

Local History, Local Colour: A Review Article

GORDON R. ELLIOTT

They Call It the Cariboo, by Robin Skelton. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1980. Pp. 237; *illus., maps, index.*

Bella Coola, by Cliff Kopas. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980. Pp. 296; *illus., map, index.*

The Nootka Connection: Europe and the Northwest Coast 1790-1795, by Derek Pethick. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980. Pp. 281; *illus., maps, index, bibliography.*

A Pour of Rain: Stories from a West Coast Fort, by Helen Meilleur. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1980. Pp. 270; *illus., map, index, bibliography.*

Over the past ten years the writing of local history has taken on a new respectability in British Columbia; that is, if one may judge from the number of local histories being published by reputable presses. But the attitude persists that the local historian is an enthusiastic amateur and that the only worthwhile material comes from a trained and skilled professional, usually teaching at a university. There is some basis for this distinction, because so much local history is poorly researched, poorly written and poorly proofread; but the attitude is unfortunate, because the two historians are not mutually exclusive and both contribute to their readers' knowledge and enjoyment. What is more, they have some problems in common. Because readers go to history with questions and for insight, amateurs and professionals must know what they are setting out to do, know the story they are telling, do their research honestly, and then interpret that honest research in order to give the insights their readers want.

The local historian, however, has problems that the "national" historian usually escapes. Because so much of it is anecdotal, local history has its own special problems. The good local historian is much like the ancient bard whose job was to tell and retell the old and the very old stories.

Because these bards are telling stories that few from outside the community know, they must use a kind of explanatory generalization; but at the same time, because they are telling stories on which the local people all consider themselves to be experts, they must be absolutely accurate and detailed. In addition, the teller of good lively anecdotes requires the fiction writer's sense of form and structure, the dramatist's skills with dialogue and the poet's awareness of the emotional impact of language. To these skills, add the gift of creativity which breathes life into facts. The "national" historian, too, can usually choose representative people to illustrate points, but the local historian is almost obligated to catalogue the host of people who helped create a community, never daring to miss one, and somehow interpreting all the action without offending any living member of those old families who might buy the book. What is more, the "national" historian might write about British Columbia and live in Ontario, British Columbia being a professional interest, whereas the local historian usually lives in the community, or retains ties with it, and must take forty whacks for every error, every vague statement and every name misspelled.

Of the many local histories published in 1980, four illustrate the problems that writing local history creates. One, *They Call It the Cariboo* by Robin Skelton, is about the high and dry interior, while the other three are related in being set on the north coast. One of these, *Bella Coola* by Cliff Kopas, is a welcome reprinting of a 1974 edition. *The Nootka Connection* by Derek Pethick, subtitled "Europe and the Northwest Coast 1790-1795," is more than a local history, because its range is the entire Pacific Ocean and Nootka only the point in common for the rangings. This book is excellent background reading for the Kopas volume and for the third coast book, *A Pour of Rain* by Helen Meilleur, subtitled "Stories from a West Coast Fort," a volume giving the essence of life around Fort Simpson — which became Port Simpson — over a period of about a hundred years.

Although a new book on the Cariboo is usually welcome, Sono Nis Press should never have published the Skelton book in its present form: it exactly illustrates why the professional rejects local history. Who to blame for this production is difficult to decide. Unfortunately the author's reputation as a poet and as a university professor gives the book a credibility it does not deserve. While it has a slim index and no bibliography other than a list in the acknowledgements, the extensive footnotes and the many quotations imply that it is based on new and interesting scholar-

ship. Skelton relies on a few older authors, but never questions their texts and does not always go to the latest editions to find their corrections. He should have seriously questioned the work of Mark Wade; and the entire chapter on Soda Creek, Cedar Creek and Williams Lake illustrates the disasters that can befall one who naively believes everything he is told in an interview or accepts those proliferating caches of oral history tapes which contain information that must be checked, re-checked, and cross-checked. In effect, instead of adding new knowledge about the area Skelton has been content with gutting the works of others — giving credit where credit is unavoidable — and expanding a little on materials already identified for him. Everything about the book suggests that his purpose in writing was to add another item to his *curriculum vitae* and to have that item paid for by a Canada Council Explorations grant.

The many factual errors implant the idea that Skelton is neither very knowledgeable nor very enthusiastic about his subject matter, and they create a mistrust of the book from the outset. In his “Author’s note and acknowledgements” he says that he travelled the Cariboo from 1963 to 1977, but his prologue indicates that he was neither very observant nor very thoughtful when he calls Williams Lake “a huge expanse” of water and Barkerville “an exact copy of the old town of the 1860’s and 70’s.” Chapter 1 says that by 1807 Simon Fraser had helped found Fort McCleod [*sic*] and had built Fort St. James “to compete with the Americans who had supplanted the Russians on the Coast,” even though the Americans were not established at Astoria until 1811. The chapter says that fur trade in the Cariboo was “rich indeed,” whereas in fact the fur trade there was disappointing. It says that “stories reached the coast” in 1745 of Chilcotin Indians massacring Carrier Indians at Chinlac, but does not reveal who might have been on the coast to hear the stories or to record them. Research some years ago changed what seemed to be an American Washington Delaney Moses to British Wellington Delaney Moses. By reason of geography Williams Lake in 1921 or at any other time could not have “looked much like early Barkerville”; the highway did not go right through that town until after World War II, and the land on which Billy Lyne had his dairy farm and grist mill is some distance vertically and horizontally from the site of the present Williams Lake airport. In Skelton the Collins Overland Telegraph becomes the Overhead Telegraph, and that John Oliver ever really thought of himself as Prime Minister of British Columbia is doubtful. In addition to such inexcusable errors, ambiguity abounds because Skelton sometimes

includes material about which he knows too little, one example being the Brigade Trails.

