

Book Reviews

A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870, by Richard I. Ruggles. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. xx, 300 pp. Maps, illus. \$49.95 cloth.

This book is the culmination of, in some sense a monument to, a lifetime of careful scholarly work. Through well over three decades, since his University of London doctoral thesis on "The Historical Geography and Historical Cartography of the Canadian West . . ." completed in 1958, Richard Ruggles has explored the Hudson's Bay Company archives and informed us (to borrow from the titles of a couple of his dozen or so articles) about the mapping of the interior plains of Rupert's Land (*Great Plains Quarterly*, 1984) and the ways in which imagination and reality have been combined in depictions of the Canadian west (*Canadian Geographer*, 1971). Handsomely produced, *A Country So Interesting* combines 120 pages of text; three annotated catalogues of the near 1,400 manuscript maps, charts, sketches, and plans prepared for the HBC between 1670 and 1870; high-quality reproductions of 66 of these items; and sundry lists and appendices. It is a substantial contribution to the history of Canadian cartography.

I respond to it in three ways. The first is with fascination and delight. Turning its pages reminded me that Robert Louis Stevenson found it "hard to believe" that there were "people who . . . [did] not care for maps." Although I have never met Ruggles, I can imagine him warmed — as I am — by Stevenson's insistence on "the inexhaustible fund of interest" that old maps offer anyone "with eyes to see or twopence-worth of imagination to understand with." Four summary maps, prepared by Ruggles to show the boundaries of European ignorance being pressed back across "Canadian" territory, encapsulate much of what this book is about. But for the Atlantic coast, the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes axis, and the shores of Hudson and Baffin bays, that for 1670 is deep, dark black; in 1795, the

outline of the Pacific is clear, but the line of Alexander Mackenzie's monumental journey down the river that bears his name ends in the forbidding black unknown of the north; not until 1870 does the fundamental form of the modern country appear "essentially known." Much, though by no means all, of this expansion of European knowledge came from HBC employees, and the dissemination of the information they gathered, especially after 1795, through the maps of the Arrowsmith firm. By tracing the progress of Company mapping, Ruggles reminds us — to use several phrases that he quotes from the correspondence of Hudson's Bay men — of the "industry and Exertions" of HBC employees; of their role in providing "a general description of the Country [and of the] numbers and conditions of the Natives"; of the ways in which their explorations helped eliminate from European maps rivers "made to cross other streams and mountain ranges in a marvellous manner"; and of the importance of their surveys in staving off "a repetition of Oregon annoyances" in British Columbia.

My second response is awe. Awe inspired by Ruggles' meticulous research; awe at the capacity of the indigenous peoples of the western interior to sketch maps of extensive territories; and awe at the skill and fortitude of the HBCs early explorers-mapmakers. Self-effacingly, Ruggles finds the most important contributions of his magnum opus in its revelation "to the scholarly community of the unique and rich treasure which is held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives" and its concern "to make manifest the authenticity and cartobibliographic quality of these documents." These things it does. But it also provides a definitive inventory of HBC maps, throws light on the work of such figures as Philip Turnor, Peter Fidler, David Thompson, Henry Kelsey, and Anthony Henday, and illuminates the link between Company cartography and Company trade. The native maps reproduced in this book are quite as arresting as anything else between its covers. Products of what one European described as the Indians' "peculiar faculty of finding their way over pathless wilds . . . [by] the habitual observation and retention of local objects, even the most trifling, which a white man, less interested in storing up such knowledge, would pass without notice," they are remarkable documents — artifacts of the mind that reveal much about their authors' perceptions of, and ability to impose an intellectual order upon, their surroundings. The Hudson's Bay men who made the maps that are Ruggles' main concern were genuinely remarkable individuals. Largely self-taught, braving winter cold, "want of Victuals," swamped canoes, mosquitoes and black flies and, sometimes, the admonitions of superiors who insisted that celestial obser-

vations be made and distances be measured “without breaking into the necessary Business of the Factory,” they were a resilient and resourceful, if small and often unsung, army of amateurs who unveiled vast areas to European eyes. Tall among them, and of particular interest to readers of this journal, stood Joseph Despard Pemberton, sometime Professor of Practical Surveying and Engineering at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester, England, despatched from Britain by the HBC in 1851. Atypical by virtue of his training and his appointment as surveyor and cartographer for the Company and the colony of Vancouver Island, Despard nonetheless exhibited the energy and effectiveness characteristic of most of his predecessors. In eight years he ranged widely through coastal British Columbia, and was responsible for the development of a triangulation grid, the establishment of a land survey and registration system, and the production of topographical, geological, and other maps, including the first three town plans of Victoria (dated 1852, 1855, and 1859) and an 1853 map of southern Vancouver Island from Sooke to “Cowitchin.”

