

## **Making Myths and Making Good: Maritime Business Biographies**

Margaret McCallum

---

Volume 21, Number 1, Autumn 1991

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad21\\_1re02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad21_1re02)

[See table of contents](#)

---

**Publisher(s)**

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

**ISSN**

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

**Cite this document**

McCallum, M. (1991). Making Myths and Making Good: : maritime Business Biographies. *Acadiensis*, 21(1), 180–190.

## Making Myths and Making Good: Maritime Business Biographies

“LET ME TELL YOU about the very rich. They are different from you and me”.<sup>1</sup> Scott Fitzgerald was not alone in his fascination with the rich and successful, judging from the recent popularity of books about successful businesses or startling business failures. In Atlantic Canada, such books satisfy a variety of needs: dispelling myths about Maritime de-industrialization or lack of entrepreneurship, reiterating old myths about the rewards available to those who are willing to work hard and save their money, and providing some vicarious pleasure for the rest of us who struggle with low wages and high unemployment. Business biographies also assure us that the successful and powerful are decent ordinary people, except that, as Ernest Hemingway said to mock Fitzgerald, “they have more money”.<sup>2</sup> This review essay examines one recent and several not-so-recent books about Maritime entrepreneurs, and, for contrast, discusses some dissenting approaches.

Douglas How's *Canada's Mystery Man of High Finance: The Story of Izaak Walton Killam and His Glittering Wife Dorothy* (Hantsport, N.S., Lancelot Press, 1986) is slightly revised from a 1976 book commissioned by the Trustees of the Estate of D.J. Killam for holders of the scholarships funded from Killam's fortune. Academics benefit from Killam's success in other ways, too; at his death, the federal succession duties on the \$83 million Killam estate helped establish the Canada Council. Killam amassed his money during his 39 years as head of Royal Securities Corporation, the successful investment brokerage firm established by Ontario-born and New Brunswick-raised financier Max Aitken. Killam's grandfather, Thomas Killam, was a wealthy Yarmouth shipbuilder and merchant, but Killam's father, William, did not find a place for himself in the reorganized firm run by his older brothers after the patriarch's death. Instead, William lived on his inheritance and the income from a variety of jobs, spending his leisure time drinking and fishing. His first son, named for the author of *The Compleat Angler*, liked fishing too, but even as a child, his greatest pleasure was making money. At 19, Killam was recruited from his job as a bank clerk to work for Aitken, and became president of RSC in 1915 after Aitken moved to England to become Lord Beaverbrook.

Apart from a couple of pages on Killam's interests in utility companies in Latin America and pulp, paper and power companies in Canada, How provides details of only four of the multitude of enterprises which Killam promoted — the Riordan Pulp and Paper Company, which collapsed at the end of the First

1 F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The Rich Boy”, in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1989), p. 318.

2 “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”, in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York, 1955), p. 72.

World War with no return to its shareholders; the successful Mersey Paper Company Limited, which opened a large plant in Liverpool, on Nova Scotia's south shore, in December 1929; the Toronto *Mail and Empire*, which Killam purchased in 1927 and sold ten years later to the *Globe*; and Famous Players Canadian Corporation, the American-controlled firm that dominated the Canadian movie business. Like the book in general, these accounts are interesting anecdotes, but provide no insight into how Killam made his millions. How mentions Killam's mental acuity, ability to master detail, astounding memory, and disdain for conspicuous consumption, but provides little information on the business environment in which Killam was able to turn these qualities into money. Killam never ran for public office, but his business ventures often straddled the ideological divide between public and private enterprise, and one wonders what role political connections played in his success. Without any of Killam's papers, How may have said all he could, but in focusing on individual character traits and achievements while ignoring the changing political, economic or legal context, How's approach is typical of the hagiography that often passes for business biography.

