Book for the 1830s. The reader is allowed to understand the chief justice's decisions through notes kept by Robinson while hearing cases at the district assizes.

Finally, *Sir John Beverley Robinson* is just plain good reading. Brode's command of the narrative form, combined with his scholarly use of archival and secondary sources, presents the reader with an excellent biography. While not written by an historian, the quality of the work is such as to make it indispensible to anyone seriously interested in Upper Canadian history. This is Patrick Brode's first major work; it is sincerely hoped that it will not be his last.

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The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton: A Study of Wealth and Influence in Early Upper Canada, 1776-1812. BRUCE WILSON. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1983. ii, 248 p. ISBN 88629 0090 $9.95 pa.

The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth. BRIAN C. CUTHBERTSON. Halifax: Petheric Press, 1983. v, 174 p. ISBN 0-919380-43-3 $11.95.

Both Bruce Wilson's *The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton* and Brian Cuthbertson's *The Loyalist Governor* examine the careers of prominent but not particularly well-known figures in the life of early British North America, and each argues for increased recognition of the importance of his subject. Both attempt to move beyond the experience of an individual to draw larger conclusions about the evolution of colonial society and to consider the question (if only somewhat implicitly in Cuthbertson's case) of what agencies were central in that evolution.

Further similarity between the two works is limited however. Wilson, who is an archivist at the Public Archives of Canada, offers a sophisticated, convincing, and revisionist interpretation of early Upper Canadian history as revealed through the experience of the Niagara peninsula. Cuthbertson, formerly an archivist at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, presents a conventional biography of Sir John Wentworth in which (not atypically of the genre) hard analysis eventually gives way to the author's admiration for his subject. Wilson's analysis of the career of pre-1812 Upper Canada's most prominent private citizen says much about the extent to which commercial systems which predated the creation of the colony were of greater importance than the formal structure of the state or conservative ideology in the development of its most populous region. Cuthbertson's treatment of the "Loyalist Governor" argues, in the best tradition of the "great man" view of history, that Wentworth exercised a decisive influence on the evolution of Nova Scotian society during the Napoleonic era and was, in fact, the "Father of the Province."

In tracing Wentworth's career from pre-Revolution New Hampshire, where he was a scion of the colony's leading family and governor between 1760 and 1775, to post-Revolution Nova Scotia, where he served as governor between 1792 and 1808, Cuthbertson provides an account that is carefully researched and not unbalanced in its details but which overreaches the evidence in an attempt to establish its larger conclusions. The picture of Wentworth that emerges is not without elements that justify

the sympathetic treatment accorded him by the author. His demeanour as the last Royal Governor of New Hampshire was realistic and non-confrontational. He laboured mightily in the difficult job of Surveyor-General of the King's Woods in the years immediately after the American Revolution, and his zeal for development, successful resolution of the colony's fiscal problems, and fair-handed treatment of the Acadians speak well of his governorship of Nova Scotia.

Moreover, his judicious use of patronage effectively brought the previously disgruntled Loyalists into the circle of political power, thereby putting an end to the dissention between Loyalists and pre-Loyalists which had characterized the regime of Governor John Parr. Unfortunately, Cuthbertson burdens the latter accomplishment with an interpretive load larger than it can easily bear. It is claimed that the effect of Wentworth's governorship was to make "Nova Scotians conscious of themselves as a distinct people," and that he "nurtured in them a new loyalty to Nova Scotia that transcended the anguish of the past." In support of this claim the author points to a Loyalist-led "cultural awakening quite exceptional in British North America in its intensity and achievement," and to Wentworth's establishment of a "predominantly Loyalist oligarchy which governed Nova Scotia with hardly a ripple of opposition through the terms of five succeeding governors."

D.C. Harvey placed the "intellectual awakening" of Nova Scotia, that time when its people came to real collective self-consciousness, in the period 1812-35; it is typical of *The Loyalist Governor*, that, in challenging this interpretation, it does so seemingly unknowingly, and then later asserts that the achievements of the Wentworth years merely laid the foundation of the "intellectual awakening" described by Harvey. In either case, whether the argument is about foundations or fruition, it is difficult to see precisely the causal connection between Wentworth's leadership and this development.