A Country So Interesting contains a great wealth of such information, yet I find myself finally (and reluctantly) disappointed by this book. It reflects its long gestation, and hardly begins to address intellectual issues that have come to the fore as it was being brought to conclusion. Ruggles tells us how HBC maps were made in the field and how they were returned to England; he traces the spread of Company mapping with care; and notes that most of the maps he examined were drafted to inform the HBC's London-based principals about those territories in which they had a trading interest. But his purpose is inventory and his account essentially assumes that maps are mirrors of nature. Some are more congruent with reality than others, but these are the “good” and the “accurate,” and they stand, by and large, at the end of a linear progression of increasingly precise representation. Implicit in all of this is what a prominent student of historical cartography, Brian Harley, called “the epistemological myth . . . of the cumulative progress of an objective science” (on p. 247 of “Deconstructing the Map,” in Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, eds., *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, London: Routledge, 1992). Questions about the social and cultural forces that shaped maps and their makers, about the omission or commission of information (by selection, classification, symbolism), and about the power embodied in, or inferred from, maps are left aside. Yet they seem particularly pertinent since Foucault, Derrida, Hayden White, and others have alerted us to the importance of reading between the lines and in the margins of texts, and warned us of the “new fictions of factual

representation" that confront us every day. Although Ruggles describes most of the HBC maps as unremarkable in cartographic design, drafting technique, and innovative quality, and characterizes them as "sketch maps" compiled for reference, the overarching lesson of this recent literature is that documents (such as maps) are never neutral. To view the HBC maps through the lenses of discourse analysis, to pay more attention to their unregarded details, and to broach questions of intertextuality, metaphor, and rhetoric in relation to these documents would surely open the way to fresh and fascinating perspectives on several facets of the Canadian past. Contemplating them, I am led to remark, as Hudson Bay man Edward Smith did to the London Committee of the Company in 1825, "what a field to face the imagination, what a number of ideas rushes in at once, all for the means to investigate a Country so interesting," for there is no doubt that Ruggles' book will be an invaluable companion on that enticing journey of exploration and interpretation.

University of British Columbia

GRAEME WYNN

Life Lived Like a Story, by Julie Cruikshank in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. xvi, 405 pp. Illus. \$50.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

Life Lived Like a Story is the result of a unique collaboration carried out over a number of years between anthropologist Julie Cruikshank and three native women of Athapaskan and Tlingit ancestry: Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. The written narratives presented in the book do not correspond with our usual notion of a life history or autobiography. Indeed, Cruikshank explicitly deals with the extent to which the Western life history/autobiography genre is appropriate for rendering these native women's life experiences.

As Cruikshank worked with her collaborators — all residents of the Yukon territory — she gradually shifted her research focus from documenting their lives and the changes that had taken place in the Yukon to examining the actual way they talked about, remembered, and interpreted their lives. In doing so, she also considers the larger question of what is history and what is myth. Each life history consists of from nine to seventeen segments which include not only stretches of familiar personal narrative (such as stories about getting married and travel) but also

mythological tales, clan histories, songs, and personal and place name information. Woven together, the segments become the fabric of each woman's life. The recurring theme is "connection," both to other people and to nature.

Despite the far-reaching changes that have taken place in the Yukon during the course of these women's lives, many of the stories they tell are formal stories that originated generations ago. These stories continue to be told because they continue to fulfil needs in people's lives. "An ultimate value of oral tradition," Cruikshank reminds us, "was to recreate a situation for someone who had not lived through it so that the listener could *benefit* directly from the narrator's experience [my emphasis]." (p. 340) To native Indians and many other "traditional" people, stories teach. They are part of their intellectual tradition and, therefore, part of their everyday lives. It should not surprise us that Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned recount these important stories for Cruikshank, treating them as part of their personal narratives.