If errors such as those inspire little confidence, his spelling of names should inspire even less, because the errors are more obvious. On page 7 he acknowledges the "great help" of Anne Mackenzie "Stephenson," not Stevenson; on the next page he spells Elliott — one of his sources of information — with one "t" and then throughout the text adds or subtracts the "t" as the fancy strikes him. He quotes extensively from the book that Edith Beeson created from the diaries of Alex P. McInnes, but she calls her book *Dunlevey*, not *Dunleavy* as Skelton has it. Had he read to the end of her prologue he would have found a photograph of a gravestone and still another spelling, "Dunlevy," one which should have made him question Beeson or McInnes. Skelton's "Stella Yah" on page 18 and in his index becomes "Stella-yah" on page 21. On page 38 the steamship *Umatilla* is *Umtilla*. On page 61 "Robert Stephenson" helped Cariboo Cameron, but on the next page he is "Stevenson." Camerontown becomes Cameronton, probably on the strength of Fred Ludditt's *Barkerville Days*. Olson, of Downes and Olson trundle-barrow fame, becomes "Oleson." Harry Moffat spelled the name of his Lansdowne Farm with an "e"; though Skelton drops the "e" on page 94, he replaces it on page 99. That is not a grave error, but Moffat spelled his own name with one "t" and no one in the Quesnel area at the time, or in the entire Cariboo indeed, confused him with Moffatt or Moffit, a problem Skelton introduces. Those errors could easily have been eliminated, as could a few others, such as Valkenburg, Bernard Weelman, McIntoshes and MacIntosh — separated by only eight lines — Cookestown, Blanchett, Dessault, Versepeugh and Gooke.

Though Skelton wants to tell a good story, he does not have the prerequisites of the short-story writer or the novelist. Occasional one-liners such as the one about Baptiste's "mythical" ring add a bit of zest, as does the melodramatic tale of the struck-it-rich Diller boy who arrived home just in the nick of time to save his old mother from the poor-house, but those two are very short. Sometimes instead of deciding on the truth of a story himself, Skelton tells two or three versions of it and lets the readers choose the one they like the best. In this way he betrays his readers: he should have been examining his evidence and coming down on the side of one story or another instead of having it all ways at once.

An early indication of this refusal to accept his responsibilities appears in his discussion of the origin of the word "Cariboo." Another appears in

the naming of Dog Creek. Elsewhere he tells of a meeting of Indians at Lac La Hache and then says "There is another version of this conference," but he comes to no conclusion about which is the better. In telling of the meeting of Dunleavy [*sic*] and Long Baptiste, Skelton seems to want to accept the Beeson-McInnes version but does not want to offend Captain Evans-Atkinson, who told him another.

Perhaps tired of relating two stories, Skelton often slips into even easier modes of telling what he has not checked. He resorts to a dangerous practice in using "some say." "Francois Guy (some say Frank Way) . . . sold 58 mules and 4 horses there [at Beaver Lake] on September 1, 1861 for \$14,000." ". . . Keithley and his partner J. P. Diller (some say George Weaver) found gold on a bluff above a creek running into Cariboo Lake." "Some sources maintain that Dunleavy's [*sic*] hotel was . . . owned by Jim Sellars. . . ." At other times Skelton uses an even less scholarly technique, a parenthetical "or" or "perhaps," or both combined. "The most memorable packing venture of all perhaps was that organized by John C. Callbreath (or Calbreath) of Lillooet. . . ." The carpenter in Barkerville was "Johnnie Knot (or Not)." On page 65 Bill Diller had become a leading citizen of New York City, but on the page before Skelton calls him "Diller (or Dillar)." Steve Tingley brought horses from California, "400 (perhaps 500)." The *Fort Yale* had been built for "\$26,000 (or perhaps \$31,000)"; the first stage-coach left Yale with the driver being "James Down (or perhaps Charles G. Major)." Other material is less easily checked: the superintendent of the San Francisco mint is "supposed" to have predicted the Fraser River rush; "It is said that at 40 feet" Billy Barker and his company "all despaired. . . ."; "This mill . . . has been called the first flour mill in Cariboo. . . ."; "One man, it is reported, shot . . . [a camel] under the misapprehension that it was an outsize grizzly. . . ." Skelton does not indicate who said, who called, or who reported.

In writing his social history Skelton has other interesting stylistic habits such as failing to use brackets, or misusing them, misusing possessives, and sometimes failing in logic. Page 151 illustrates several other recognizable quirks as well as his use of parentheses — six sets in one paragraph, though admittedly the paragraph is a long one. He is discussing a group of volunteers "variously reported as consisting of the New Westminster Volunteer Rifle Corps with the Hyack Fire Brigade, and as a body of Marines and Sailors" who went up Bentinck Arm to "New Aberdeen (Bella Coola)." "Whoever they were, they travelled toward

Punze (or Punzi, or Punzee) Lake"; another group left the Cariboo led by William G. Fox or William G. Cox and the groups met at "Punzee (or Punzi or Punze)"; the party under "Cox (or Fox)" left for Bute Inlet. In another version of the story, "Fox (or Cox) persuaded Chief Alexis to act as intermediary . . . [and] the Indians agreed to meet the white men at an old Hudson's Bay Fort (some say Chelamko [*sic*] Forks). . . ."

Nothing in the book, though, shows Skelton's attitude toward scholarship so much as his use of the Beeson-McInnes material on Dunlevy. Edith Beeson was following the McInnes version, itself questionable though interesting, but in order to tell a better story than McInnes, or perhaps to add to the romantic picture of the Indian as orator, Skelton takes liberties with an already liberally transcribed passage. In no way indicating that he had doctored McInnes' material, he focuses on an Indian meeting at Lac La Hache in 1859 and on the speeches of two Indian chiefs. According to page 63 of Beeson-McInnes, Dunlevy "sat close to Baptiste" and was "straining to hear the meaning of each word that the big Indian [Baptiste] was translating quietly in his own way." The speeches, therefore, come from the chiefs by way of quiet-speaking Baptiste who was translating "in his own way" for Dunlevy who was straining to hear and who then passed the speeches on to McInnes whose manuscript Edith Beeson used; and hers Skelton saw.

