

BOOK REVIEWS

Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging Company, Vancouver Island

Richard Somerset Mackie

Victoria: Sono Nis, 2000. 309 pp. Illus., maps. \$39.95 paper

BY GRAEME WYNN

University of British Columbia

IN THE MUSIC WORLD, crossover hits are not uncommon. Think of recent successful releases by Shania Twain, Diana Krall, or Celine Dion. In book publishing they are rather more unusual. David Suzuki is, indubitably, a public figure, but the immensely popular books that bear his name are hardly essential reading in genetics, his original field. Important though they are, the writings of Alan Cairns, Will Kymlicka (and many other Canadian academics) are little known among the public at large. While “professional” historians sniff at the “popularizer” Pierre Berton and all his works – and vice versa – Canadian publishing struggles to survive, its “serious non-fiction” list kept afloat by the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, and its trade books subject to massive returns by “big-box bookstores” intent on moving titles through their shelves. There are, of course, many, many reasons for all of this – ranging from business bottom lines and fiscal caution, through style and taste and design and marketing considerations, to the size and interests of the book-buying public – and they cannot be sorted through here.

Against this backdrop, however, Richard Mackie’s *Island Timber* warrants attention. It is a work of local history, firmly focused on a small part of east-central Vancouver Island. Yet it throws a good deal of light on British Columbia’s coastal forest industry – an enormously important facet of the provincial past that still awaits its mature historian. It is not an academic book, yet it has more academic substance than many works that claim an academic pedigree. And it was, for some weeks after its publication, the best-selling non-fiction book in the province (on the strength of this success, a second edition is now in preparation). This is not enough to proclaim: “Richard Mackie Rocks!” However, to stretch a point, perhaps he might be thought of as a sort of Ashley McIsaac manqué – someone who has successfully brought the classical sensibilities of the trained historian (and, I would add, the historical geographer) to a popular audience.

Island Timber is basically a history of the Comox Logging and Railway Company through the first forty years of the twentieth century. It tells the story of the conversion of “a logger’s

Eden" – 200 square miles of prime Douglas fir forest – into more than three billion board feet of lumber (enough to build well over half a million houses). This is done simply and straightforwardly. The book follows the wood, from the flat gravelly soils between Comox and Campbell River (first opened by settlers in the 1860s) to the massive mills twelve miles up the Fraser River, where between 500 and 900 men converted magnificent 250-year-old trees into dimension lumber, doors, window frames, and plywood destined for markets within Canada and across the world. It is hardly surprising, then, that work – the various jobs in which Comox Logging's 450 employees earned their daily bread (from cruising and surveying, falling and bucking, rigging, yarding, skidding, hauling, booming, towing, and grading to saw filing and cooking) – holds a central place in this account.

Indeed, one of the major contributions of this book lies in its clear and detailed depiction of how the forest industry worked. Who knew that Comox Valley men engaged in "aerial logging" with "flying machines" before the First World War? If you are intrigued, Mackie will help you understand that they were using high lead methods and Lidgerwood skidders to bring out the cut. He shows as well as anyone who has written on the industry how skylines are rigged, how donkeys and logging railways changed the assault on the forest, and how log booms were built. Even more impressive are the maps and diagrams that show the principle and practice of skidder logging, the manner in which logs were yarded from a cold deck pile and loaded onto flatcars, how fallers and buckers worked their ways through a skidder setting, and

how logging railways shaped the geography of forest exploitation. Here Mackie has used his training as a historian, and his engagement with geographers, to shape a thoroughly useful, tightly integrated account of the heyday of logging on the coast of British Columbia, revealing not only how the forest was turned into lumber but also how places such as the Comox Valley became resource hinterlands of southern mills (in Chemainus and Vancouver) and integral parts of such celebrated stories as that of Prairie settlement.

