

The Grand Experiment: Law and Legal Culture in British Settler Societies. Edited by Hamar Foster Benjamin L. Berger, and A.R. Buck. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009. 400p. Includes bibliographic notes, selected bibliography, index, and contributor profiles. ISBN: 9780774814911 (hardcover). \$85.00

This collection of essays honours John McLaren, Emeritus Professor at the University of Victoria Faculty of Law. Professor McLaren joined the Faculty as the Lansdowne Professor of Law in 1987 after professorships at the Universities of Calgary, Windsor, and Saskatchewan, and following Deanships at Calgary and Windsor. He is the recipient of many awards, including the Ramon Hnatyshyn Medal, awarded by the Canadian Bar Association for contribution to law and legal scholarship. He is a founding member of the Canadian Law and Society Association, and has contributed much to the fields of Canadian and colonial legal history. He is known for encouraging Canadian and foreign legal historians to look beyond their own borders to identify pan-colonial realities, for exploring historical injustices and more generally the regulation of morality through law, for his contributions engaging legal history with critical legal studies, and for his work in legal education, compensation law, and public policy.

Named for Pollock and Maitland's description of the spread of English law through the Empire, *The Grand Experiment* grew out *Law's Empire*, a Canadian Law and Society Association conference also celebratory of Professor McLaren held June 25-30 2005 in Harrison Hot Springs, B.C. The volume examines times and places in which law and society spring from disparate sources, and which therefore offer opportunities to examine the interplay between them. In it we find fascinating accounts of how evolving British law and far-flung colonial societies met, divided, collided, and coincided in their centuries-long association across three continents and two oceans.

The work is introduced with an essay on the importance of the idea of the rule of law, which went hand-in-hand with the expansion of "Law's Empire." The essays are presented in three parts that correspond to important themes in Professor McLaren's work: Authority at the Bounds of Empire, looking at how law was applied out of its place of origin; Courts and Judges in the Colonies, which examines how specific people influenced the growth of law and legal institutions; and Property, Politics and Petitions in Colonial Law, which presents specific conflicts that illuminate the how social forces contributed to legal decisions that regulated moral behaviour. In his concluding essay on the likely future directions of the legal history of former British colonies, Professor McLaren is optimistic, and identifies a number of resources and perspectives that he expects will soon be exploited.

Some topics appear prominently: libel laws and their relation to freedom of expression are explored in New South Wales, Upper Canada, Massachusetts, and Nova Scotia; the sad and confused relations between colonial administrators and indigenous peoples in Canada; and the relations between courts and communities in Van Diemen's Land, New Zealand, and Canada. Two essays stand out for their uniqueness in the collection: a review of the law of the sea and

the surprisingly consistent successes of civil actions against Masters; and an empirical look at the question of how colonial court decisions influenced British courts.

For librarians, a number of these essays contain intimate discussions of prominent legal texts and the importance of the communication of legal norms via the printed word. In this regard, Professor McLaren draws our attention to the importance of the “exposure and rationalization” of archival materials. He cites two Australian scholars, the late Alex Castles and Bruce Kercher as path breakers in this respect.

This work belongs in every Canadian academic library, and certainly in every Canadian law library that is not entirely utilitarian. It offers an excellent entry point into the literature, not only for its list of selected readings and bibliographic references, but also for its very helpful general remarks on the state of the research.

By Michael Lines, Faculty and Student Services Librarian, Diana M. Priestly Law Library,  
University of Victoria.