A worthwhile contribution within this genre is David Folster's *The Chocolate Ganongs of St. Stephen, New Brunswick* (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1990), recently reissued in a paperbound edition by Goose Lane Editions of Fredericton. The lively and well-written narrative describes Ganong Bros.' successful transformation from a small grocery business established in 1873 into a confectionery manufacturing firm supplying national and international markets. A family portrait as much as a business history, this book will never get on the reading list in business school courses. Despite the firm's claims to have pioneered the all-day sucker, five-cent chocolate bar, use of cellophane wrapping for candy, and the Valentine chocolate box, the focus of the book is not on the elements of entrepreneurship such as risk-taking, innovation, or making the hard business decisions necessary to cope with changing production and marketing needs. Instead, Folster tells us about personalities and the human relationships in which these personalities are revealed. For example, one chapter, entitled "Uncle Will", describes the career of W.F. Ganong, the eldest son of James Ganong, one of the firm's founders, who obtained several degrees before accepting a life-long teaching position at Smith College in Massachusetts. Every summer, he came back to New Brunswick to continue his extensive research on the province's natural history and science, and to attend Ganong Bros. board meetings. The book also describes the party which the firm's co-founder Gilbert Ganong hosted to celebrate his appointment in 1917 as lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick, and the household routine enjoyed by A.D. Ganong, Gilbert's nephew and successor both as president of Ganong Bros. and Conservative M.P. for Charlotte County.

Folster describes the Ganongs as "like the leading families of a thousand [!] other mill and factory towns in the Maritime provinces and New England. Their

values and their moral tone came out of the 19th century and stood strong and true as the world plunged into the uncharted 20th” (p. 67). Folster, however, is unwilling to explore the implications of these values; he participates uncritically in the celebration of a “unique corporate ethic that had always put people and community ahead of personal profit” (p. 185). Unquestionably, Ganong Bros.’ commitment to its community involves more than the bottom line, and was dramatically demonstrated in the decision by current president, David Ganong, to stay in St. Stephen when he built his modern, computerized factory. In staying, David was recognizing “both the assets and the liabilities of all that history” (p. 200). Employee loyalty offsets some of the locational disadvantages of southwestern New Brunswick, and nostalgia helps sell the Ganong product, but commitment to a community places some limits on management choices. Nevertheless, from the construction of its first factory on the town’s main street in 1888, Ganong Bros. benefited from municipal tax concessions and reduced rates for municipal water and sewer services. In the early 1970s, when the company needed money for new equipment and to buy out one of the family shareholders, the provincial government provided loan guarantees and direct loans. Extensive government subsidies helped determine that Ganong Bros.’ main Maritime competition, Moirs, would re-locate to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, instead of leaving the province when the company sold its old factory in downtown Halifax. If there were any financial incentives for Ganong Bros. to stay in St. Stephen beyond reaping the benefits of its traditions, Folster does not tell us.

Folster does not identify his book as “an authorized history”; nevertheless, he relies heavily on private company records and on interviews with Rendol Whidden Ganong and David Ganong, the third and fourth presidents of the firm. Indeed, R.W.’s voice is heard clearly throughout the book; his perspective shapes the narrative and his point of view prevails. This book is an affectionate and somewhat sentimental portrait, combining personal anecdotes and local history to emphasize that the Ganongs, despite their success, remained loyal to their family, community and region. It is a method and story-line used as well by Harry Bruce in his biographies of the founders of two of Nova Scotia’s successful business empires, R.A. Jodrey and Frank Sobey.

The first of these books, *R.A.: The Story of R.A. Jodrey, Entrepreneur* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1979), was commissioned by the Minas Basin Pulp and Power Company Limited, one of Jodrey’s creations, to mark its 50th anniversary. In between bits of local lore and quotations from *The Busy East* — a Maritime business magazine which more historians should consult — this book describes the career of Roy Jodrey, who made a fortune from apples, electricity and pulp. Born in the Annapolis Valley in 1888, Jodrey left school early to make money, his only acknowledged goal in life: “I always kind of figure that as long as you make a dollar honest, it doesn’t make any difference what you make it out of...As long as you get it” (p. 28). In 1910 Jodrey bought an apple farm from his future