Skelton takes these fifth-hand speeches, excises what he does not want from the Beeson-McInnes text, and presents them as verbatim. Taking off, Skelton reports a long and glorious speech by Chief Dehtus about keeping the white men out of the country. An excellent speech: rolling and rousing rhetoric. An even more magnificent one follows, one by Chief Looloo, whose passionate and brilliantly organized display of impromptu oratory takes an opposing stand, saying let the white man come. The Beeson-McInnes text, however, indicates, on page 69, interpolations and interruptions, comments describing the audience and Dunlevy's own feelings. In reworking Beeson to make the Indian's speeches more arresting, more dramatic, more in keeping with the legendary oratorical prowess of the Indians, Skelton really perverts history. This perversion of text would not have been so surprising had Skelton indicated what he was doing, or had not given the impression of high scholarship.

Clifford Kopas has also played fast and loose with some of his sources, but he makes clear at the outset that he has "no claim to being an historian." He had collected a "veritable treasure house of stories, reminis-

cences, diaries, clippings, letters, photographs," and these, as "a fusion of fact and fancy," he wanted to develop into a "continuous account" which would "perpetuate" the "romantic history of a beautiful corner of British Columbia." And a romantic history it is: *Bella Coola*.

Kopas' organization is chronological, from the dim past of myth and legend to the building of the road over the mountains to Williams Lake. The first chapter reports on the early peoples of the area, and the second on the exploring European ships which made their geographical advances toward his focal point. On board Captain George Vancouver's *Discovery* was Lieutenant Johnstone, who, on 3 June 1793 saw the Indian village at Bella Coola. Kopas has arrived at his locale and seldom wanders far from the valley in his story.

He must, of course, go out and beyond with the land explorers, and with them comes a change in Kopas' techniques. Somewhat like Skelton with the Beeson-McInnes material, but not so offensive because of Kopas' disclaimer and his statement about "a fusion of fact and fancy," Kopas is not content with merely reporting on Mackenzie but instead tries to make Mackenzie's journal more interesting. In the second chapter Kopas quotes extensively from Mackenzie, too extensively, and within a short time is dramatizing, adding dialogue. Unfortunately Kopas is not so smooth as Skelton, and Mackenzie's stimulating speeches are not very often believable: " 'You are the best of the voyageurs . . . and the stream does not flow that voyageurs cannot navigate.' " After one such speech an inspired voyageur is brought to his feet: " 'Lead us, Chief . . . and we will follow' ."

And Kopas moves to the cliché that western romance is made of. He introduces "a beautiful Indian princess," white men who speak " 'with forked tongues'," and indeed even the term " 'crazy white men' ." In some places the Indians almost use the obligatory "ugh," and in other they speak the tea-time language of the nineteenth-century drawing room. The Indians question Peter White about Royal Engineers searching for a road to the Cariboo: " 'Why for they hunt? Hiyu white man already go that way' ." But when the Indian leader Stelles faces a bear, " 'the bad bear, the one the white men call the grizzly'," the language is totally different: " 'Let us flee,' a woman cried softly." Stelles took command immediately: " 'Women and children go back down the trail. The men will stay. We will kill the bear,' the chief said. . . ." " 'When the bear is passing yonder boulder . . . I will shout. The bear will rise up, and when he is on his hind feet like a man, shoot him. Shoot to break his shoulders,

you men with muskets. The bow and arrow men will then pierce his throat'."

Kopas certainly does tell the story of his valley, and though all of it is informative much of it is less "thrilling" than he hoped it might be. Remarkable characters like Palmer and Waddington and Begbie never come to life. The story of Peter White and the Indian girl has no point; and the marvellous material about James Young, the Overlander, is too long and need not really be in the book at all. Most of the time the never-ending stories go on and on, but every once in a while, suddenly, comes a surprise, a fine short and to the point account of something like the Waddington massacre. Because it is so well written no reader will forget the story of the Indians confusing the names of Ian Black and Peter White and how the confusion grew into the legend of the Bella Coola Blackman.

One legend running through the early part is the life of Sam Shields of the Hudson's Bay Fort, whom the Indians adopt and later make chief. Much of the action is epic, and much of the approach to White Sam is that of a teller of epic tales. White Sam pops up everywhere. Like Odysseus and the axe heads, or like William Tell hitting the apple, Sam shoots the topknot off a chief. In one fine passage Sam shoots the demoniacal Dxilis, who is standing on the edge of a cliff in the act of bringing his war club down on the head of an unflinching missionary: "As the club reached its apex and Dxilis was balanced on his toes, Sam pressed the trigger. The bullet caught him under the arm-pit and as he crumbled he fell over the brink into oblivion in the cauldron below." The Indians flee, thinking that God has intervened, and thus White Sam ensures the survival of Christianity in Bella Coola.

In one touching episode White Sam takes a prisoner: "Her long black hair, which she wore in two neat, tight braids, curled around her forehead and was festooned with a thousand globules of mist. She had a pretty face and her body was trim and shapely and full of the promise of womanhood." Sam could have ransomed this slave, made her "the plaything of her owner," given her away, or sold her "to a northern tribe who might eat her in one of their cannibal dances." But White Sam was taken by her looks, her grace, her smile: "'Tonight [he said] you shall cook my food and share my blanket.'" This marriage was, of course, "never blessed by clergy," but it lasted "a full four decades": "White Sam kept her, honored her and Ma-ree, whose name eventually became Mary, cooked for him, bore and cared for his children and, on several occasions, indeed fought for him."

