

Book Reviews

Motion Picture Production in British Columbia: 1898-1940, by Colin Browne. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, Heritage Record No. 6, 1979.

Colin Browne's introductory study of the early years of movie-making in British Columbia is a lively look at an aspect of our social history that, until now, has been largely ignored. *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia: 1898-1940* is an extensive, carefully detailed catalogue of over 1,000 films produced in and about the province by an extraordinary range of professional and amateur cameramen. Accompanying this catalogue is a brief history of the development of a provincial film industry, such as it was, from the first years of the silent film to the establishment of the National Film Board and the beginning of World War II. This account of movie-making in B.C. is well organized and anecdotal in tone. More importantly, though, it contains a great number of surprises about the images we hold of ourselves and our cultural history.

As early as 1897, motion pictures were playing in B.C. vaudeville houses. They were mostly newsreels of boxing matches, gold prospectors heading for the Klondike, trains hurtling down mountain slopes, loggers felling timber, and picnickers smiling and waving at the camera; but audiences around the province were willingly paying a nickel or a dime for half an hour of flickering pictures. Movies "promised the illusion that a viewer, in a dark, smokey room, could duplicate a thrilling experience without leaving his chair."

The first movies specifically focused on British Columbia were described as educational or promotional, depending upon the producer's bias. The CPR, for example, produced a collection of newsreels extolling the province's scenic wonders which they exhibited across the country. Their motive, Browne suggests, was to direct public interest "to the pleasures of luxurious, restful holidays. Being there, not getting there, became all the fun . . . an important distinction for a company operating a new string of

expensive hotels across a thinly populated wilderness nation.” The provincial government, intent on encouraging immigration as well as promoting tourism, began in 1908 to produce footage documenting B.C. life with scenes of downtown Vancouver, sawmills in operation, and fruit farming in the Interior valleys.

Provincial government involvement in the motion picture business extended beyond documentary productions. In 1913, in response to concerned citizenry worried about the quality of theatrical movies (virtually all of which were American in origin) available to B.C. audiences, the provincial government passed the Motion Picture Act. The legislation provided for the establishment of a provincial censor who “created what quickly came to be known as the most rigid motion picture censorship on the continent.” Seven years later, an amendment to the Act established the British Columbia Patriotic and Educational Picture Service, under the aegis of the Attorney-General’s Department. In addition to providing a film production and distribution service, this legislation required each movie theatre to show up to fifteen minutes of government-made or -sponsored films. Neither the legislation nor the films produced as a result of it proved to be popular. Browne notes that the *Victoria Daily Colonist* “claimed that many of the appointed films and slides showed a high degree of political motivation and that occasionally films were faked to make the Liberal government look more commendable.” The BCP and EPS remained active until 1924, when funding apparently dried up after a provincial election in which both the premier and the opposition leader were defeated.

Aside from the ups and downs of the provincial government’s interests in the movie business, the most intriguing aspect of B.C.’s history in film was the efforts made to establish the province as a branch production facility for Hollywood during the decade of the quota quickies, 1928-1938. With great relish, Browne outlines the schemes of some of the more notorious profiteers who were anxious to take advantage of the British legislation, passed in 1927, known as the Cinematograph Films Act. This act, designed to boost the motion picture industry in England, guaranteed a percentage of screen time in theatres in the United Kingdom for movies produced within the British Empire. It quickly became apparent that the quota system would provide an open licence for enterprising con-men with stock for sale in hastily conceived film projects.

There were a few entrepreneurs, however, who were serious about using the quota system to establish a film industry in B.C. Among them was an Englishman from Hollywood known as Kenneth Bishop. He

advertised himself as having twenty years' experience in stage and screen production, and with the assistance of some starry-eyed backers including Kathleen Dunsmuir, heiress to the James Dunsmuir fortune, he planned to make Victoria the "Hollywood of the North." How Bishop interested Columbia Pictures, additional investors and Victoria citizens in getting into the movies could be the basis for a great Canadian feature film.

