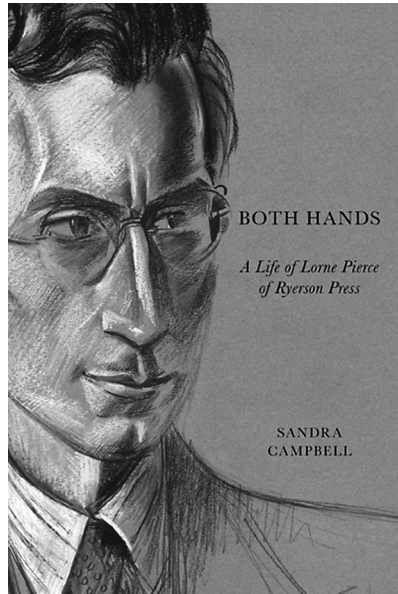


*Both Hands: A Life of Lorne
Pierce of Ryerson Press*

BY SANDRA CAMPBELL
(MCGILL-QUEEN'S, 2013, \$49.95)



of a Blu-ray of the TV movie and a quest for a decent reading copy of Larry McMurtry’s novel. As I browsed new and used bookstores, *Lonesome Dove* proved elusive in any format other than mass-market paperback, which was how I read it first time around. I thought the title would be an ideal candidate for one of those Franklin Mint leather-bound editions. Perhaps McMurtry, well known to be a used bookseller as well as a successful writer, thinks they are tacky. Finally a bookseller friend brought me a well-read copy of the first edition, ending my quest for the reading copy.

Following my *Lonesome Dove* period, I was reading the newly released and very well reviewed western saga *The Son*, by Philipp Meyer (“pulp fiction with a very high I.Q.,” according to the TLS) and watching the director’s cut of *Heaven’s Gate*. This was followed by reading John Williams’s *Butcher’s Crossing*, a book I had purchased several months earlier after reading *Stoner* and which is anything but pulp fiction. This proved to be another devastating look at the settlement of the West, which brought me full circle, back to *A Geography of Blood*.

I’m still not sure why the American West was the focus of my reading for several months. One thing leads to another, as they say, and chance always seems to have a role to play.

1. Recently collected in *Ten Years in the Tub* (McSweeney’s).
2. Writer Bruce Powe told me he had ascertained that only six copies of the Random House first of *Blood Meridian* had been sold in Canada, and he was excited to learn I had one. I explained that I had bought mine at Serendipity Books in Berkeley a few years after publication. I had in fact ordered the book from a local bookseller at the time of publication and it never showed up, perhaps in part explaining the low Canadian sales of this masterwork. Its total North American sales were 1,883 copies, which when you subtract library sales means that there are very few copies potentially available to the collector.

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 ↪ Paul Whitney is the former city librarian of Vancouver, British Columbia.

AS YOU WALK west on Queen Street from University Avenue in Toronto, you encounter a building that stands out not just from other buildings on the street but from other buildings in Toronto. It is only five storeys high but it is clad in white terra cotta with book motifs, scribes and readers. If that is not enough to attract your attention. the truck halfway out of the building at the third storey will.

This is a building steeped in the media. Best-known today as the home of Bravo TV and music channel MUCH (formerly MuchMusic), it was previously home to CITY-TV. From 1913 to 1970, however, it was the home of Ryerson Press—its publishing and editorial offices, its printing plant—and of its editor-in-chief, Lorne Pierce.

Ryerson Press was the publishing and printing arm of the Methodist Church. With the formation of the United Church in 1925, Ryerson Press continued in its role for the new church.

Sandra Campbell, in this biography of Lorne Pierce, describes Pierce as a “seminal

figure for over forty years of Canadian cultural publishing,” and she provides the evidence to support this conclusion.

Campbell traces in detail Pierce’s early years growing up within a Methodist household, his theological training and his ordination as a minister in the Methodist Church. In Campbell’s opinion, “Pierce’s ordination was to become the organizing principle of his life.” Pierce also had a strong Canadian nationalism.

Pierce spent his working life at the centre of Canadian publishing, but he never ceased being an ordained minister. Both these aspects of Pierce’s life strongly influenced his approach to publishing. Ryerson’s book list reflected this from 1924, when Pierce was appointed “Book Editor and Literary Advisor” at the press, until his retirement in 1960—and beyond, until the demise of Ryerson Press in 1970.

Pierce published significant works on Canadian history by Harold Innis, Donald Creighton and Arthur Lower. He published Canadian literature by authors such as E.J. Pratt, Charles G.D. Roberts and Earle Birney. Campbell recounts in depth the history of the Ryerson Poetry Chapbook series, the Ryerson-Macmillan Readers and the Canadian Art series. She provides much interesting detail about Pierce’s dealings with his authors.

We are told of “Pierce’s Ruskinesque resolve ‘to insist that each book be a good book and a beautiful book.’” He hired the artist Frederick Varley to design E.J. Pratt’s *Newfoundland Verse* and William Arthur Deacon’s *Pens and Pirates*. He also commissioned book designs from C.W. Jefferys and J.E.H. MacDonald. Thoreau MacDonald designed many books for Ryerson Press as well as house logos and emblems, including the “wind-blown spruce against the lettering ‘Ryerson Press.’” Despite the energy Pierce dedicated to achieving his aims, Campbell also offers glimpses of how Ryerson’s printing facilities could occasionally frustrate him and his aspirations.

This book is a comprehensive, well-written and engrossing contribution to book history in Canada.

~ REVIEWED BY CHESTER GRYSKI



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