father-in-law, and with his profits, started speculating in stocks, particularly in pulp and power companies. Despite losses in the Depression, Jodrey was able to win the confidence of Horace Enman, Supervisor of Eastern Branches for the Bank of Nova Scotia, and through him, borrow the money to maintain his existing businesses and to enable him to take his own advice: "When things look blackest, buy", preferably with someone else's money (p. 201). Enman played an important but unexplored role in the development of Maritime business; he was recognized by R. W. Ganong, Roy Jodrey, Frank Sobey and others as a good banker and a good friend. Jodrey repaid some of his debt to Enman when he bought control of Ben's, a big bakery in Halifax, and immediately switched its banking business to the Bank of Nova Scotia. Other Nova Scotia businesses Jodrey created or acquired include Avon River Power Company, Canadian Keyes Fibre Company and Avon Foods Limited.

Jodrey, as portrayed by Bruce, was an unpretentious man who did not drink or smoke, worked hard, made money for the fun of it, hung onto what he made, and relaxed by listening to the sound of his machinery humming. Not wanting to flaunt his wealth, his acts of generosity were private (and, Bruce might have added, somewhat niggardly). He rewarded his employees with gifts of knick-knacks, chocolates from Moirs after he bought into the company in the mid-fifties, and gold watches delivered personally at the annual company banquet for long-term employees. As some former employees told Bruce, if Jodrey had paid them more, they would have been able to buy their own little luxuries (pp. 333-334). This acknowledgement of the dark side of paternalism is one of Bruce's few references to the men and women who worked for Jodrey, and who contributed to his success. Nor does Bruce discuss any government contribution to Jodrey's ability to make money, even though Jodrey himself said that Canadian Keyes Fibre needed government loans to keep going. Instead, Bruce focuses on the individual, and attributes his success to hard work, thrift and luck, implying that we could all do as well if we tried.

Frank Sobey was able to, as Bruce tells us in *Frank Sobey: The Man and the Empire* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1985). Although not identified as a commissioned history, this book was clearly written with Frank Sobey's full co-operation. It describes how Sobey developed his father's grocery in Stellarton, Nova Scotia into a supermarket chain whose profits supported expansion into a drug store chain, food processing and distribution, and real estate development. In deference to Sobey's choice of church, this book is embellished with quotations from the *Presbyterian Witness* instead of *The Maritime Baptist* used in *Jodrey*, and snippets of Pictou County's rich history replace the references to Evangeline. The basic story, however, is the same. Frank Sobey was more interested in making money than in getting an education, worked long hours, did not spend lavishly, and built a business empire using borrowed money and the cash generated by selling off inventory before he had to pay for it. Perhaps because Bruce was able to interview Sobey, he presents a fuller picture of him than of

Jodrey; we get anecdotes about Sobey's "Edwardian" childhood and intimations that Sobey liked power. As mayor of Stellarton for 22 years, from 1937 to 1959, he was a "bulldozer" (p. 117); but what he did for the town was on his own terms. He worked the same way when he became the unpaid president of Industrial Estates Limited, the crown corporation created by the Stanfield government to encourage industries to locate in Nova Scotia. IEL provided firms with a plant to lease on serviced land, financed up to 60 per cent of their equipment costs and helped arrange tax concessions from municipalities. Details of IEL activity form the longest chapter in the book, based largely on the private papers of Robert Manuge, IEL general manager, whom Sobey had first noticed when Manuge was selling coolers to supermarkets. Sobey repaid some of his debts to Horace Enman by naming him as chairman of the IEL board. Bruce deals with IEL's spectacular failures — the Clairtone stereo and TV plant in Stellarton, and the Deuterium of Canada heavy-water plant in Glace Bay — but he concludes that IEL was a success, using the Michelin Tire plants as evidence. Sobey shared Michelin's opposition to unions, but Bruce mentions the company's stormy labour relations only in passing, when he cites a strike as part of the explanation for the sale of Sobey's interest in the Quebec-based Provigo chain. Sobey employees worked hard, too, but for lesser rewards than their employers.