This catalogue and history are an important contribution to existing studies in Canadian film and may be particularly useful to readers of Peter Morris' *Embattled Shadows*, a history of filmmaking in Canada from 1895 to 1939. It is especially valuable, however, because it expands our sensitivity to the role of film in shaping our social history.

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Community Work in Canada, edited by Brian Wharf. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979. Pp. 272.

Community Work in Canada is concerned with the conscious intervention by professionals and their cohorts (professionals from other disciplines or, more significantly, socially conscious citizens) in the unfolding history of Canadian communities. These communities may be a neighbourhood, e.g., Regent Park (chapter 2), a city, e.g., Vancouver (chapter 8), or a rural region, e.g., North Frontenac (chapter 4). The conscious intervention is thought to be both necessary and beneficial for the social development of that community, and is justified on the basis of certain societal and professional value assumptions: e.g., strengthening social provisions for disadvantaged people (Caring) and improving the problem-solving capacities of citizens in these communities (Education).

Wharf's objectives in presenting eight Canadian case studies are manifold, but a principal one is the testing of the validity of two interrelated heuristic devices for categorizing the strategies and tactics of community work. The details of these heuristic devices are of no consequence for this particular review. What is of interest for readers of local British Columbia history, however, is the very question of conscious professional intervention in the social development of particular local communities: i.e., Michael Clague's description of "The Britannia Community Service Centre" in chapter 3, and Christiane McNiven's description of "The Vancouver Social Planning Department" in chapter 8. The former, in the light of the heuristic rubric, would be an example of locality develop-

ment which, stripped of its professional jargon, emphasizes the importance of the contributions by, and the various roles of, the local neighbourhood's citizenry. The latter, by the same token, would be an example of social planning and stresses the key factor of centrally located professionals who are in touch with the social and political pulse of the city as a whole.

Whether it be citizen-inspired locality development or more centrally oriented social planning, one may well ask, *sub specie eternitatis*, whether conscious professional intervention anywhere in the world has made significant strides either in strengthening social provisions or in improving people's problem-solving capacities. From time immemorial people all over the world have been concerned with "improving" their condition, but always from within their specific value framework. This last condition is crucial in the light of some of our (western) dismal attempts to introduce improvements in various world communities without much reference to local value systems.

Clague's description of the birth, development and stabilization of the Britannia Centre is minutely detailed but lacks conceptual clarity. McNiven's Vancouver Social Planning Department, on the other hand, skips some of the historical and descriptive detail in favour of a more conceptual and very erudite exposé of that particular organization. Both struggle with questions which, in my mind, are central to the social development of a community: What are the dominant social values in any given community and how are they defined? How does one determine the boundaries of such a community for the purpose of ascertaining the dominant and variant value systems? And, lastly, to what extent does one follow or confront such a value system? It is in the answers to these questions that the community's willingness and ability lie for strengthening its social provisions and/or its capacity for solving its own problems. Britannia community does not exist in a vacuum; it is surrounded by the rest of Vancouver, and it in turn by the province of British Columbia, the country of Canada, the world. The same goes for the Vancouver Social Planning Department. It is, therefore, more logical (rational, sensible) to start with the larger value system and work down, or keeping in mind "small is beautiful," does one attempt to start from a relatively small core and influence outward? Can both occur simultaneously?

Wharf argues eloquently against centralization and for a thorough kind of participatory democracy:

Until we have grappled with the dilemmas of introducing participatory management schemes into schools, hospitals, and public departments of social

welfare, we will be little more than bystanders in a significant and developing area of reform. (p. 268)

Is this an "either-or" situation? Is it not equally logical, glancing sideways at some examples from more centrally planned societies, e.g., China or Cuba, to express admiration for some of their accomplishments? Will our obsession in the west with social and political pluralism leave us forever mired in a morass of incremental social change? In the last analysis I would have to agree with Buchbinder ("Just Society Movement" — chapter 5) that we cannot bring about much strengthening of social provisions and/or improvement in our problem-solving capacities without "revising perceptions and assumptions about basic givens in our society."