Not all of this book is legend, of course. A chapter on the Hudson's Bay Company tells of life in the fort. One expects more than one gets, but his interesting information about the prices of furs and trade goods Kopas has taken from Company records that had been kept by none other than Sam Shields before the boy became White Sam the Indian. Most of what Kopas takes from legend about Indian slavery and warfare is more or less confirmed by the other two books on the coast, but he more than the other two authors shows the effects of liquor and the terrifying effect the raiders from one tribe had on another in an area too far away, too isolated, for the laws made in Victoria to be useful.

Kopas also introduces "long, lean, learned and loquacious" B. Phillip Jacobsen from Tromso, Norway. In 1884 and 1885, with rowboats and canoes, Jacobsen collected curios and artifacts for German museums, and on his second trip, with the aid of the ever-present Sam, persuaded a group of Indians to go to Germany with him, where for thirteen months the "actor-artist-aborigines" toured the country — followed around, one of them said, by German women. Jacobsen's letters in "picturesque" English are descriptive and astute. While observing Indian life, including its food, clothing and housing, the potlatches, the canoes and the paddles, the rituals, the masks and the witchdoctors, he concluded that "the British Columbia Cost Indians has some wonderful traditions. I have made big collections of them but people here in this contry take no interest in the Indians. They certainly are interesting from a scintefic stand point." Elsewhere: "Chinok is an Indian Trading Language consisting of about 400 word and if a man can talk it fluently he can express him self fairly wel . . . and it is certainly wonderful with as few words as are how well a good Chinok speaker can exspres him self. In my opinion Chinok aught to be the Universal language of the world, they talk about Wollopuck and Esperanto, neither of this 2 could com up to the Chinok."

According to Kopas, Jacobsen had tried to interest the provincial government in settling the area, but not until 1894 did the valley really change and become a community, not until the adventurous Norwegians from the Dakotas and Minnesota steamed into it: "'Yeesuz, Yeesuz, Yee-suz,' one of the bearded passengers exclaimed with ascending emphasis, as he saw the flotilla of savages surround the ship." This chapter tells of hardship, of moving the village from site to site, of relations between the newcomers and the local people, both Indian and white. But here also is a picture of trapping, of developing fisheries, of the evolution usually associated with a community settling into a pattern. The praise for

Christian Saugstad, the leader, is high, but he never comes to life like Jacobsen, and it ends with a list of the original Norwegian colonists, the requisite cataloguing of the epic host.

The final chapter, too, begins slowly, telling of depression, the coming of the party-line telephone system, the beginnings of motorboat fishing. Most of the material is pedestrian, though some good story-telling does occur: with the fifteen-piece concert band from the Indian village playing "Onward Christian Soldiers" the Emmanuel Church building actually does seem to move up the road and, surrounded by dugouts and seagulls, across the river for relocation. A fine and quickly told story showing organization and wit.

And then suddenly, at the very end, the whole book comes to life. Suddenly everything seems to have been moving toward the building of the road to the Chilcotin and the Cariboo, to the outside, to beyond the valley. Readers will quickly forget most of what they read earlier, and just as quickly come to care about the Matthews and the Saugstads and the Urseths who go looking for an outward passage, about the Matthews son who helps blaze trail, about Alf Bracewell who had to follow the blazes with his Cat "through thirty miles of jack-pine jungle, find his footing along the lip of canyons, some of them three thousand feet deep, then bring his machine from the top of a mile-high mountain to the floor of the Bella Coola valley, thereby piercing the Canadian Coast Range, and giving North America another outlet to the sea." More and more people become involved in the action, and like onlookers, readers may also gasp as George Dalshaug winches out his ancient bulldozer from which he has jumped just seconds before. And finally, after years of setbacks, the excitement reaches a climax. The distance between the two roads, one from the east and one from the coast, narrows. Eventually comes the last shot of powder: "the terrain shook and mighty thunder roared from crag to crag."

The bulldozers moved toward each other thrusting rubble over the edge, backed away, got another load, advanced, backed up. A huge tree complete with roots and limbs was caught between them, tossed back and forth like a giant's bouquet until finally it slipped over the edge and dropped out of sight.

Finally, jointly, the two blades pushed the last yard of rubble over the edge; then, backing up a few yards, the machines advanced and touched their blades together. Dalshaug and Bracewell stepped out onto the blades, reached across and shook hands.

A mighty shout arose. The road had been completed!

Everyone there knew that now Bella Coola had a road connection with the rest of the world.

That is story-telling. Short pieces had indicated that Kopas could create the tension required in a good story, but only here does a sustained passage build suspense and excitement, and retell the age-old story of man's satisfaction in pitting himself against nature, in this case against a mountain range. Truly epic stuff, but our thinking had not been directed toward this climax. Kopas' story-telling ability had not really been obvious when he was writing about Sorrence and Anaheim, but by the end of the book he is writing not about myths and legends but about real men and women. By the end of the book Kopas himself comes to life: he is then writing about his own people, for his own people, and for his own time.

In total contrast stylistically and philosophically is Derek Pethick's *The Nootka Connection*, but Pethick was not writing about his own people and his book cannot be strictly considered a local history. The catchy title leads one into thinking that the book concentrates on Nootka, but it really focuses on trade, commerce and political activities going on in and about, around and through Nootka. His introduction says that his purpose is twofold, but neither is to delineate the community itself. One is "to outline the major advances in geographical knowledge during this period" and the other is to "give the main facts regarding all the known voyages to the area during these five years." He certainly does what he sets out to do, and more.