Cuthbertson's second point is equally suspect. It is true that Wentworth made effective use of patronage in reconciling the Loyalists (or at least their elite) to their new home, as Margaret Ells has demonstrated, but the reference to a "Loyalist oligarchy" strikes the wrong note. Loyalists indeed dominated key positions in the provincial administration for many years, but one key to their success was the ability (conspicuously absent in Wentworth) to leave behind them the extremes of their particular heritage. Cuthbertson's emphasis on Wentworth's Loyalist legacy to Nova Scotia overlooks the fact that Nova Scotia was far less consciously a "Loyalist" colony than either New Brunswick or Upper Canada, and that its moderate and pragmatic politics were in fact based on the very antithesis of the "obsession" with loyalty that was so evident in Wentworth's behaviour after 1800. If he had indeed been the "Father of the Province," one might well expect Nova Scotia's early nineteenth-century political culture to have been more like Upper Canada's.

The upper province is the subject of Bruce Wilson's careful analysis in his excellent study of the Niagara merchant Robert Hamilton. The book is, first of all, impressive in its research; in this regard it will be as interesting to archivists as to historians. The footnotes are rich with references to collections which have been available for many years in a number of archives in Ontario and the northern states; the book demonstrates clearly that a thorough researcher can use such sources in distinctly non-traditional ways. For example, a good portion of the reconstruction of Hamilton's Niagara business affairs is the result of a careful combination of evidence found in the papers of John Askin of Detroit and Richard Cartwright of Kingston. Similarly, the many smaller collections to

be found in the province's archives are used to provide glimpses of a man who, unfortunately, left relatively few records. This may serve as a useful reminder that it is not always comprehensive or "prestige" collections which enable researchers to function effectively.

On another point, Wilson's research is equally revealing. The history of early Upper Canada has traditionally been approached through the papers of private individuals such as Cartwright or administrators such as J.G. Simcoe and Peter Russell; military records have been neglected and, as Wilson's work makes clear, undervalued. As a major consumer of both locally produced and imported goods, the military stood at the centre of much economic activity, and its records consequently say much about both that activity and the power which accrued to those who dominated it.

In this manner, in the absence of any sizeable collection of Hamilton papers, the author has pieced together from a wide variety of sources a detailed account of the process by which Hamilton rose from relative insignificance to a position of preeminence in his society. When he arrived in Upper Canada from Scotland in 1780, Hamilton had little in the way of capital or experience. What he did possess, however, through his junior position in the Montreal branch of the Ellice brothers' firm, was an *entrée* into the world of the Canadian fur trade and Laurentian commerce. Aided by native ability and a social respectability that recommended him to the British officers in charge of the Niagara frontier during the Revolutionary War, he was able to parlay this modest beginning into one of the most impressive private careers in the annals of pre-Confederation British North America.

In the course of tracing that career through its various activities — forwarding, portaging, military supply, retailing, land speculation , and politics — Wilson demonstrates certain fundamental (and hitherto largely unrecognized) truths about the structure and dynamics of early Upper Canadian society. Specifically, he shows that a focus on the Niagara peninsula, rather than on the Loyalist settlements along the St. Lawrence or the official culture of Newark and York, reveals the central importance of "commerce and networks of trade" in the determination of economic and political power.

In the readjustment which followed 1783, success went to those best able to link themselves to such larger economic enterprises as the fur trade and the provisioning of the British Army, enterprises which "could protect them from the vicissitudes of the local economy." Hamilton and his partner Richard Cartwright of Kingston were just such men, with their connections to the military at Niagara and above, to the major trading firm of Todd and McGill in Montreal, and to the prominent trader John Askin at Detroit.

Hamilton acted to reinforce his position by a quite deliberate policy of establishing his sons, nephews, and cousins in various branches of his growing business. Thus reinforced by his connections to both the larger world of Laurentian commerce and the local region, Hamilton was well placed to profit from the Niagara region's "period of transition from a pre-settlement economy dominated by army supply and the fur trade to a settled economy." As that transition proceeded, Hamilton adjusted his enterprises accordingly, using the capital and "dominance of the local market" derived from "enterprises associated with the frontier economy of the Great Lakes" to exploit the newer "sectors of the local pioneer economy."