In his last chapter, Wharf raises some of these fundamental questions. For these alone I would recommend this book to local and not so local historians, if they can avoid the "trees" of the technical questions around community work and look for the "forest" of philosophical, social and political questions that lie hidden there.

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Vancouver Island: Land of Contrasts, edited by Charles N. Forward. Western Geographical Series Vol. 17, 1979. Victoria: Dept. of Geography, University of Victoria. Pp. 349.

The preceding volumes of the Western Geographical Series have been excellent sources of information and viewpoints concerning various geographical aspects and topics in British Columbia and western Canada. This volume on Vancouver Island is the first regional geography example in the series. It was prepared to be distributed to members who attended the meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers in Victoria in June 1979, but the volume will be useful to educators throughout the province and across Canada. The authors of each chapter are faculty members of the Department of Geography at the University of Victoria, and the editor was Chairman at that time.

The organization of the chapters follows a time-honoured format for regional geographies. Some geographers may have wished for some "innovative" or "new" approach to such a regional study, while others may agree that this standard format has the advantages of familiarity and logic. As is often the case in regional geography, the two introductory

chapters deal with the people on Vancouver Island — mainly their history of settlement and ethnic groups — and the next chapters discuss the physical environment into which these people came and to which they have adjusted. Part two, the physical environment, has brief chapters on natural hazards, climate and vegetation. One of the themes is areal contrasts in these physical phenomena.

Section three, with four chapters on the primary resource industries, maintains the customary geographical logic of discussing these industries through their functional connections with the natural environment from which they are derived. Thus, the forestry chapter builds on the preceding chapter on vegetation; the mining chapter stresses the influence of geology on mineral distributions; the agriculture chapter brings out the areal relationships with soils and climate. In addition to the excellent use of the well-known theme of natural resource/natural environment linkages, these chapters do not omit people; the purpose of the chapters is to show how Vancouver Island people *use* their natural environment to maintain important primary industries.

Part four, on water, energy and transportation, could have been a continuation of part three on the primary use of the environment, except that the water and energy chapters have a different viewpoint, mainly that of management problems. These chapters illustrate the concern of some geographers with natural resource management issues. The chapter on transportation describes the evolution of land transport routes on the Island and seems somewhat out of place in this section.

Many regional geographies often conclude with a section on cities and tertiary activities, but section five of this book seems to be more a collection of essays using the talents and topical interests of certain faculty members. There is little interconnection in the four chapters on manufacturing, recreation, tourism and urban social geography. Some readers may wish to have had a fuller section on the urban geography of Vancouver Island, since most of the people there are urban residents. Information and viewpoints about Victoria are dispersed through several chapters, however, and one should recall that Vol. 12 in the Western Geographical Series dealt specifically with aspects of Victoria's geography.

The book has been well produced and well edited. It is illustrated by an abundance of excellent tables and maps both on the regional scale for the Island and for certain small areas in most chapters. There are sixty-one maps, forty-six tables and forty-two pictures — thus a most useful average of eight to ten illustrations per chapter. Inside the back cover has been folded a most interesting photo-map taken from outer space; the

green areas indicate forest cover and the white areas show agriculture and cut-over forests. The landform characteristics of Vancouver Island are quite obvious from this satellite photomap.

The faculty of the Geography Department of the University of Victoria can be quite proud of this regional geography and proud of the internal co-operation and effort that went into its planning, preparation and production. Geographers and geography departments across Canada should try to duplicate this fine book and produce more such regional studies. Educators and parents could not complain about the lack of material for Canadian Studies if we had more studies similar to this one.

J. LEWIS ROBINSON

Ocean of Destiny: A Concise History of the North Pacific, 1500-1978, by J. Arthur Lower. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978. Pp. 256, *illus.*, maps, \$16.50.