The amount of research this book displays is staggering. That it is staggering is attested to by the good bibliography — something Kopas does not have at all — a bibliography which includes books, articles, and theses; unpublished scholarly works; microfilm; photocopies of unpublished journals, ships' logs, reminiscences and private journals. That nothing here is padding is indicated by the massive number of thoroughly scholarly footnotes. In fact, footnote readers will have a field-day with these footnotes, because they are so full, so obviously written with pleasure, and so many. The book is for specialists, for those steeped in the subject matter, but the (occasionally faulty) index of people and ships, a chronology of more than eleven pages and the running chapter heads in the footnote section all help the uninitiated. They might have been even further helped by running chapter heads throughout.

Because of the short time span the overall organization by year is fairly simple: eight chapters, one for each year, an introductory chapter, and

a last one called "Retrospect and Prospect." Organizing each chapter must have been a nightmare, but even readers who do not like sub-headings and breaks within chapters will soon see that Pethick had no other choice. Chapter 4, 1792, for example, he subdivides into twenty-eight sections, each one describing the action by episode, by nation or by ship; showing captains, their trade cargo and the furs they exchanged for it, the destiny of the cargo and often the price it brought there, and occasionally the amount the financial backers would gain. Pethick himself is aware of his problems: "All this is a complex tale [he says on page 89] and raises the problem of how to reduce a score of voyages and a thousand incidents to some sort of unity." Only Pethick will know the shortcomings: the book does have a unity, one imposed by his time span and heightened by the geographical focus, and then bound together by a perfectly sensible though perhaps old-fashioned table of contents which makes browsing possible by listing the twenty-eight sections in order: "*Spanish Plans; Exploring Rosario Strait; The Vancouver Expedition; Vancouver in the Strait of Juan de Fuca; A Historic Meeting. . .*"

In a sweeping first chapter Pethick surveys material he published earlier in *First Approaches to the Northwest Coast*, in order to bring the reader into position. This early chapter is a reminder for those who have read the 1976 volume, and a necessary overview for those who have not. He speedily tells of Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikov with the *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* in 1741, and the later Russian fur-trading posts; of Spain's early Cabrillo, Ferrelo, and Vizcaino, and of Juan Pérez going to the Queen Charlotte Islands in the *Santiago*, and then of Don Bruno Hezeta, and of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra in the *Sonora*; he tells of England's Drake with the *Golden Hind*, of James Cook, accompanied by George Vancouver, with the *Resolution* and *Discovery*; by 1788, the Americans with the *Columbia Rediviva* and the *Lady Washington* under John Kendrick and Robert Gray. The French came late. Others who helped prepare the way for confrontation included Barkley, Meares, Dixon, Portlock, Dalrymple; groups of London merchants, the Bengal Fur Company, the East India Company, the South Sea Company.

This history is not purely local; it is about the Pacific scene as the world faced the crisis of 1790 and then solved it. As the ships move from place to place, manoeuvring for position, they explore and slowly fill in the outline sketch of the northwest coast. Little by little, up the outer coast or from Juan de Fuca, bay by bay, promontory by promontory,

channel by channel, the ships unroll the map and add to the world's knowledge of the world. And as the mariners trade and explore they come closer and closer to confrontation, the tension heightened by the French Revolution and by Europe's marshalling its forces and making new alliances, heightened by forces coming closer to breaking Spanish dominance, to pushing the Russians northward, to controlling the Americans, and to holding off the British. The prizes might have been half a world away, but the connections at Nootka gave them to the winner.

All of this history is very detailed, and such details in lesser hands could spell a deadly dull kind of book. But not one page of this one is boring. One reason is that by a lively use of place names Pethick relates the action to today. The Spanish called Clayoquot Puerto de Clayucla; their Rada de Valdes y Bazan is now Royal Roads; Esquimalt was Cordova; in 1792 Port Cox became Tofino, the name given by Valdés and Galiano. The Spanish also named the present Porlier Pass, but their Canal de Nuestra Señora del Rosario became Captain George Vancouver's Gulf of Georgia. Such details running through the book make it relevant to a general reader as well as to the specialists. Small details about the men themselves add a human touch to what could be an overwhelmingly vast though colourful tapestry. Pethick tells, for example, that after being an instrument of major historical change at Nootka, James Colnett went to the Napoleonic wars, was a French prisoner, and transported prisoners to Australia before he died in 1806. Pethick also shows something of the living conditions on board the ships, and by doing so allows the reader to identify to some extent with the sailors. He shows something too of the dangers faced by the crews of all kinds and colours, the trading practices, the crookedness, the greed, the destruction, the loyalty or lack of it, even the food and the problems it created. Though not by choice, Captain Vancouver once breakfasted on "bow-wow" and picked the bones of all but the pretty toes. After King Kamehameha of Hawaii had feasted on a dog, two fish, and "a calibash full of tarro pudding," he wondered whether King George ever lived so well.

Pethick also knows which striking material to quote. Although having a nice gentle ironic wit himself, he is not a superlative teller of tales: he does not, therefore, try to be one, and knows better than to try to improve upon the drama, the excitement, the derring-do, the exotica, the attention-riveters that come directly from the material in which he has been doing his research. Quotations transmit the first-hand impressions of the captains or the log-keepers as they travelled, and these wonder-filled passages are as good reading today as when they were written.

Quimper tells of how King Wickananish lived with more than a hundred persons in "a great house adorned with columns of huge figures." In his log John Boit describes a village of upward of 200 houses, some of which were "by no means inelegant." Grieved to think that Captain Gray "should let his passions go so far" as to wipe out this village of Opitsatah, Boit had to do the dirty work: "This fine village, the work of ages, was in a short time totally destroyed." Colnett's journal describes a spot of trouble: "The chief (being as powerful a man as I ever saw; myself and two officers put together not able to make such another for bulk and size) at first endeavoured to brave me. As I saw nothing but force would stop him and his friend, my pistols being loaded at hand and produced, he resigned himself to his fate, with more seeming content than I expected." The crew of the *Malaspina*, the "most elaborate scientific expedition ever sent out by Spain," compiled a tremendous amount of detail about native life, including the custom of making holes in the noses, and of the women wearing a stick in the lower lip. Tomás de Suría, who painted as well as wrote about the Indians of the coast, reported that the chaplain of a Spanish ship traded guns for six boys he hoped to convert. One of them, Primo, told the Spanish that "he had been destined to be a victim and to be eaten by Chief Macuina together with many others, and that this custom was practised with the younger prisoners of war. . . ."

