

BOOK REVIEWS

Joan Magee. **A Dutch Heritage. 200 Years of Dutch Presence in the Windsor-Detroit Border Region.** Toronto and Charlottetown: Dundurn Press. 1983. Dundurn Local History Series: 2 (In association with The Netherlandic Press, Windsor, Ontario), 128 pages.

Albert VanderMey. **To All Our Children. The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada.** Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press. 1983. 512 pages.

Reviewed by Adrian van den Hoven, University of Windsor

One may wonder why anyone would wish to devote a book to the Dutch presence in Essex county; after all, unlike the French, the Italians, the Germans, and the Slavs, the people from the Low Lands do not exactly dominate in that area. However, Joan Magee has sound reasons. She wishes to indicate the pattern of Dutch migration on a very broad, international scale and then to show how Essex county shared directly and indirectly in the movements of the Dutch people throughout the two continents of Europe and North America. This explains why the Mennonites are featured in the book even though most of us tend to think of them as being of German stock, or at least as having been assimilated by the Germans. We forget that Menno Simon had a large following in Flanders and Holland before the Mennonites moved to Germany and thence to Russia and finally to Canada. Ms. Magee's approach also justifies the presence in the book of Dutch-Americans, specifically those who as Empire Loyalists settled in Ontario after having emigrated to New Amsterdam and beyond. To Joan Magee the Windsor-Detroit area is a focal point, allowing her to draw lines of Dutch migration from across the globe, all of which intersect in this border area.

Albert VanderMey's book is significantly different in size and content from Joan Magee's work. The latter has a thesis which is carefully worked out, VanderMey's voluminous work is a compilation of many voices and, although it is divided according to certain headings, it contains a lot of undigested material. **To All Our Children** is basically history in the raw.

I am sure that the professional historian will disapprove of

this book, even though it employs a framework that should receive his blessing. It juxtaposes geography and cultures, those of the Netherlands and of Canada, and arranges all in chronological order. He allows the immigrants to speak largely for themselves, and even when he narrates his voice is usually but a paraphrase. The result often appears to be a jumble where the same point is not re-emphasized but pointlessly repeated.

Yet, even if the contents of this volume could have been usefully compressed, it has its attractions. For one thing, the reader can open it virtually anywhere and plug into a man or a woman's story. For another, the many photographs allow the reader to view the story pictorially and form his own impression of what Dutch immigration to Canada was all about. To return once more to Joan Magee: she paints the Low Landers as intrepid wanderers, people who for religious, economic or political reasons have become international adventurers whom one may encounter in Russia as well as in New York State or in Essex County, Canada. The people in VanderMey's book provide us with a different aura. In spite of the huge success that Dutch immigration can be said to have been, the newcomers seem to have suffered universally from culture shock. Few, if any, were prepared for the tough climate, the rough-and-ready attitudes, and the lack of amenities.

The reason for this must be obvious to anyone who has recently visited the Low Lands. It is really quite a pleasant place to live because the country takes care of its people and its people take care of it. Consequently, the Dutch have become a hypersensitive and somewhat pampered people. Of course, below the surface the impalpable forces of indoctrination have also created a people who, depending on which group they belong to, are impervious to change while remaining adaptable to any situation.

To All Our Children mirrors the Dutch newcomers well because the book reveals them warts and all. Clearly, they are not all tall, blue-eyed, smiling work horses who tolerate any and all. Dutch society is made up of groups carefully delineated by religion, education, class, and geography. Many of the Dutch have come to Canada empty-handed but none of them came without a knapsack full of specific convictions, skills, and tastes.

Thomas Wolfe, using a million words, once explained that "You can't go home again." But one can counter this with another platitude: "You take your home with you wherever you go" This commonplace statement certainly seems applicable to the Dutch. Just as the rings of a tree permit you to tell its age, so one snippet of a Dutchman's speech can tell you when he arrived and sometimes also whence he hails. After all, in cultural terms, they arrived fully equipped and they were proud of their baggage, be it fanciful or otherwise. They have made excellent farmers, preachers, politicians, and professors, to mention but a few professions, because they were trained well in Holland. They also imported intact their beliefs and convictions and they spread them with equal efficacy and directness and consequently those who were taught to be tolerant back home are still thus and those who were intolerant in Holland are equally so in Canada.

What is remarkable about the Dutch in Canada is the importance they all accord to religion and to politics. As a matter of fact, and as one of my colleagues once remarked, the Dutch all claim to be experts in these two areas. Perhaps he meant to say that the Dutch are both outspoken and opinionated. This seems true on the national as well as on the local scene. Who has not heard of bishop Rémi de Roo who is of Low Lands stock and whose left wing ideas have brought a blush on many occasion to the cheek of an already rubicund cardinal? Let us not forget William van der Zalm, ex-minister of education in British Columbia and ex-mayoral candidate in Vancouver, who is known less ceremoniously as "Willy Wooden Shoes" and who is even better known for his ability to stick his clog in his mouth on any and all occasions and who is now establishing new credentials as premier of British Columbia and incipient cineast. Out in Alberta they have to contend with an ex-teacher named Keegstra, whose conspiratorial views of history are as indicative of the paranoia that sometimes marks the small town mind as they are of any innate evil intentions.

In this area we have Al Santing, late of Windsor's City Council, who is always ready with his quick solutions to complex problems. He is another man of strong opinions who wishes to be heard. The town of Essex has in Schinkel a mayor of Dutch background. This butcher represents a different kettle of fish.

He does not throw the baby out with the bathwater nor does he offer to slice it in two; instead he hacks through the Gordian knots of politics with rapier like-efficiency and with a wisdom, if not wit, akin to Solomon's.

At the Learned Societies' meeting held in May 1983 in Vancouver, a Dutch sociologist from Laurentian University attacked the media for giving undue publicity to the opinionated Dutch, and he assailed the intelligentsia for not having made it a countervailing duty to create liberal straw men. He misunderstands the role of the media: their function is to create drama out of non-events and to prop up the villains in the morality play of public opinion. After all, Canada already has the most draconian laws of all lands to keep us from straying off the narrow path of tolerance and liberty. As a people the Dutch are a perfect example of the powerful force of indoctrination which is provided by the potent mixture of education, dogma, and political principles. It may not be difficult to make the Dutch work hard, but it may prove wellnigh impossible to shut them up or to make them change their mind.

I have allowed my mind to meander, inspired as I was by the multifarious meanderings of the Low Landers as described by Joan Magee; if you wish to know more about these you will perforce have to purchase her paeon to those people known to have moved everywhere as well as here. Similarly, if you are interested in the personal stories of the thousand of Dutchmen who settled in Canada, pick up Vandermeij's hefty tome, peruse as you will, and acquaint yourself with the variegated backgrounds and heartfelt experiences of a people who often only have their language in common.