Since the Nova Scotia business elite is small and its members are often directors on the same boards, some of the stories in *Sobey* were also told in *Jodrey*, although from a slightly different perspective. For example, Jodrey, Sobey and real estate developer, contractor and building supplies dealer Charles MacCulloch were the principals in Halifax Developments Ltd., the company which turned 17 acres of land below the Citadel in downtown Halifax into Scotia Square, a hideous collection of parking garages, street-level solid brick walls, office and apartment towers, and underground shops. In *Jodrey*, Bruce credits MacCulloch with arranging \$16 million in financing for the project from Metropolitan Life in New York, partly by using Jodrey's name. In *Sobey*, however, Bruce quotes Sobey as saying that anybody could have arranged the financing, given the names of the people on HDL's board of directors. Bruce also retells the story of what he calls the Bluenosers' attempt to prevent the take-over of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (DOSCO) by the British-owned A.V. Roe Canada Limited. Both Jodrey and Sobey opposed the take-over, but when Sobey saw that opposition would be futile, he did not back Jodrey's efforts to organize shareholders against it. Bruce concludes this story with Sobey's resignation from the DOSCO board after A.V. Roe's successor, Hawker-Siddeley, announced on 13 October 1967 that it intended to close the Sydney steel plant. In blaming the absentee owners for DOSCO's troubles, Sobey merely affirmed what many Nova Scotians have believed since outsiders first gained control of the Cape Breton coal and steel industries. The explanation is a convenient one for Maritime business leaders, suggesting as it does that regional business leaders are not like other capitalists, and that class differences are less important than regional

loyalties. Both the Jodrey and the Sobey empires are still managed from the modest offices which their founders acquired early in their careers, partly to avoid any lavish display, but also to reap benefits in worker and consumer loyalty from maintaining and celebrating their Nova Scotia roots. Just look at Sobey TV ads to see the importance the company places on its image as part of the family.

The appeal to regional rather than class loyalties is also part of the corporate strategy of National Sea Products Limited, which recently commissioned journalist Stephen Kimber to write its history. National Sea was formed in September 1945 with the merger of several major Nova Scotia fish companies. A corporate family-tree would have made this part of the story a lot easier to understand. In *Net Profits: The Story of National Sea* (Halifax, Nimbus Publishing, 1989). Stephen Kimber discusses the history of these individual companies. The main story-line, though, is the take-over of National Sea in 1977 by H.B. Nickerson & Sons Ltd., and National Sea's restructuring early in 1984 after both companies failed to pay for expansion undertaken to exploit Canada's declaration of the 200-mile coastal limit. The restructuring involved investment from both the Sobeys and the Jodreys. David Hennigar, Roy Jodrey's grandson, was widely hailed in the media, and in this book, as the person who "saved" National Sea by arranging this investment. Kimber explains the interest of Hennigar and Donald Sobey, Frank's son, in National Sea as part of their family heritage of "profound distaste for government intervention in private enterprise and equally profound sense of parochial provincial patriotism" (p. 247). But, to quote Kimber, "did David Hennigar save National Sea from the clutches of government socialists or did Ottawa bail out the banks and the company with taxpayers' dollars?" (p. 254). Kimber seems to feel that merely raising the question fulfills his duty to be critical. Certainly, with private sector investment of \$20 million and federal and provincial investment of \$105 million, this restructuring was not the "private-sector solution" that the media ideologues claimed it to be. Nor, it turns out, was it any solution at all. Neither the government nor the industry recognized or dealt with the problem of declining fish stocks, or questioned the wisdom of spending \$2 million on boats to catch the same quantity of fish that had not brought security to the industry when caught in \$250,000 boats. Gordon Cummings, hired by Hennigar as president of the restructured National Sea, concludes the book with an "upbeat forecast", despite the closure of the fish plant in Lockeport, N.S., and the likely closure of several others. National Sea probably wishes Kimber had finished his book a few months earlier, before the industry downturn, or perhaps a few months later, after Cummings had been fired.<sup>3</sup>

3 *Financial Post*, 28 August 1989, p. 5.