Pethick also brings the dismal science to life by quoting directly about trade. Writing in her diary, Mrs. Barkley reported that "Powder and shot was always the first thing they [the natives] wanted . . . two or three muskets being in every canoe; then blankets, cooking utensils, and tools or other iron weapons." Barkley himself wrote that a Russian cargo "consisted of articles that were invaluable in this part of the world . . . namely, iron in bars, anchors, cables and cordage, with various kinds of ironmongery wares, and a considerable stock of rum." Captain Gray, trading with Wickananish, discusses trade goods and their value. "Our principal articles of traffick were copper and cloathing; iron they would scarcely take as a gift; for a sheet of copper we got four skins; cloathing in proportion. For small articles such as knives, buttons, fish hooks, gimblets etca. we procured a few sea otter tails, fish and vegetables." According to the chronicler of the *Mercury*, at Fox Island the Russians stripped the people of their furs, and "to keep themselves in the good graces of the natives and stimulate them to work, the Russians occasionally distribute among them a few copper and pewter rings, glass beads, &c; and we saw them reward a man with a pinch of snuff who had been out fishing

for them the greatest part of a cold bleak night, and he appeared perfectly satisfied."

The trade in firearms was rampant. A member of Vancouver's expedition wrote of William Brown's land transaction: "for two pieces of cannon (four-pounders) . . . Titeeree had given him the whole right and property of the islands Woahoo and Atooi, entitling him to take off them, at his own will, everything he stood in need of. . . ." The Spanish scientist José Moziño says that Kendrick "gave Maquinna a swivel gun; he furnished Wickananish with more than two hundred guns, two barrels of powder, and a considerable portion of shot, which the Indians have just finished using on the unhappy sailors of Captains Brown and Baker." Vancouver himself said that "The putting of fire-arms into the hands of uncivilized people is at best very bad policy; but when they are given in an imperfect and insufficient condition for a valuable consideration, it is not only infamously fraudulent, but barbarous and inhuman."

The Nootka Connection does not say much about the liquor trade, and except for rum for the ships' men, very little seems to have been sold. James Magee, captain of the American *Margaret*, became ill and, while having "his sabbatical from active participation in the fur trade," found other ways to make a living: he was the first bootlegger on the northwest coast, but even he does not appear to have sold directly to the natives. One of Vancouver's men commented on Magee: "he was carrying on a most profitable trade with the Spaniards & seamen in spirituous liquors, generously charging only four dollars a gallon for Yankee rum that cost him probably about 2/- or half a crown per gallon." After hearing some Indians reject liquor, a Frenchman on the *Solide* commented that "it were to be wished for their tranquility and happiness that their communication with Europeans may not introduce into their forests this fatal liquor which has carried confusion into those of the savages of the east part of North America." But as Kopas shows, the liquor did become a problem.

Other passages indicate that a different kind of relationship with the natives was developing as time went on and, as Pethick points out, "the interaction of two widely different cultures was beginning to erode the traditional native order." Edward Bell, on the *Chatham*, noticed the change in attitude of the Nootka women over six months: "Then an indelicate expression would shock most of the women . . . but now, lost to all sense of shame, there were few out of those that frequented the cove that would not openly barter their stinking charms for a few old buttons." And one senses that there were lots of buttons to be bartered.

Much of the book centres in Hawaii, because the ships wintered there, and one passage indicates that the natives themselves were not above using the women in an attempt by the king and his brother to take the *Gustavus III*, once named the *Mercury*. According to John Bartlett, a native of New England, these two schemers “sent all the handsomest girls they had on board and gave every one their charge how to behave that night. When they gave a signal everyone of them was to cling fast to the Europeans and to divert them. . . .” The king and his brother were then to cut the ship’s cable. “At night every man in the ship took a girl and sent the remainder ashore. At 12 o’clock that night the watch perceived the ship adrift and at the same time every girl in the ship clung fast to her man in a very loving manner. All hands were called immediately. I had much to do to get clear of my loving mistress.”

The Pethick book is different from those by Skelton and Kopas, and *A Pour of Rain* is different from them all, but it gains in depth from a reading of Pethick. Where he takes the stance of the professional, Mrs. Meilleur, like Cliff Kopas, makes no pretence of being an historian. Yet she is. Here a more personal attitude replaces Pethick’s detailed view of the coast and his political implications: Helen Meilleur was born Helen Young at Port Simpson in 1910 and with that community as both “Fort” and “Port” she was personally involved. Her mother and father had come south from Alaska and operated “an extremely general store” there, and once on a business trip to Victoria he encountered the Hudson’s Bay Company journals of Port Simpson for 1839. Over the years Helen Young invaded the British Columbia provincial archives in Victoria and the Hudson’s Bay Company archives in Winnipeg for more and more journals related to Fort Simpson. Her reason for writing is to share her delight in those journals of the nineteenth century. And she has succeeded as admirably at Pethick. Actually her book weaves several stories into the fabric of those journals, one about the Hudson’s Bay Company and its role over the years on the Nass River, where Fort Nass met Russian opposition and was a failure, and at McLoughlin’s Harbour farther south; one about the community of people and the interaction of the people of that community, white and native; and her own story of growing up.

