

Preface

Vancouver's centennial of incorporation on 6 April 1886 has provided the impetus to this special issue of *BC Studies*. It seemed appropriate to bring together in a single volume research currently underway by academics, graduate students and other scholars on the history of Canada's third largest city.

The result has outdistanced its original, rather modest objective, the essays as a group demonstrating that the history of Vancouver is maturing. While previous work emphasized the city's early, formative years, the majority of essays in this volume treat the coast city as a dynamic, complex, urban place. Their concern is with the early and mid-twentieth century, thus pushing forward in time our knowledge of Vancouver's past. More importantly, perhaps, the political and economic focus of much of the previous work is here complemented by subtle and sustained analyses of Vancouver's social development. Emphasis on connections between the Burrard Inlet metropolis and its surrounding region, which as Patricia Roy points out in her essay has been a staple of writing about Vancouver, is giving way to discussion of the lives of ordinary citizens.

While the essays presented here do not attempt to establish a single interpretation of west coast life, together they touch on many aspects of the Vancouver experience, enriching our understanding of the city's history and opening numerous topics for further discussion. Deryck Holdsworth and Jean Barman explore the social significance of spatial arrangements. Holdsworth argues that, to 1929 at least, this low density, suburban city more readily fulfilled people's aspirations to live in detached houses than did the industrial centres of eastern Canada and Great Britain from which most residents came; Barman documents the social character of Vancouver neighbourhoods, concluding that, during the interwar years, the socio-economic distinctions separating East Side from West Side were lessened by the integrating ties of community. In an overview of working class life to 1914, Robert McDonald argues that, while capitalist economic relations fundamentally divided Vancouver's

middle and working classes, several west coast influences lessened class tensions, creating in the city a relatively benign social environment.

Other articles explore basic components of many residents' lives. In an essay that examines aspects of both medical and women's history, Veronica Strong-Boag and Kathryn McPherson demonstrate that by the interwar years almost all women delivered babies in hospitals controlled by male doctors rather than in the more familiar setting of private homes. Recounting the experience shared by all young Vancouverites of going to school, Neil Sutherland utilizes oral history techniques to show that traditional educational practices continued to guide the conduct of teachers as late as the 1960s despite reformers' efforts to introduce a "progressive" educational system. In the most systematically structural of all the essays, James Huzel analyzes police court records to show tentatively that in the 1930s increased economic distress did correspond with higher levels of non-violent crime against property.

The remaining three authors approach the city's history somewhat differently, identifying the strategies by which particular groups responded to social and economic needs. Paul Yee describes the operations of a prominent Chinese business firm, documenting its surprisingly diversified range of activities and challenging our conventional view of orientals as the passive victims of discrimination. In contrast, Irene Howard looks at a group of white activists fighting for social justice. Her study of the Mothers' Council, a left-oriented organization intent on bettering the condition of the unemployed during the Depression, presents women as political actors and, in so doing, suggests ways of overcoming the problem of inadequate sources that often limits the writing of women's history. Canada's severe housing shortage during the Second World War evoked protests that in January 1946 culminated in the occupation by veterans of the Old Hotel Vancouver; Jill Wade sorts out the complex political and social forces that led to this striking assertion of popular will.

The innovative character of many of these essays makes it especially appropriate that this special issue of *BC Studies* should be dedicated to Margaret Prang. Dr. Prang, who retires in 1986 after a long and distinguished association with the University of British Columbia, was co-founder and longtime co-editor of *BC Studies*, as well as president of the Canadian Historical Association. Her efforts have guided the journal to success and have encouraged the study of both regional and national history in British Columbia.

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