analysis to the conclusion, deny the reader guideposts along the way.

It is unfortunate that the authors let their almost antiquarian enthusiasm for the subject carry them away for they do raise some significant questions in the course of reaching their conclusion:

the stridency and militancy displayed in these crusades [concerning Sunday cars and municipal reform] reflected deep and abiding tensions within the community--tensions created not simply by a clash of ethical standards but also by a jockeying for power and influences amongst competing groups in a time of economic uncertainty (p. 173).

No doubt in their forthcoming larger study of Canadian public utilities at the turn of the century, Armstrong and Nelles will rise above the minutiae and will explore and develop the themes they have raised here only tangentially. One also hopes that they, or some other historian, will develop this "footnote" into a full scale study of the secularization of Canadian society.

Patricia E. Roy
Department of History
University of Victoria

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Union List of Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps Held by Institutions in the United States and Canada. Western Association of Map Libraries, Occasional