Cruikshank draws a number of interesting and important conclusions from her collaborators' lives. For example, she points out that much of the behaviour and concerns which outsiders classify as "practical" and associate with native women are in fact enmeshed with the "spiritual" activities of men and are no more practical (or less spiritual) than men's activities from the native point of view.

One value of this well-written and assembled book lies in the fact that it gives a wide readership access to three native women's thoughts and lives, at the same time providing a native view of historical events in the Yukon. As a graceful treatment not only of these women's lives but also of their indigenous way of imparting knowledge, it is also a special gift to the people of the Yukon. For fieldworkers and students the book provides a valuable model of how collaboration between an anthropologist or oral historian and their native teachers can work — and does work, it seems to me, more often in the Canadian and Alaskan north than elsewhere. The book is also a cautionary reminder of the limitations of the conventional life history or autobiographical form when applied to people outside the Western tradition.

The Railway King of Canada: Sir William Mackenzie, 1849-1923, by R. B. Fleming. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991. xxi, 340 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

R. B. Fleming presents us with a sympathetic portrait of one of the alleged robber barons of Canada, financier-promoter Sir William Mackenzie. Declaring that "biography enriches history," the author places [Mackenzie's] "life itself [at] the focal point" of his study (pp. xix, xxi). This approach allows Fleming to catalogue Mackenzie's myriad interests. But the organization impedes the author's analysis of Mackenzie's business strategy and his management of a series of firms besides the Canadian Northern Railway. The extant sources hinder his attempt to illuminate the character of the man who made the business decisions.

Complementing T. D. Regehr's work, Fleming demonstrates that Mackenzie's business interests extended far beyond the railway company most closely associated with his name. Before the promoter began to assemble the components of the Canadian Northern, he had already made a substantial fortune contracting for the Canadian Pacific Railway. During the 1890s he acquired street railway concerns in Toronto, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Birmingham, England. With the Canadian Northern under way, Mackenzie gained control of *La Presse*, promoted utilities which would become Brazilian Traction, and created a hydro-electric company in Ontario which competed for several years with the Ontario Hydro Commission. Indeed, the German newspaper accolade of Mackenzie as the "Railway King of Canada" diminished his activities.

Although Fleming does not rehearse the origins and expansion of the Canadian Northern, Mackenzie's most important venture in western Canada, he presents some new material about his subject's actions in British Columbia. We learn more about Mackenzie's role in an abortive plan to build a railway line behind the contested American Panhandle from Telegraph Creek to the Yukon during the late 1890s. The author clarifies the familial and business ties between the Northern Construction Company and Mackenzie and partner Donald Mann. He also reveals how Mackenzie was able to monopolize the west coast whaling industry through Canadian Northern Pacific Fisheries. But the book contains little on the larger acquisitions of Canadian Western Lumber and Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir), and nothing on Canadian Fish and Cold Storage which built what was described as the largest fish packing plant in North America at Prince Rupert.

Fleming reiterates Mackenzie's "chief role" as "company representative in investment houses and Parliament" (p. 71). To illustrate how Mackenzie bargained with supplicants, the author draws on the memoirs of Martin Nordegg. He suggests the promoter's skill in dealing with those to whom he was beholden in an account of Mackenzie's actions to shore up Borden's government in 1917, even after the prime minister had nationalized the Canadian Northern. Unfortunately, he does not explain how the financier "juggled," to borrow Canadian Northern superintendent D. B. Hanna's metaphor, funds from one concern to the next to extend his holdings. Describing the transcontinental railway system as "the most speculative of all Mackenzie's investments" (p. 81), Fleming recognizes that the "enormous principal of its bonds" had "small chance of being repaid, war or no war" (p. 188). Why, then, did Mackenzie sell "profitable stocks" from his other concerns "in a futile attempt to keep the Canadian Northern afloat" (p. xx)? Does entrepreneurial vision mean much if "vision is often dependent for its success on luck or coincidence" (p. 61)? If, as a trade journal maintained, Mackenzie's genius lay more in his "amazing ability to raise capital" (p. 245), this reader would welcome an extended examination of British investor appraisals of his projects as well as his strategy.

