

Matthew Evenden, *Allied Power: Mobilizing Hydro-electricity during Canada's Second World War*. University of Toronto Press [utorontopress.com], 2015. xii + 273pp, figures, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, ISBN 9781442648500 Cdn \$75.00, Paperback, ISBN 9781442626256 Cdn \$32.95.

In *Allied Power: Mobilizing Hydro-electricity during Canada's Second World War*, Matthew Evenden presents a straightforward case. "The wartime crisis," he argues, "facilitated an unprecedented expansion of state control over hydro-electric development that rapidly boosted the country's generating capacity for war production and delivered an important material contribution to the allied war effort." (8). In addition, he contends that hydro developments during the conflict transformed several major watersheds in Canada and that they set the template for the post-war "big dam era" (16). Overall, Evenden presents a convincing argument, although there are minor issues that could be raised about his book, particularly by business historians.

Evenden tells a truly remarkable tale. The country increased its output of electricity by 40% during the Second World War. By the end of the conflict Canada was ranked first or second in the world in terms of generation of power per capita and total production of electricity. Evenden also demonstrates that roughly 80% of that energy had been based in Ontario and Quebec in 1939, and that developments during the war only reinforced this regional disparity, (the prairies and the Maritimes remained relatively undeveloped in terms of generating capacity). Furthermore, Evenden describes how the hydro projects were carried out with little heed to their environmental impacts.

The author traces how the federal government became the omnipotent overseer of this mobilization of energy. During the early stages of the war, Ottawa vested control over its economy in a handful of "dollar a year men". Herbert J. Symington was appointed Power Controller. He was a lawyer and a veteran representative of and stakeholder in private hydro-electric interests in Canada. Evenden asserts that Symington confronted a significant challenge in undertaking his job because the power industry was under provincial jurisdiction, each province's systems often acted independently of each other, and they were also geared toward providing energy to different types of clients whose power needs varied. Symington's job was to rationalize and significantly expand this complex electricity network to provide Canada's – and some of America's – essential wartime industries with the power they needed. Nevertheless, Symington successfully employed his summary powers to fulfill his mandate.

Evenden describes how Symington tackled different challenges in Quebec and Ontario. In the former, the issue was integrating discrete (or nearly so) systems into one vast grid (that extended into the US) and enormously expanding its overall generating capacity. In neighbouring Ontario, the publicly-owned Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario (HEPCO) was facing an acute power shortage by the time of Pearl Harbour, and HEPCO could not simply link the various regions in the province to access more power or harness huge untapped cascades to produce more of it, as had been the case next door in Quebec. Instead, HEPCO increased its capacity at Niagara Falls and elsewhere by diverting more water into the Great Lakes basin, building limited new capacity, and implementing a comprehensive conservation program. In fact, Symington

implemented a host of measures designed to save electricity in several parts of Canada, although the author shows that their effectiveness was moot.

Symington also addressed power issues in Canada's two westernmost provinces. In Alberta, Evenden recounts how Calgary Power constructed a new station and dam on the Bow River in Banff National Park. Although a great deal of attention and money was paid to enhance the project's aesthetics, these measures were obviated because Symington granted the firm remarkable latitude in how it operated. In British Columbia, the major development involved increasing the amount of power generated from the Kootenay River in order to ramp up local mining operations, all in the name of the war effort. Moreover, Symington managed a critical power shortage in BC's Lower Mainland during the conflict.

Evenden's book is built upon several strengths. It presents in a coherent and well-organized manner a crucial chapter in the story of how Canada achieved a remarkable level of industrial productivity during and after the war. In this regard, Evenden's book ably fills a lacuna in the existing literature. Moreover, he presents more than enough evidence to prove his thesis and support his case. On these fronts, the book is a strong contribution to the historiography.

By the same token, readers could quibble with minor aspects of the book and overall it might leave them – particularly the business historians – wanting. For example, Evenden and others have told major parts of this story before. More important, however, is his reluctance to address directly the central issue in this tale, namely to situate the initiatives that Power Controller Symington pushed during the war within the broader context of the Byzantine workings of the hydro-electricity business in the few decades preceding the conflict. (President Roosevelt himself decried the private power monopoly at work in the northeastern US in a famous speech in Kingston, Ontario in 1938). Since HEPCO's creation in the early 1900s, private power interests on both sides of the border had fought tooth and nail to undermine its drive to deliver power at cost and thereby destroy their ability to continue charging inflated rates for electricity. Symington had been a prominent advocate of the private power interests' prior to the war, and Evenden admits that Symington retained his large stake in them during it. Symington also used the aegis of the wartime emergency to go to extreme lengths to assist one of the firms with which he was closely associated. Furthermore, as Power Controller he financially supported the development of the gigantic Shipshaw project in Quebec, an action that was criticized for undercutting the future of public power. In other words, practically every major move the Power Controller made and that Evenden recounts points directly to Symington operating at the behest of the "private power trust," but the author leaves unanswered the fundamental question of whether Symington was driven by this animus.

Nevertheless, Evenden's case is a convincing one. It is a tale that needed to be told, and the author has done a commendable job in chronicling it.

Mark Kuhlberg
Laurentian University