British Columbia is a Pacific place. This fact about its history, that was so apparent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has, with the establishment of continental ties, been largely ignored in the twentieth. Turning our faces to the sea of mountains, we have turned our backs on the great ocean that connects us with Asia. For their part, central Canadians have, quite rightly no doubt, been more concerned with trans-Atlantic relations than with developing contacts across the Pacific. In his book, *Ocean of Destiny*, J. Arthur Lower reasserts the importance of our aspect to the Pacific. He seeks to place Canadian, and therefore British Columbian, history in a Pacific context.

In the course of 200 pages, Lower provides a concise account of the history of the north Pacific from 1500 to the present day. There is a Canadian, rather than a Pacific, emphasis on the recent past. The first 250 years (1500 to 1750) are dealt with in twenty pages, whereas the last sixty years take up more than eighty pages. The geographic scope is as vast as the temporal. The Pacific Ocean covers one-third of the earth's surface and the north Pacific region includes the four largest nations in the world, the state with the largest population, and three countries that are among the world's leading traders. There can be no doubt about the importance of the topic or about the magnitude of the task undertaken by the author.

The idea behind the book is laudable, but its execution leaves much to be desired. If the bibliography is indicative of the extent of the research (and it is not described as a "select bibliography") then there are some alarming gaps. The author apparently has not read anything by Glyndwr Williams, James R. Gibson, Terence Armstrong, or O. H. K. Spate. On Spanish explorers on the northwest coast, Warren L. Cook (who could at least have helped with the spelling of Spanish names) and Christon I. Archer are both ignored. Lower has read Alistair McLean, but not J. C. Beaglehole, on James Cook. His comments on the treatment of orientals in British Columbia are not informed by the scholarship of either Patricia E. Roy or W. Peter Ward. Not a single article from *Pacific Affairs* is cited. No attention is paid to recent work on the Pacific out of the School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University. Admittedly, Lower's focus is on the north Pacific, but outdated generalizations about the south, like the one on "blackbirding" (page 107), could have been modified in the light of work by Peter Corris and others. While the list of neglected authors reads like a who's who of recent scholarship on the Pacific, even works cited are not necessarily taken into account. Keith Ralston's article on "Patterns of Trade and Investment on the Pacific Coast, 1867-1892" that appeared in the first issue of *BC Studies* is listed in the bibliography, and yet the author still asserts, without batting an eye, that "San Francisco controlled the economic life of the Pacific coast in the mid-nineteenth century" (page 180).

Built on a rather shaky foundation, this book leaves the impression of being old-fashioned and text-bookish. Like the books I was given at school, it is episodic and fragmentary. The chapter divisions are chronological and each chapter is subdivided into sections dealing either with a particular nation or with a specific subject. The author does not have the space to deal with anything in great detail, but neither does he develop consistent themes to tie the information together. There is no overview or synthesis to give coherence to the detail.

The author is necessarily selective about the information he presents, and his selections are revealing. *Ocean of Destiny* is rather more a history of the lands that surround the north Pacific than a history of the ocean itself. The sea brings imperial tides and currents, but we are shown their impact on the shore. There is little here about ships and sailors, and Lower has not drawn any concepts from the ocean and island-centred history that is currently being written on the south Pacific. To a considerable extent, his point of reference is the metropolis. Even British Columbians may be a little disconcerted by the central Canadian focus and the

suggestion in the first sentence that the Pacific west was settled from the east. It is almost as if the author has not entirely overcome the bias that he is reacting against. Indeed, the need to reassert the importance of the Pacific, my first paragraph notwithstanding, may be more central Canadian than British Columbian.

There are also some more minor problems. Errors of fact have crept into the book, as is bound to happen in a work of this scope. The normally high editorial standards of the University of British Columbia Press have slipped a little, allowing the appearance of James Webber (page 32) and Mark Train (page 109). The publisher has, however, relented a bit on the price of this volume.

The publication of *Ocean of Destiny* will serve the useful purpose of reminding British Columbians that their province is an integral part of the Pacific. The book also brings a certain amount of information on the north Pacific region together in one place. It does not, however, make any new contribution to knowledge, and neither does it offer any clear interpretation of the history of the region.

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