Fleming's attempts to defend Mackenzie's management actions is rather less successful. Lock-step chronological chapters require that the author cut back and forth between Mackenzie's efforts to run each firm. Thus, it becomes difficult to discern the promoter's motives and goals and evaluate his decisions in these concerns which Fleming contends were "admirable successes" (pp. xix-xx) with the exception of the Canadian Northern. Such an evaluation is also impeded by the author's reluctance to offer some financial data series for the respective firms. A case in point is his discussion of Mackenzie's direction of the Toronto Railway Company from 1891 to 1921. Here he seeks to overturn the interpretation of Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles that Mackenzie was milking the trolley company for profit. To support his contention that Mackenzie had made the Toronto system "among the best in North America" (p. 173), Fleming cites a 1910 report on Toronto transport by two New York consultants, but does not present or discuss the data which led the investigators to such a sunny conclusion.

To find the man behind the manager is perhaps most difficult. The absence of Mackenzie personal papers and the apparent dearth of business correspondence outside the Canadian Northern holdings make puzzling Fleming's decision to focus on "personalities and interpersonal relation-

ships" (p. xix). Diligent collection of press accounts and reminiscences leads Fleming to suggest what probably were important elements in Mackenzie's personality such as a tendency to suppress harsh memories and a disinclination to attend to detail. But rarely does the author use these observations to explain specific actions. Much of the personal description is drawn from what appears to be society columnists of the day. It tells us more about the image of the Railway King than about the individual.

This last comment suggests an alternative organization. An explicit life-legend dichotomy, similar to that which Maury Klein employed in his study of American robber baron Jay Gould, might allow one to argue more acutely that the historical record contradicts some of the notorious elements of Mackenzie's image. But this wish for another book should not detract from the scholarly one which the author has written. Fleming's portrait gives us a Mackenzie more complex than the one we had before.

Douglas College

FRANK LEONARD

Alex Lord's British Columbia Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-1936, edited by John Calam. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991. xii, 192 pp. Illus. \$39.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.

This is an exciting time in British Columbia rural educational history. Over the past few years, educational historians have turned their attention to the nature of rural schools as focal points in uncovering a host of previously neglected yet important issues. The understanding of rural education and the importance of gender becomes more precise as through the eyes of the often frightened, young, inexperienced female teacher, historians are able to study pedagogical efficiency and student retardation, the condition of school buildings and equipment, curriculum, teacher transiency, and teacher/pupil/parent interaction. At once, the rural community is open to inspection: wide discrepancies are revealed among communities in politics, industry, ethnicity, customs, religion, and climate and terrain. Far from the urban-based Department of Education bureaucracy in Victoria, local participants struggle through daily activities particular to their social and physical environment.

On a number of levels, *Alex Lord's British Columbia* contributes quite nicely to this ongoing study. To complement the teacher's perspective of local communities, Calam has allowed for a view from a "man in the field," a regional school inspector charged with supervising a number of

assisted (usually one-room) schools over a vast, often remote geographical territory. Throughout, with Calam's exhaustively researched editorial annotations — witness, for example, six references alone to the 1914 New Hazelton Bank robbery — which use a variety of sources including local accounts and newspapers, official correspondence, government documents, and oral history, Lord's memoirs help to illuminate the hardships and idiosyncrasies characteristic of rural life. Walking fifty miles because of washed-out roads and ubiquitous train delays was not uncommon. Extremes in local customs where paying for an *offer* of food and lodging was mandatory was matched by local politics rife with personal peculiarities and interests. Local industry could fluctuate as often as the weather, and Lord's encounters with a host of colourful people recalls communities where the telegraph operator was integral to "social cohesiveness." This was an individual's country, "among the hills and the trees and the cattle, where a mind can be free from the multitude of minor things that cannot be avoided in thickly populated areas" (p. 100).

Local schools reflected the community. Within Lord's inspectorates (Calam neatly divides Lord's travels into geographical chapters couched by uncluttered reference maps) schoolhouses varied from decrepit shacks, like the one near Port Clements on the Queen Charlotte Islands which exemplified "the earmarks of unskilled carpentry" (p. 91), to the typical multi-roomed Kelowna building in a community replete with sports clubs and music societies. The former was much more the rule, as Lord comments on schools with leaking roofs, poor heating and light, and inadequate equipment with, literally, blackboards. Scattered families scrambled to make up the required eight children to keep the school open — even to the point of creating an imaginary pupil — and oftentimes abject poverty made educational activity impossible. Lord writes of one father in Dunster who referred to boots as "de devil," for their scarcity forced his children indoors the entire winter.