His success in the developing fields of retailing and land speculation was nothing less than spectacular. His store at Queenston became the major retail centre of the region, offering a range of necessities and luxuries far wider than those of his competitors. At his death in 1809, Hamilton was creditor to 1218 individuals who owed him a total of £68,721. He also either owned or held mortgages on the incredible total of 130,000 acres of land, an amount almost equal to the total granted to all the chief officers of the Upper Canadian government and their families.

Success on this remarkable scale might suggest that Hamilton was a classic entrepreneur, boldly seizing new opportunities and outdistancing his competitors by virtue of the creative ability to combine capital and resources in some new or more effective manner. For all his ability and achievement, this was not the case with Robert Hamilton. Rather, he early positioned himself in the key sector of his local economy, the already existing Laurentian commercial/transportation system, and proceeded to develop its possibilities intensively. While he did share the *expansive* dreams of the "continental trade system centred on Montreal," and looked to the state to create and defend an extensive commercial empire, the actual focus of his endeavours was the exploitation of the opportunities afforded by the growth of his own region. Moreover, it was the continuing profitability of his original activities which was one of the striking features of his business success after 1800.

In the end, Hamilton's empire survived him by a mere three years. At his death the family businesses passed to sons who were unable to cope with the problems that were beginning to afflict their father's enterprises even before his death. Severely weakened by the decline of the southwest fur trade and increased competition on the Niagara portage, the impressive commercial edifice of Robert Hamilton was finally ruined by the devastation wreaked on the Niagara economy by the War of 1812.

There is much in Wilson's recounting of the above which will be of interest to historians specializing in the economy and business life of early Upper Canada, but the book's contribution goes well beyond those particular fields. In its analysis of political power and personal influence, *The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton* offers significant new perspectives on the forces which shaped Upper Canadian society. As he demonstrates, the period between the end of the war in 1783 and the inauguration of the new colony in 1791 was marked by a relative erosion of military control and its replacement by a "commercial authority structure" centred in the Land Boards, Courts of Common Pleas, and justices of the peace. It was to his connections with influential figures in the military and the Montreal commercial world that Hamilton owed these initial appointments, and Wilson is most effective in his use of Lt.Col. John Butler as the foil who demonstrates the superiority of such connections over mere "loyalty" (prominent military service in the case of Butler) as the basis for advancement in the post-revolutionary period.

The success of the major Niagara merchants in securing for themselves key local positions meant that a *de facto* regional administration was in place before Upper Canada was even founded. The establishment of the province and the inevitable clash between the merchants and the would-be "provincial" administration of Lt.Gov. Simcoe provided the forum and the opportunity for those (both lesser businessmen and farmers) who resented the power of the "mercantile oligarchy."

The result was that the early politics of Upper Canada were dominated by economic issues and a fundamental agrarian/mercantile split. Such debtor/creditor friction was of

course not unusual in frontier societies — what is significant in the case of early Upper Canada was the fact that Simcoe aligned himself with those opposed to mercantile power and took measures such as dismantling the Land Boards and Courts of Common Pleas to decrease the influence of men such as Hamilton and Cartwright. As Wilson demonstrates, however, Simcoe was merely attacking the auxiliary components of Hamilton's empire, the real strength of which had always been economic — connections to the British Army and the fur trade and an absolutely central position in the economic life of the Niagara peninsula.

While it would be too much to speak of the "irrelevance" of provincial politics, Wilson's study thus clearly indicates that "established status and economic power proved more important than structures of administration." Not surprisingly, Hamilton's personal outlook reflected this imbalance. While he espoused the toryism of the respectable classes, his "first loyalty was to the Laurentian system of trade in which he participated." Unlike his partner, the Loyalist Richard Cartwright, who articulated the anti-Americanism of the official culture, Hamilton was staunchly pro-American in his views on matters such as immigration, the franchise, and religious freedom. This concern with practical matters, all of which bore directly on the attractiveness of Upper Canada to the American settlers so necessary to its early development, marks Hamilton as the first adherent to what Wilson calls "commercial toryism," that mixture of business and politics in which commerce came first and ideology second and which was later to be identified with W.H. Merritt, Allan MacNab, and John A. Macdonald.