Cummings no doubt received a handsome golden handshake to ease his transition into unemployment. Not so the laid-off workers, or Tom Pittman, one of the National Sea trawler captains whom Kimber profiles. Pittman was “let go” by the company in 1954, after he developed heart troubles. Kimber’s description of the long hours and hard work of the people who catch the fish for National Sea suggests that “we’re all in this together”. Indeed, within the industry, fishermen on the traditional wetfish trawlers are treated as co-adventurers, who share in the proceeds of the trip rather than receiving a guaranteed hourly or daily wage, even though it is the company, not the fishermen, who make all the decisions about where, when and what to fish. In 1967, National Sea trawler workers staged a one-week walk-out over Christmas to protest low fish prices, and in 1969, National Sea voluntarily recognized the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers as the bargaining agent for its trawler workers. Since fishermen were excluded from the province’s collective bargaining legislation, the company had no legal obligation to recognize the union, but doing so forestalled any organizing attempt by the more radical United Fishermen’s union that led a long and bitter strike in the Canso area.<sup>4</sup>

There are limits to the questions which a commissioned history can ask. John DeMont is not faced with the same constraints in *Citizens Irving: K.C. Irving and his Legacy: The Story of Canada’s Wealthiest Family* (Toronto, Doubleday, 1991). The principals in his story denied his requests for interviews, but this is a substantial book nonetheless, based on extensive interviews and careful reading of documents available to the dogged and determined researcher. DeMont raises some critical questions about the Irving contribution to the region, but seems reluctant to challenge the Irvings’ view of themselves as “ordinary, Christian folk, doing their part just like everyone else to make New Brunswick a better place in which to live. That the Irvings, on balance, have been good for the province is undeniable; if they had never existed it is doubtful that another group of entrepreneurs would have emerged with the guts and drive to create jobs and enterprise in the barrens of New Brunswick” (p. 5). The Irvings own an oil refinery, shipyard and millions of acres of woodland. Their companies employ one out of every twelve New Brunswickers, and provide, directly or indirectly, one in five of the province’s private-sector jobs. In Prince Edward Island, the Irving companies are the single largest private sector employer, and the eagerness of the Island government for more investment in Irving’s food processing company,

4 See Donald Cameron, *The Education of Everett Richardson: The Nova Scotia Fishermen’s Strike, 1970-71* (Toronto, 1977). One result of that strike was the extension of collective bargaining rights to trawler workers, although inshore fishermen are still excluded. The inshore fishermen’s struggle is well told by Sue Calhoun in *A Word to Say: The Story of the Maritime Fishermen’s Union* (Halifax, 1991). Her book provides a perspective on the fishing industry and the problem of over-fishing issue which Kimber ignores.



Cavendish Farms, has led some to re-name the province “Prince Irving Island”. With their chain of gas stations, restaurants and convenience stores, the SMT bus line, and Sunbury trucking, the Irvings make money with almost every movement of goods or people in the province. The Irvings also own most of the province’s English-language media outlets, including all five English-language daily papers. In justifying this monopoly in hearings before a Senate committee, Irving said better me than someone from away. But New Brunswick has paid a heavy price for being the Irving personal fiefdom. Because the Irving empire is vertically integrated, and a ruthless competitor, new businesses are reluctant to come to the province, and existing businesses hesitate to expand, for fear their success will end in their being bought out or driven out by the Irvings. DeMont quotes Maurice Mandale, an economist with the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, who sees the consequence of Irving’s dominance as “a dulling of the entrepreneurial edge” (p. 193).

How did K.C. Irving, the patriarch of the family, create the economic empire now managed by his three sons? DeMont explains the Irving success by referring to the proverbial Presbyterian virtues — a willingness to work long and hard, a passion for thrift, which precluded use of alcohol or tobacco, and the drive to expand. Yet this is not a rags to riches story. K.C. was born in Buctouche in 1899, the son of the owner of the town’s sawmill, grist mill, carding mill, fish plant and general store. In 1924, when K.C. wanted to get into business on his own, he opened a gas station in Buctouche with a loan of \$100,000 from his father and a long-time family friend. And in 1933, when the ubiquitous Horace Enman called for payment of K.C. Irving’s outstanding loans, somehow he came up with the necessary \$2 million. Like Jodrey and Sobey, Irving’s basic business strategy was to buy cheap, with borrowed money if possible, and not to sell. Before deciding where to put a new plant, Irving negotiated with municipal politicians for free land, tax reductions or fixed rates for municipal services, and successfully fought legislation introduced by the Robichaud government which would have limited his ability to get municipalities to bid against each other for his investment.