Capricious teacher/community relations and teacher transiency are important aspects of the study of rural schools, and Lord acutely attests to their existence. Local people were hospitable, indifferent, or antagonistic towards the teacher, who regardless of her pedagogical prowess managed to attract every bachelor in the vicinity. Not surprisingly, teachers frequently vacated schools on an annual basis. Again, Calam's annotations prove enlightening, as by using the Department of Education Annual Reports he traces the transiency of one teacher who Lord visited to four different schools between 1917-1925. Indeed, in one inspectorate, by September new teachers were found in seventy-four of the eighty-eight schools,

thus challenging long-term educational effectiveness derived from stability in the rural classroom.

Having intimately experienced rural contingencies, Lord reflected on one-room schools in a manner that differed little from the teachers' view as reported in other historical studies, such as that of Wilson and Stortz, " 'May the Lord Have Mercy on You': The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," (*BC Studies*, 1988). Lord's urban perspectives quickly dissipate to a point where a chance encounter with B.C. Premier H. C. Brewster and Minister of Lands T. D. Pattullo among other dignitaries on the Peace River near Fort St. John seemed like a visit from another world. Lord's recollections with local people, however, shed light on school financing among settlers as well as the arbitrary nature of the local selection of the new school teacher. Particularly insightful is the chapter on Lord's "view from headquarters." Here, Lord offers a glimpse of early curriculum development since 1910 in British Columbia, centralized and inflexible, much to his apprehension. In typical fashion, anecdotes serve to further increase historical understanding, as seen particularly in the draconian authority exercised by the Department of Education's Alexander Robinson. Lord recounts that with questionable acumen the Faculty of Education dean in the 1940s remarked on the province's education as being cursed by personalities. The term "curse" is debatable, Lord suggests, but "the extent of their influence is not open to doubt" (p. 119).

A definite strength of *Alex Lord's British Columbia* is its introduction. Calam outlines Lord's upbringing and education in Ontario, teaching and administrative appointments in British Columbia, up to his retirement in 1950 and death in 1961. Lord's legal, political, social, and educational beliefs are fleshed out, revealing a dynamic individual who thought that effective rural teachers judiciously using the "instrument" of curriculum contributed to education as the "touchstone of social integrity." Calam also offers an historical context to Lord's recollections, in particular when he discusses the introspectively intellectual atmosphere of educational progressivism embodied in the *Putman-Weir Report*, a philosophy with which Lord seemed comfortably at odds. Significantly, Calam connects Lord's "unpretentious stories" with a number of historical themes, citing important recent scholarly works in the history of teaching, curriculum, children, women, and biography. *Alex Lord's British Columbia* best serves rural educational historiography as different value systems among local communities, creating a myriad of problems for Department of Education officials, become painfully clear. In an effort to curb rural school pedagogical inefficiency, the failure to train "rural-minded" teachers in urban

normal schools is better understood through Lord's view as a representative of centralized educational control. This book succeeds both as a slice of rural conditions in the past and as a solid contribution to the history of education in British Columbia, and as a result bears the unique attribute of appealing to the casual reader and serious scholar alike.

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

PAUL J. STORTZ

Duff Pattullo of British Columbia, by Robin Fisher. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. xv, 445 pp. Illus., index. \$40.00 cloth.

From John Foster McCreight to Rita Johnston, British Columbia had twenty-eight premiers. With few exceptions their most common characteristic was their mediocrity. In his "Preface" to *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*, Robin Fisher argues that four premiers — Richard McBride, John Oliver, Pattullo, and W. A. C. Bennett — "dominated British Columbia politics in the twentieth century"; and that of the four "Pattullo was the most significant" (p. ix). In addition to his central task of rescuing the life and career of his subject from the obscurity into which they have fallen, Fisher set himself a number of other goals. He hopes that his biography will help to disprove the notion that the genre throws little light on "class, gender, and race"; to counter the false characterization of Pattullo as an "unthinking and dogmatic opponent of Ottawa's attempt to centralize further Canadian government" by means of the recommendations of the Rowell Sirois Commission; and to employ his subject's life as an embodiment of a British Columbia perspective, as contrasted to "the centralist" interpretation of Canadian history (p. x).

