Reading Log 2

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Sandwells chapter looks at the practice of creating a microhistory and its value to the historical community. In the article Sandwell inquires as to the real purpose of creating a microhistory, and its value in helping to contribute to a historical narrative. In this approach to microhistory writing, Sandwell elaborately describes his trials and tribulations when conducting his own research on the history of Saltspring Island, BC, delving into the many approaches and multiple angles through which his work took shape1. Sandwell shows how various resources can be used to draw conclusions about a community, and how the use of these limited resources may help contribute to the construction of a larger narrative. As well, Sandwell also shows how resilience and a little historical sleuthing can aid a researcher in uncovering previously untapped historical resources, therefore helping in the creation of a more inclusive and reliable account. Specifically, the chapter examined his experience in researching the history of life on Salt-spring Island beginning in the mid-1800s. In this research, Sandwell discusses how limited resources required him to draw from a variety of sources in order to make any concrete conclusions regarding these past communities. Such evidence used by Sandwell included voter registration, agricultural statistics, business directories, censuses, tax assessments, court records, inquests, school records, newspapers, diaries, letters, gravestones, and a variety of other sources2. The use of this wide variety of sources demonstrates the commitment necessary when conducting research in a thorough manner, and also the creativity necessary to construct an adequate microhistory of a given place in time. In relation to the A. May article, I believe that Sandwells work helps to highlight the importance of using a narrow historical scope when conducting research, as well as the wider value that a given microhistory may hold for drawing wider conclusions about a given time period, geographic location, economic community, or any other quality of interest that a researcher may choose to examine in a particular historical work.

Littles article, conversely, seeks to assemble a microhistory concerning the disappearance of $200 from an envelope intended to be distributed to various church funds in Kinnear’s Mills in Leeds Township, Quebec3. In this article Little examines the controversy surrounding the disappearance of said money, and how various members of the community (including the hardly impartial judge who oversaw the investigation) responded to the spectacle4. Through Littles investigation he uncovers two major suspects in the case of this disappeared money. Namely, the postmaster James Kinnear who oversaw the delivery of said money (it is of no little note that this money was donated by Kinnears father Kinnear Sr.), as well as the pastor reverend Whiteclaw who addressed the envelope which supposedly contained said money5. Interestingly, Littles article looks at various perspectives within the community and draws from several individual perspectives in an effort to investigate possible explanations for this moneys disappearance. Through this investigation, Little points to evidence which supports both possibilities as viable explanations for the moneys disappearance, showing how the community involved in this controversy was hesitant to believe that either party could be guilty of such an action6. On one hand, Kinnear was a very wealthy and well respected figure with a long history of reliable service and high standing in his community, and based on this finding Little seems hesitant to invest much belief in Kinnears involvement in the theft7. On the other hand, Whiteclaw too was a very well respected member of the community, and in 1899 few members of the community were willing to believe that the pastor had any involvement in theft of money intended for the church he was so deeply invested in8. In relation to the A. May article, I believe that this work is quite relevant as it shows the process of microhstorical writing; not only does Little show how a longer historical lens may shed light on biases based on social or economic standing, but also how astutely various historical resources including legal records and newspapers may be utilized to more fully conceptualize the major factors contributing to the theft9.

Endnotes

1. R. Sandwell, “History as Experiment: Microhistory and Envirnmental History.” *Method and Meaning in Canadian Enviornmental History,* (2008), 126
2. Ibid, 127
3. J.I. Little, “A Crime ‘Shrouded in Mystery’: State, Church, and Community in the Kinnear’s Mill Post Office, 1899-1905,” in *Little, The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society*, (2006), 3
4. Ibid, 32
5. Ibid, 9
6. Ibid, 15
7. Ibid, 8
8. Ibid, 9
9. Ibid, 15

Bibliography

Sandwell, R. "History as Experiment: Microhistory and Environmental History." In *Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History*, edited by Alan McEachern and William Turkel, 122-36. Toronto: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008.

Little, J.I., “A Crime ‘Shrouded in Mystery’: State, Church, and Community in the Kinnear’s Mill Post Office, 1899-1905,” in *Little, The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006: ch. 8.