DeMont records that one of K.C.’s sons boasted that his father never lost an election in New Brunswick. K.C. Irving did not run himself, but he generally backed the party which won, until the premier turned down one of his requests. From various governments, the Irving companies obtained tax concessions and special privileges to expropriate land or to pollute with impunity. K.C. hated taxes, and some said it was opposition to Robichaud’s proposed succession duties that prompted K.C.’s move to the Bahamas in 1971. It may also have been the on-going federal investigation to determine whether the Irving newspaper monopoly functioned to the public detriment. (The Irvings were acquitted of all charges on appeal). Meanwhile, K.C. had moved on to Bermuda, where this man who liked to live simply spent \$2.5 million building a house for himself, his wife, and “their few servants” (p. 117). There are other such discordant notes in this portrait of a modest New Brunswicker who made good. Despite their attempt to

portray themselves as paternalistic employers, the Irvings have a high staff turn-over; lawsuits for wrongful dismissal are not uncommon. Even senior management have no job descriptions, and service station managers may have to don straw boaters and spend a Saturday afternoon parking cars for Irving guests. The Irvings are rigorous in their control of employees and rigidly enforce company rules. I heard of an Irving driver who was fired shortly after ordering his lunch because he was not eating in an Irving restaurant. More than Irving softwood plantations and the smell of the Irving pulp plant in Saint John, such incidents demonstrate the power the Irvings exercise. Yet DeMont seems to share the view of Mayor Elsie Wayne of Saint John, who said: "If the Irvings were somewhere other than Saint John, the locals would be bragging about them.... Where would we be without them?" (pp. 190-191).

Where, indeed? Colin Howell observed in reviewing Giles Walker's National Film Board Production about K.C. Irving, *I Like to See the Wheels Turn*, that "popular support for the likes of K.C. Irving represents not so much an affirmation of the virtue of corporate capitalism as it does New Brunswick's longing for a more equitable share of Canada's industrial wealth".<sup>5</sup> Telling nice stories about regional entrepreneurs, however, does not help anyone think clearly about the problems of regional disparity and Atlantic under-employment. As its title suggests, *People, Resources and Power: Critical Perspectives on Underdevelopment and Primary Industries in the Atlantic Region* (Fredericton, Acadiensis Press for the Gorsebrook Research Institute of Atlantic Canada Studies, 1987) attempts to counter some of the myths about regional entrepreneurship. The collection's 16 essays deal with agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining and energy. Introductions to each section by editors Gary Burrill and Ian McKay, suggestions for further reading, and an afterword by Rick Williams provide unity and coherence, and increase the book's suitability for course use. Most of the essays were originally published in *Round One* or *New Maritimes*, and they have the strengths and weaknesses of good popular journalism. Factual and jargon-free, they provide valuable information about some of the region's problems, but little direction on using the information for social change. As the editors argue in their general introduction, however, the need for "critical perspectives and radical research" as prerequisites to change is demonstrated by another Irving story. In 1971, crew members of six Irving ships wanted to unionize, but the union of their choice was unable to apply to the Labour Relations Board for certification as the bargaining agent for the crew members, because of the difficulty of determining what corporate entity actually employed them. As the editors comment, "everyone in the Atlantic region, with the exception of a very few powerful individuals, is in a position similar to these seamen... because we simply do not know some of the basic things we need to know about

5 "Film and History in Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis*, XI, 2 (Spring 1982), p. 143.

the social and economic structures which shape our lives.... Whether offshore oil and gas deposits are explored, whether the forests are sprayed, whether our fish are harvested with freezer trawlers, whether our mines are open or closed — not only are we not consulted about these life and death matters, but we are rarely even given the background information others have used to make these decisions for us.... The media (much of it either Irving-controlled or dominated by other conservative interests) give us a steady drizzle of facts and opinions about the economy and society of the region but almost no tools to understand these facts and put them in historical perspective, and no way to form a critical perspective on self-serving editorial opinions” (p. 2).