The Pattullo that Fisher has successfully rescued is mostly a public Pattullo. Only very occasionally, as when he quotes the poignant poem entitled "Alone" that Pattullo wrote in his old age, does Fisher reveal much about Pattullo's private self or even his private life. Perhaps warned off by the dismayingly bad examples set by those who have searched for the "essential" Mackenzie King, Fisher was wise to eschew psychohistorical approaches to his subject. Within, then, the natural limits of a mostly public biography, Fisher has painted an often lively portrait. He opens with an account of Pattullo's comfortable Ontario childhood and his sometimes floundering, youthful years. He shows that many of the qualities that came to characterize his public life took form after Pattullo moved west, first to Dawson City during the Yukon gold rush and later to a

Prince Rupert eagerly awaiting the completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific. In describing Pattullo's early years in the west, Fisher places his subject in two vividly realized frontier settings. In both cities Pattullo revelled in being a "man's man," one who lived vigorously ("be up and doing") and generously, and one who gambled, generally unsuccessfully, in real estate in pursuit of the fortune that always eluded him. He entered municipal politics in both cities, and "revelled in the conviviality and banter of election meetings and he seemed to draw energy and confidence from the election campaign" (p. 94). As a municipal politician in cities whose growth, he believed, was held back by a lack of essential services, Pattullo also came to the view that public works could be an engine of general economic prosperity.

In 1916, and as part of a Liberal sweep of the province, Prince Rupert elected Duff Pattullo to the provincial legislature. At forty-three he had, at last, found both the career — he came to describe himself as a "professional politician . . . an expert in the science of Government" — and the success that had so long eluded him (p. 242). Fisher lays out Pattullo's subsequent career in straightforward fashion. The central figure in Fisher's narrative, one who regularly "travelled throughout the province" for the whole of his career, still stands out clearly, but the provincial setting beyond the legislative buildings is less sharply realized than the Dawson City and Prince Rupert of the early years (p. 291). We see Pattullo as an extremely able Minister of Lands, and as an increasingly effective performer in the legislature and on the public platform. Fisher carefully recreates Pattullo's masterly effort at rebuilding his party after its defeat in the 1928 election, and his shrewd fashioning of the victory that took him to the premier's office in 1933. Fisher shows how, despite an extremely severe financial situation, Pattullo's new government quickly embarked on a modest programme of reform; as Fisher reports, "Pattullo believed in an interventionist state and his government would be arguably the most active in Canada during the 1930s" (p. 248). After its re-election in 1937, however, Fisher explains, "much of the reformist heat had gone out of the Pattullo government" and its second term was "a good deal more cautious than the first" (p. 299).

Fisher does a fine job of laying out a British Columbia perspective on the history of federal-provincial relations in the 1920s and 1930s. From Arthur Meighen's cavalier treatment of the visiting provincial Minister of Lands in 1919, though discussions of the deleterious effect of prevailing freight rate practices on the provincial economy, and the province's persistent claims for a renegotiation of the terms under which it entered Con-

federation, Pattullo and his Liberal predecessors found successive federal governments unwilling even to listen to the often telling cases that they made. In 1941, Fisher reports in a culminating example, "Pattullo was simply off to Ottawa for yet another one-way conversation with the federal government" (p. 330). Pattullo rightly found the federal government's attitude towards public works in British Columbia during the depression as especially galling. Despite a long history of national investment in the economic infrastructure of central Canada, especially in canals and railways, R. B. Bennett and Mackenzie King persisted in seeing Pattullo's sensible requests that Canada begin to counter the effects of depression through modest programmes of public works as, as King confided to his diary, "the most absurd ideas about the extent to which public monies should be spent at this time" (p. 286). Fisher is particularly effective in countering a view, first propounded by journalists and politicians and later uncritically accepted by "national" historians, that cast Pattullo as "one of a terrible trio of wilful wreckers" at the dominion-provincial conference on the Rowell-Sirois report in January 1941. Fisher makes clear that, in the short run, Pattullo was entirely correct in arguing that the commission's proposals were unnecessary to the war effort; even without the agreement of the provinces the federal government possessed virtually unlimited powers and employed them vigorously. Fisher also emphasizes a fact that later critics have ignored — namely that, in the long run, the Rowell-Sirois proposals were "political nonsense" (p. 335). Nonetheless, both provincial and national critics ensured that this "political nonsense" played a major role in ensuring that the Liberals won less than half of the seats in the provincial election of 1941, that John Hart replaced Pattullo as provincial Liberal leader and premier of a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives, and that Pattullo would, after almost thirty years, come to lose his seat in the legislature in the 1945 election.