The journals, of course, are not all that she consulted, but are her major sources, mainly the ones from 1834 to 1866. These she altered only to standardize names, choosing the form of name most nearly reproducing the words she herself had “heard as a child.” The “Macuina” of many spellings in the Pethick, here settles down to a single “Maquinna.”

She warns, however, that even though the writers of the journals knew the Indians better "than any white men since," they did write from the point of view of the Company: "Please bear in mind [she says] there *was* another viewpoint — unrecorded." These journals she backs up with letter and correspondence books, company diaries, autobiographies and logbooks of ships and steamers. She draws from every conceivable source: from books, the standard to the specialized; from published reminiscences and scholarly commentaries; from newspapers and periodicals. A check through the bibliography after a reading of the text gives the feeling that nothing here is padding either. In fact, the bibliography and the index are models.

Helen Meilleur is a better writer than either Kopas or Pethick. Unlike Kopas she knows where a story begins and where it ends, and unlike Pethick she relies on the journals not so much for the drama as for the facts from which to create her own drama. She smoothly works in quotations from the journals, relating their facts to all her own reading and experience, and into this historical knowledge she weaves the social, economic and cultural world of the northwest coast, which had changed considerably in most ways since 1795. In many ways the material about ships and shipping and trade goods continues the story as set out by Pethick, but whereas *Nootka* shows the connection of all the shipping and trading and exploring activity, *A Pour of Rain* shows the problem of building and of living in that wet country after trading has been established and the political problems solved.

The book is in five parts, each covering a topic, and each chapter in the part exploring an aspect of the topic. Chapter 1 of Part I, "Arrivals," opens with what is almost a short story about Helen Young's mother arriving pregnant at Port Simpson when the "century was in its seventh year and already racing headlong into change," and this very short chapter establishes a mood, a place, and a time. Chapter 2 is about earlier arrivals, Captain Aemilius Simpson of the *Cadboro* in 1830 looking for a place to locate a post on the Nass, and in 1831 building it with Peter Skene Ogden, who also appeared in the Skelton book. In 1834 came the move to McLoughlin's Harbour, which also saw arrivals: Englishmen, Russians, Bostonians; Captain Duncan, Dr. Tolmie, James Birnie, hundreds of others. Part II, "Family Neighbourhoods," considers Helen Young as a "member of a minority group . . . a white child living on an Indian reservation," and in five short chapters creates the idea of a community with its church and fire-hall, its band and bandstand, its choir of young Indian girls who wore T. Eaton hats with cherries on

them, and the 500 feet of piles and planks and railings which made the bridge "that joined the Island to the mainland at low tide," and on which stood stores, her father's "first in the line of bridge buildings."

Other neighbours included the hotel ghost and the beached riverboats; the remains of "Lieut. AE Simpson, R.N.," the remains of Captain Swan's wife and those of a Sandwich Islander in a graveyard that had by her time returned to weeds, alders, and an old apple tree which indicated that the ground had once been the site of the fort orchard. A Mr. Gaskill is also there; he died while on a trip for his health. She carefully points out that segregation of white men and Indian was carried from life into death: the Indians had their own graveyard. The discussion of these dead neighbours leads to a discussion of the coffin-makers for the company and to the different styles of funeral.

In such a way does she draw Fort/Port Simpson. Part III, "Rain. Employed as usual," goes deeper into the journals to show the labourers and buildings, the beginnings of trade and barter and of opposition. Gradually short chapter after short chapter explores the different facets of work in the area from the early days into the 1920's. Each chapter is a little essay, a beautifully crafted unit, each one a charmer. Sometimes it is a character sketch, such as the one on her father with his motorbike, sometimes a short story like that on Dinah. The first chapter of each part is usually — in fact in all but one case — about Helen Young or her family, a technique which gives not only a personal touch but also some credibility and personality to the narrator. The reader accepts that Helen Young knows what she is talking about.

Much of this book is about Indians, but most of that about the inter-relating over 100 years. The Indians quickly became closely involved with the fort, which bought furs and sold trade goods, trading in the new and essential. An interdependence grew up between the two groups, and as it grew so did some of the problems. The fort had to regenerate itself constantly, because "buildings rose and rotted" in a country where rain was the main enemy and where footings could rot in two years. But the Indians were also the "enemies"; they stole the logs and pickets for firewood. The Indians, in fact, stole everything they could from the fort, seeing it as "the handiest hunting-ground of all." Potatoes had come across from the Queen Charlottes in 1835 and against all odds John Work tried to grow a garden, but Fort Simpson was not kind to potatoes: the wetness rotted them; frost rotted them; excessive heat rotted them; and the natives, who had acquired a taste for potatoes, "slithered over the garden pickets and into the potato patch" and stole them. The com-

pany did nothing about the predators, because any strong action would stop the fur trade.

Meilleur gives full marks to the Hudson's Bay Company for much of its work. On the credit side, according to her, the company tried to stop the decline in furs by discouraging the Indians in their wasteful spring hunt, but it had no luck. Greedy and ruthless in their hunting, the Indians would kill a female beaver which had just whelped and was therefore an easy prey, but they would leave the pups to die. Meilleur also upsets the idea that the company traded beads and trinkets for valuable furs and shows that the gradual extinction of the sea otter is reflected in the rising prices paid for pelts, from six blankets for one pelt in 1836 to thirty-nine blankets and three guns for each in 1865. The same ruthless Boston traders Pethick introduced loaded their ships with rum and guns, "raised the prices recklessly, debauched the Indians and then sailed away leaving the forts to deal with the havoc they had wrought."

Not that the Russian American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company refused to trade in liquor and guns, but they co-operated with each other to control the trade in both. Whisky superseded rum in time and became known as "Tangleleg." Sir James Douglas outlawed the sale of liquor to Indians, but, as both Kopas and Meilleur point out, law enforcement was impossible when the arm of the law was so far away from the crime. Even William Duncan of Metlakatla failed to stop the trade which centred at Whiskey Harbour, about five miles south of the fort.