The first thing to observe, then, is that the region’s celebrated entrepreneurs made their money principally by expanding services and monopolizing trade, and only secondarily by developing productive industries: “Since the Second World War, every phase of their massive expansion has been underwritten by the development policies of the federal state. Their activities have been, in short, primarily parasitical” (p. 5). Government, not the private sector, is the major source of employment and non-employment income in the region. Yet primary producers and workers seem unable to organize effectively to gain control of the governments which determine so many of the conditions of their lives. And in the private sector, as several of these essays argue, people who are employees in all but name resist collective action to increase their bargaining power with, for example, the McCains, who dictate to the potato growers when and what kind of potatoes to plant, what chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to apply, and what price the growers will receive.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps Eleanor O’Donnell could do a book about the McCains like the one she did on the Sobey’s, before Harry Bruce occupies the field. *Leading the Way: An Unauthorized Guide to the Sobey Empire* (Halifax, Gatt-Fly, 1985) is a resource book for use in the public schools; the research behind it is set out in O’Donnell’s essay of the same title in *People, Resources and Power*. Working entirely with publicly available sources, O’Donnell shows that “there was always a lot more to the Frank Sobey story than shrewd bargaining, foresight and the making of purely local connections” (p. 44). O’Donnell analyzes how, through vertical integration and sheer size, the major food conglomerates can control the prices paid to producers and by consumers. She also details the government subsidies that permitted HDL to profitably develop the Scotia Square complex. In discussing Frank Sobey’s role in IEL, she observes that a lot of IEL dollars went to well-established multinationals, including Standard Brands, owners of Moirs, to facilitate the move to Dartmouth. O’Donnell deals frankly with the

6 Tom Murphy, “Potato Capitalism: McCain and Industrial Farming in New Brunswick”, pp. 19-29; Darrell McLaughlin, “From Self-Reliance to Dependence to Struggle: Agribusiness and the Politics of Potatoes in New Brunswick”, pp. 30-35.

Sobey empire's anti-unionism, which the Sobeys defend as their way of protecting their workers from outside agitators.

O'Donnell concludes with a call for more information for people so they can start asking for alternatives. Rick Williams, however, begins one of his essays in this collection with a story of how difficult it is to disseminate any views about the region that contradict the mainstream media. He tells about his big lunch with the publisher and editor of the *Globe and Mail*, who were touring the Maritimes as a prelude to launching the new national edition which academics read so faithfully. Williams had been invited to talk about the fishery, but the Toronto two cut him off brusquely when he criticized government and industry decisions which threatened the inshore fishery. To them, having met already with National Sea, the Nickersons and the governments, the inshore fishery was an anachronism which should be eliminated. Williams looks critically at the National Sea restructuring, and dissects the media coverage which obscured the real issues by raving about the dangers to fishermen's independence if government managed the fishing companies. He also identifies the people who benefited — those who control the Jodrey and Sobey empires, not the region as a whole.

Historian Michael Bliss, in a lecture delivered on 18 October 1991 as part of the centennial celebrations of the University of Toronto's History Department<sup>7</sup>, chides himself and his professional colleagues for their fascination with narrow and highly private approaches to the history of Canada just when the public needs information about the political and constitutional accommodations which have kept us together so far. Bliss is too quick to conclude that the fragmentation of Canadian history into specialized work on labour, women, the east, the west, urban life, rural life or some other defined research area, including the work he does on Canadian business, does not contribute to the history of the nation as a whole. But he is right in suggesting that historians and other academics have an obligation to use their skills, training and expertise to help identify, understand and resolve current problems. Bliss may be merely reminding historians of the political importance of remaining relevant in a decade of declining funding for universities. The business biographies reviewed here should be poignant reminders of our responsibility to provide our communities with the information and skills necessary to think in new ways about entrepreneurship, control of resources, and the meaning of success.

MARGARET McCALLUM

7 *University of Toronto Magazine*, XIX (Winter 1991), pp. 6-11.