I want to take issue with two already mentioned claims that Fisher makes for his book and for his subject. First, as in very different ways Brian Young's *George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois* (1981) and Terry Crowley's *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality* (1990) illustrate the point, biography can, indeed, provide insight into such matters as "class, gender, and race." Except in the most general sense that he shows that his subject came from a middle-class family and made a success of a middle-class career, however, Fisher does not add to our knowledge in any one of these important areas. Second, although Fisher claims that Pattullo was the most significant of those on his list of dominant premiers, he makes no case for this evaluation. Although such judgements are neces-

sarily subjective — I myself find the public Pattullo far more engaging a man than the public Bennett, for example — there may perhaps be some objective evidence as well. W. J. (Bill) Asselstine, who served in Pattullo's (and Hart's) cabinets and later sat as a Social Crediter during part of W. A. C. Bennett's premiership, once explained to me that, in his opinion, the two men shared a similar imaginative vision for transforming the provincial economy and the important role that public works should play in that process. The difference between them, Asselstine concluded, was that post-war prosperity provided Bennett with substantial means by which he might implement the vision. If having a vision together with the political will, the financial means, and the public support necessary to put it into place are measures of "significance," then Bennett must take first place and a Pattullo a respectable second.

Such concerns do not obscure the substantial merits of *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*. Robin Fisher has provided us with a detailed, insightful, well-written and well-illustrated account of the life of an important Canadian. All can read it with pleasure, while those much in need of a more balanced perspective on the concerns of the "west beyond the west" can read it with both pleasure and profit.

University of British Columbia

NEIL SUTHERLAND

Sherwood Lett: His Life and Times, by Reginald H. Roy. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Alumni Association; distributed by University of British Columbia Press. xvi, 180 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

Well-meaning efforts to write the life of a worthy man do not always make a good biography. The way to this one was paved with good intentions: a widow who wished her brave husband to be remembered, and offered papers, memories, and money to effect it. Perhaps it can be said that men and women can only be what is in the archives they leave behind them, either their own or those of others. In the absence of bibliographical information (other than end-notes), the archives for a life of Sherwood Lett would seem to be a diary he kept from 1915 to 1922, a fair run of letters to his wife Evelyn, and some few other papers. It is possible that the author has done the best he could from what he had available.

A good biography was not made any easier by Sherwood Lett's own writing, the major source, which is prosy and surprisingly naive. Lett was B.C. Rhodes Scholar in November 1919; but despite two years at Oxford,

his writing lacks intellectual vigour, humour, or wit. Even his letters to his wife are flat; though some of the incidents Lett recounts from the First or Second World Wars, or from Saigon, are remarkable, the eyes and mind through which they are seen and recorded seem incapable of rendering them memorably. They all appear to have the same absence of colour and vivacity. Perhaps, indeed, courageous men don't write brave prose; rather they may have a Stoic cast of manner and thought. A sensitive poet might well be overwhelmed by a desperate fight when the Gatling's jammed and the Colonel's dead. One thinks of the bluff, decent, hearty, shallow Rev. James Morell in Shaw's *Candida*, and of the rival for his wife Candida's affections, the poet Eugene Marchbanks, sensitive, shrinking, shy, and perceptible. Rare indeed are soldier-poets, good at both!

If this be so, then the more weight falls upon the author to make something of the man whose pedestrian prose conceals rather than illuminates a brave soldier. Unfortunately, the author was too faithful to his sources; what he cites from Lett's diaries and letters is of course real; what he fails to do is to lift the citations out of the monotony from which they came, and put in the real landscape, explain their context and conflicts, envelop the sources with a range of information that explains them — and justifies this book.

Nor is there enough comment on Lett himself, of criticism, of analysis. One closes the book without much insight into the sort of man Lett really was other than being friendly, brave, well liked, a devoted husband, and well thought of by higher-ups in Ottawa. One does not even know much of his role as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court of British Columbia, which he was from 1955 until his death in 1964. The B.C. Electric case is analyzed, but there is nothing about his other decisions, or his dissents. How far did his fellow judges agree with him? What were his decisions in other civil cases? In criminal cases?

Lett survived the Western Front in the First World War, Dieppe and Normandy in the Second, but he does not survive very well here. One wishes it were otherwise. The sources were a light that failed, and the author, too faithful by half, could not sufficiently dispel the darkness.