The company interfered as little as possible in Indian life in general, but like the Russians "could not stomach the practice of slave-killing for mere aggrandisement, and sometimes interceded." Slavery was a vicious part of Indian life up to 1860, and the company estimated that in the 1840's one-third of the coast people from California to Taku were slaves to be bought, bartered or brutalized. Meilleur has difficulty in reconciling slavery and brutality with the Indians with whom she grew up, but accepts the evidence and seems relieved to be able to write that the practice "whirled out of sight" about the end of the 1860s. William Duncan had been more successful with the issue of slavery than with that of liquor. Meilleur, like Kopas, suggests that the Indians themselves turned to the missionaries not only to gain the white man's knowledge and language, but also to escape from "the tyranny of the medicine man, the terrors of witchcraft, and the inexorable class system, slavery and retaliatory killings."

A Pour of Rain is not only about Indians, of course, but in that community the Indians were of prime importance. They did much of the menial work around the fort, made the plaster and whitewash from the shells for instance, and tended the garden, besides bringing in the furs. But the white servant was also a worker. The most important one seems to have been the blacksmith, who made such necessities as axes, nails, tools, parts for muskets, traps, locks and hinges. The book tells about the tanning process, about the danger of moths to furs, and the danger of mould, only a shade less damaging than moths. It tells of work, endless work, of cutting wood for the *Beaver*, of collecting stones for ballast, of mixing grease and fish oil for her engines. Work, constant work. "Rain, employed as usual. . . ." So hard did the white servants work and such long hours that the Indians regarded them as slaves and treated them as such.

The gentlemen of the fort no doubt had a hard life too, but they did the writing and did little complaining, at least on paper. Besides organizing and directing operations, doing the trading and worrying about finding a suitable wife, the gentlemen had skating, cards, painting, and books. And, of course, liquor. They welcomed every visitor, but especially those like "Mr. Butler of the Collins' Overland Tele'h Company," who might have great outside news to tell.

The fort was a very class-conscious community, and the company's class consciousness is perhaps one reason for its success with the natives, themselves extremely sensitive to rank. Indian women willingly went to live in the fort, where they had better treatment and gained status, for once married they became influential liaisons between the white world of their husbands and the native world of their own people. In short and to-the-point sketches, Meilleur presents Julia Ogden as a true heroine of the forest, Josette Work as an esteemed hostess, and the very free and easy Neshaki McNeill, who ran her own fur business. Many had children who were often unruly and problematical: letters from Mr. William Henry McNeill indicate some of the troubles he had with his own son Harry. The gentlemen sent their children to Red River for education or to the Reverend Robert John Staines, or to his wife, in Victoria.

Later, Port Simpson had its society too. By the 1840s there were a school and a teacher; later there were churches. From 1906 to 1910, before being superseded by Prince Rupert, the old port was "the centre of north coast commerce, politics, and culture." Social life for almost a century had been dances, berry-picking, picnics, swimming and skating

parties. And now the arrival of the Union Steamship, of which Meilleur tells a fine story. One exceedingly funny passage tells of her own adventure in a 16-footer gone wild in the Prince Rupert Harbour and disrupting the local Yacht Club sailpast. The ladies of the fort or the port had always been steeped in propriety, and “over the muskeg, through the bush, raising their skirts delicately above the garbage of the Indian Reserve, gloved, hatted, and sometimes veiled, the ladies made their rounds, leaving a calling card here, sipping tea there, and on their appointed days, they were ‘at home’.” The Indian students at the Crosby Girls’ Home were also being taught “Victorian standards of morality, cleanliness and English spelling.”

Helen Meilleur misses hardly anything about Port Simpson at that period. Certainly not the food: the salmon and the venison, the crabs and the clams; the oolichans, which were addictive, and the seaweed, which was an acquired taste. Her sharing of her delight in the journals is obvious, and her enthusiasm for her subject shines through at all times, but especially in a thirteen-line masterpiece describing the school children wading into the sea for fish eggs and ignoring the end-of-recess bell which rang and rang and rang. The passage starts with: “Port Simpson’s spring festival was not of cherry blossoms but of herring eggs.” No doubt it had always been.

All in all *A Pour of Rain* is a satisfying book, and for the general reader far better than the other three. Skelton’s — also published by Sono Nis Press, which did Meilleur’s — is so filled with unnecessary errors and footling ambiguities that one cannot with any conscience recommend it to anyone, regardless of how smoothly it reads. Its errors so come between the reader and the text that they cloud any interpretation of the region the author might have or any of his reasons for rejecting the time-honoured Canadian term “the Cariboo” and replacing it with a bald “Cariboo.” The Kopas book is an informative read, but until the last chapter it sags and drags in parts. Nevertheless it deserves republishing, because it keeps in print the romantic story of that little known area. The Pethick book is brilliantly done, the detail enormous, the interpretation plausible, the display of knowledge overwhelming and the organization a marvel; Douglas and McIntyre must be commended for publishing a book so specialized that it can never be a great money-maker. But the Meilleur book is the one with warmth, charm and joy, the one containing well-written stories based on research as honest as that of Pethick, the one that raises local history to an art. These three

books on the coast should be on every British Columbian's bookshelf, Pethick on that of every historian, and Meilleur on any bookshelf anywhere.

WORKS CITED

- Fred W. Ludditt, *Barkerville Days* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969), p. 32.
- Edith Beeson, *Dunlevey* (Lillooet: Lillooet Publishers, 1971), pp. 63-72.
- Mark S. Wade, *The Cariboo Road*. Researched, annotated and indexed by Eleanor A. Eastick (Victoria: Haunted Book Shop and Hugh F. Wade, 1979).