This reference to a larger context is one of the few points at which Wilson ventures beyond the specifics of his subject. While preferable to the excessive generalizations which mar Cuthbertson's study of Wentworth, Wilson's more cautious analysis is sufficiently skilled that one wishes he had applied his talents to some broader reflections on the relationship between his analysis and the subsequent history of the province. A case in point is Hamilton's place in the Upper Canadian political culture.

The portrait drawn by Wilson of Hamilton's commercial toryism and of the superiority of his economically derived influence over that of the fledgling provincial administration is decidedly revisionist of the more common constitutional and ideological interpretations. Yet, as he notes, the effect of the challenge to the provincial oligarchy mounted by Judge Robert Thorpe and Joseph Willcocks after 1806 was a "hardening of conservative attitudes," an end to the factionalism that had pitted provincial and lesser local elites against Hamilton, and, consequently, increased mercantile influence "within a new broader conservative grouping." This appears to have been the case, but it would have been interesting had the author attempted to assess more fully the meaning of this development. Did political events after 1806 represent merely the continuation of mercantile power in a more overtly ideological guise or was the "hardening of conservative attitudes" prior to 1812 the beginning of a shift towards the more fundamentally ideological politics which we have come to associate with Upper Canada?

The absence of such speculation is a minor deficiency at most. Similarly marginal is the complaint that, for all the detailed research that Wilson presents, Robert Hamilton fails really to come alive as a man. He is described as "astute," "shrewd," and "resourceful," but beyond that his economic and social success on such a considerable scale is attributed to his connections with and participation in larger economic structures. Little attempt is made to assess his motivation. This, apparently, is as it must be, given the limitations of

the sources. The book's title reflects this necessary focus. Bruce Wilson has not set out to produce a biography of an individual, but has instead used Hamilton's career "as a focus for the study of certain broad aspects of social and economic development." Still, one wonders whether Hamilton's empire, with its interlocking family alliances, its melding of economic and administrative power, and its sheer size, was not the product of something more than a simple desire to make money or the perceived necessity of buttressing his fortunes against the uncertainties of the eighteenth-century economy.

The only other ground on which *The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton* suffers is its isolation. Twenty years after the appearance of Gerald Craig's *Upper Canada: The Formative Years* published monographs examining particular aspects of the story which he surveyed so ably are still few and far between. As a recognizable field producing important scholarship, the study of Upper Canada may be said scarcely to exist, and studies such as this one must be read without the historiographical context which permits comparison, criticism, and synthesis. It is to be hoped that *The Enterprises of Robert Hamilton* will serve to make other students of the province, both current and potential, more aware of the possibilities for innovative research and reinterpretation which its history offers. Those who follow will have a valuable model to consider and a high standard at which to aim.

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The Western District: Papers from the Western District Conference. KENNETH G. PRYKE and LARRY L. KULISEK, eds. Essex County Historical Society Occasional Paper No. 2. Windsor: Essex County Historical Society and Western District Council, 1983. xi, 195 p. ISBN 09691611-2-3.

It is always difficult to select a series of papers from a conference for publication, more so when eleven are chosen from many more read over two days. When the conference presents a multidisciplinary approach to a geographic area within a sixty-five-year timeframe, the difficulties multiply exponentially. *The Western District* covers the administrative unit of the same name from its origins in the District of Hesse in 1788 to the final evolution of Essex, Kent, and Lambton Counties in 1853. The conference was held at the University of Windsor in October 1979.

Professors Pryke and Kulisek are to be commended not only for the selection of eleven good papers, but also for the fact that their selection represents the state of research on the Western District. Heavily weighted towards native and military studies, the work also includes papers on land speculation, agricultural development, prominent individuals, and the eventual breakup of the district. Most of the major events and personalities from the period and region are at least touched upon. Research methodologies are as diverse as the disciplines of the contributors. Geographer John Clarke and historian Leo Johnson, for example, exploit quantitative data on land speculation and agricultural development respectively while historians Ron Hoskins and Dennis Carter-Edwards and anthropologist James Clifton employ qualitative and narrative methods. Dean Jacobs documents the decline in economic and social status of area natives through land surrenders. Most contributors get high marks for their use of archival and published primary sources.