Yet *Island Timber* is more than this. Mackie's text is distinguished by a strong emphasis on people and their communities. He interviewed 150 men and women in the course of his research, all of whom "enthusiastically" shared with him their memories (to say nothing of books, maps, and photographs) of the area, and this shows. The Comox Valley is Jack Hodgins country – his father farmed and logged in the soldier settlement of Merville – and this book introduces almost as many unlikely and colourful characters as appear in the pages of *Spit Delaney's Island*. Sometimes I found myself impatient with the crowd. Like many local histories, this one revels in idiosyncrasy and anecdote. Mackie undoubtedly read more tales and heard more reminiscences than he includes in his book, but one wonders, eventually, about the work done by some stories (such as the one on page 112 about "a fatal accident ... averted during the great snowfall") and the larger significance of many "facts" (such as the claim, on page 97, that an Irish section boss "grew the biggest carrots you ever saw"). For all that, Mackie does a commendable job of weaving bits and pieces together to provide a richly textured account of

the experiences and aspirations of those men and women whose role in the conversion of one of the most impressive forests on the Coast was in some sense incidental to their larger aims of making homes, raising families, and building communities. Here reproduction is revealingly framed alongside production to reveal the complex human dimensions of a resource industry too often treated simply as an economic activity. For all its particularity, the intensely human story of logging in the Comox Valley is far from unique, and in Mackie's hands it speaks both to the histories of other resource communities across the country as well as to the humanistic impulse that links the lives of others to our own.

If these are the basic elements of *Island Timber's* success, it must also be acknowledged that no crossover artist

scores a hit without agents and publicists, and here much credit is due Sono Nis Press. This small Victoria publishing house has produced a most handsome book. It has the look and feel of a coffee-table volume, with high-quality, glossy paper, an attractive layout, and photographs (literally hundreds of them) magnificently reproduced and spread throughout the text. Many of these pictures – from candid snapshots of families at the beach, to posed studies of proud engineers beside their locomotive, to action shots of woodwork – are published here for the first time. They are undoubtedly part of the book's attraction and worth the price of the volume on their own. At \$39.95 for both text and illustrations, *Island Timber* – like island timber before it – is a rare bargain.

A Sto:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas

Keith Thor Carlson, editor

Vancouver/Seattle/Chilliwack: Douglas and McIntyre/
University of Washington Press/Stolo Heritage Trust,
2001. 208 pp. Maps., illus. \$60 cloth

BY WENDY WICKWIRE

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LAST MONTH, at the annual BC Book Awards Ceremony, *A Sto:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* received the Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Book Prize. The culmination of a large research project launched in 1999 under the auspices of the Sto:lo Nation, the atlas well deserved this honour. Keith Carlson was the driving force behind the

project. As the primary editor and principal author, he coordinated the efforts of a large crew of contributors – six editorial board members, fourteen authors, five clerical/administrative assistants, seven research assistants, two cartographers, one graphic designer, two place names advisors, two copy editors, and a production coordinator.

Hired ten years ago as a historical researcher for the Sto:lo Nation, Carlson, a PhD student in history at the University of British Columbia, was one of many resident historians drawn into the treaty negotiation research taking root across the province. In most cases, these researchers completed their contracts and moved on. Carlson, however, adopted a different approach. He settled in the Valley and established strong links with the Sto:lo people. Within a short time, he began to question the role of history in their lives.

Despite the fact that the region had been extensively documented by historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and others, many Sto:lo had felt no part of this. Steven Point expresses this poignantly in the book's Foreword: "[Not only do] we have to prove that we were here first, [but we have to prove] *that we were even here.*" (xiii). Carlson viewed treaty negotiation research as part of the problem. "Aboriginal organizations," he writes, "especially larger ones with the financial resources to sustain interdisciplinary teams of researchers," were producing massive quantities of data that "culminate[d] in obscure, seldom referenced reports found on band office shelves and in tribal council archives" (xv).

