

Book Reviews/Recensions

FOUNDERS: INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION 1830 - 1980

Ernest Stabler, 1987. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

This is a thoroughly interesting book about the founders of six educational institutions or movements and about the fortunes and significance of the projects they created. Consistent perhaps with the idea of lifelong learning, the author has selected for discussion a wide range of institutions, including: the public school system of Massachusetts (Horace Mann); the international schools and colleges and the Outward Bound School (Kurt Hahn); Mount Holyoke, the first liberal arts college for women in the United State (Mary Lyon); the Danish Folk High School (N.S.F. Grundtvig); the Antigonish Movement of Nova Scotia (J. Tompkins and M. M. Coady); and the British Open University (H. Wilson, J. Lee, W. Perry and P. Venables). In each case, the story focuses on the careers and contributions of the founding figures of the enterprise, but considerable effort is made as well to describe the economic, social and cultural situation in which the institutions were functioning, and to which in varying degrees they were a response. Within the limitations of the space which could be allotted to each institution, this latter aspect of the book (which is too often largely ignored in such studies) is well handled, at least as seen from the point of view of one who shares the author's liberal philosophical views.

Most readers, like this reviewer, will start out with varying degrees of interest in the personalities and projects involved. As an adult educator, I found myself somewhat informed about, and pleased to learn more about, the Danish Folk High Schools, the Antigonish Movement and the Open University. I knew about Horace Mann and valued the opportunity to learn more about his efforts towards the establishment of the public educational system in his home state and beyond. I am not sure I had ever heard of Mary Lyon or Kurt Hahn, though I knew about the institutions they founded. It is a test of the author's skill that one finds oneself interested in each and every person and project after reading about them. Stabler has an excellent eye for what is

important and relevant, and for what will be of interest to the reader. The writing is economical and effective; each section begins with a dramatic, attention-getting incident, but this is not overdone.

One significant test for this reviewer was how I felt about Stabler's treatment of the projects I already knew a fair amount about. In the case of the Antigonish Movement, for instance, there are at least two ways in which the author's account makes a significant contribution. The first is the enrichment of the information about the movement which Stabler makes more widely available. I found particularly useful: the considerable additional information about the history of St. Francis Xavier University and its relationship to its region; the integration into the account of the influence of key figures besides the well known Father Moses Coady - most notably Father Jimmy Tompkins; and the drawing upon and citation of a variety of local and internal documents which are significant to the story. A second useful contribution of Stabler's account consists of his pursuing the Antigonish story beyond its glory days, which are fairly well documented in Coady's book and in the two by A.F. Laidlaw, and some others, and into the decades beyond -- up to the present time. A few revisionist historians have given us views about the more recent decades, but Stabler provides a useful addition to what has been available, and places it in a comprehensive account. I have found that students of the field of adult education in Canada area are greatly interested in the Antigonish story but tend to be frustrated by the relative lack of accounts of the more recent decades. (It is also helpful to have a chapter-length overall account available.)

Founders is very helpful in somewhat parallel terms with respect to the two other famous projects of particular interest to adult educators, the Danish Folk High School movement and the British Open University. Concerning the former, we are provided with useful historical (especially economic and cultural) background, information about the distinctive contributions of several figures in addition to Grundtvig himself, and again useful information about the folk schools subsequent to the first few decades of development. In the case of the Open University, we are, again, grateful for the perspective over time (a much shorter time than in the case of the folk schools, of course). Two of the most memorable parts of the Open University story as presented here have to do with the political in-fighting in the Labour Party as the project took shape and with the strategies adopted for course development. As with Antigonish, it is helpful to have

these reasonably comprehensive chapter length treatments of the two projects.

Each of the remaining three projects presented its own problems or challenges to the author. In the case of Horace Mann and the struggle for the establishment of a public educational system in Massachusetts and beyond, Stabler skilfully combines the biographical approach with the story of institutional development. In some respects he had less to work with in the case of Mary Lyon and the founding of the first liberal arts college for women in the United States, Mount Holyoke College, and he has usefully augmented that story with information about the further development of colleges and universities for women in that country. The chapter about Kurt Hahn and his contributions is markedly different from the others, being to a large extent an interesting tale of an educational entrepreneur or "wheeler dealer" and his adventures among the titled and wealthy in promoting the development of several distinctive and significant educational institutions.

Two minor reservations to note. Although Stabler tells us in some detail about the politics within the Labour Party as they affected the development of the Open University, he, oddly it seems, omits the threat posed and excitement generated by the victory of the Conservatives at the polls in the final stages of development. Secondly, especially in the Grundtvig chapter, although the dates of some of his quotations are fairly important to the story, his footnotes tell us only the date of the secondary sources from which he took them, thus reducing their utility to the reader.

Founders is a most helpful and interesting addition to the literature of the field of education, most notably adult education. The several chapters, each some 40 to 50 pages, are lively reading, well documented and in a different manner in each case, usefully comprehensive. In the case of the adult education projects, this book is a useful place to start for students or the general reader, the footnotes and bibliography providing a guide for further research. A concluding chapter on "The Dynamics of Innovation" is brief, and somewhat disappointing, but there are many other rewards for the reader in this sound and lively volume.

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