Carlson devised a clever strategy for dealing with these issues. He would engage in "public dialogue" with the mainstream community via books – new Sto:lo history books. His first effort involved a collection of illustrated historical essays (*You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History, 1997*). The *Sto:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* followed last year. A large, glossy coffee-table book organized around forty-six illustrated maps, or "plates," it makes a bold

statement about the presence of the Sto:lo in BC history. Each plate tells a particular story: Plates 1, 2, and 3, by Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, for example, cover the mythological transformations and spiritual sites; Plate 4, by David Schaepe, focuses on the geology of the region; Plates 6 and 7, by David Smith, cover the Sto:lo language; Plate 17, by Kate Blomfield, deals with Sto:lo justice; Plate 22, by John Lutz, chronicles the "Seasonal Rounds in an Industrial World"; Plates 23, 25, and 26, by Jody Woods, highlight the history of residential schooling and canneries; Plate 24, by Rob Hancock, centres on "The Hop Yards"; and Plates 37 to 39, by Colin Duffield, cover the history of logging and the establishment of parks. The major contributors are Carlson (Plates 8, 9, 14, 18, 27, 28, 29, 30, 44, and 46), who covers everything from "history wars" to "Indian Reservations," and David Schaepe (Plates 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 41, and 42), who covers a range of issues, from Sto:lo traditional village arrangements to nineteenth-century communication and transportation networks.

The book's focus on maps is clearly strategic. As the mainstay of colonization, maps were (and still are) tools of spatial and cultural erasure. Here, however, maps underscore the power of the Sto:lo to thrive despite the colonial assault on their space. One of the highlights is the inclusion of two little known Sto:lo maps drawn by "Thiusoloc's Father" in 1859 (Plate 42, by Daniel Boxberger and David Schaepe) and K'hhalserten in 1918 (Plate 43, by David Schaepe).

If book awards and best-seller lists are any indication, then Carlson's strategy has worked. The atlas has gained entry into the mainstream historiography. It also serves effectively

as a political tool by challenging the narrow view of the Fraser Valley as a "corridor" of urban sprawl, shopping malls, and industry.

Two contributors deserve special mention. Jan Perrier, the book's graphic artist and illustrator, is a large part of the project's success. She integrates maps, photographs, charts, artefacts, and drawings with great artistic skill. The project's "cultural advisor," Sonny McHalsie, is also key. As a member of the Sto:lo Nation, he lends the atlas a strong sense of cultural authority and an insider perspective.

This latter point draws attention to an issue raised by Bruce Miller in his 1989 review of *You Are Asked to Witness*. "McHalsie's careful, pathbreaking research into Sto:lo place-names," notes Miller, "reveals Sto:lo understandings of place, events, and relationships among groups and ultimately provides the beginnings of a history from the Sto:lo viewpoint. Yet *You Are Asked to Witness* is not informed by Sto:lo concepts of history [as it] is not fully of their own making. With time, they may produce such a book" (*Canadian*

Historical Review 79 [2]: 340). The same comment could be made of *The Sto:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. Other than McHalsie, there are no Sto:lo authors in this volume.

Given this, a Guide to Contributors would be helpful. Beyond individual author's names, the book provides little on the backgrounds and perspectives of the contributors. It would be useful to know details about the individuals who worked on this project, along with their relations to the Sto:lo Nation.

But these are minor concerns. The maps are beautiful; the bibliographic section is comprehensive; and the textual material is full and sophisticated. Unlike most works of BC history, it features few stock photographs. On the contrary, there are photographic and other images that have rarely been seen (e.g., a prophet's notebook [in full] from the field materials of early ethnographer James A. Teit).

Clearly, anyone with an interest in the cultural landscape of British Columbia will want to add this book to his/her library.

Going Native

Tom Harmer

University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque. 2001. 292 pp.

Illus. US\$24.95 cloth

BY DOROTHY KENNEDY

BC Indian Language Project

GOING NATIVE is a courageous book. It could have gone so terribly wrong for first-time author Tom Harmer, yet this simple story of one man's sojourn among the

Okanagan-Colville First Nations on the US-Canada border is, instead, an evocative bridge to a world view that few non-Aboriginals have had the privilege, or perhaps the time, to

pursue. It is not surprising that Harmer concludes with an Afterword confessing that this tale is not fiction – as if there were any doubt – but actually his personal journey into the spiritual life of his Okanagan-Colville friends, with some literary embellishment to make it “a good story.”

The personal chronicle of this young American draft dodger’s self-discovery under the tutelage of Old Willie, Grandma, Clayton, and a handful of other Indians (yes, they call themselves “Indians,” he points out) is remarkably sensitive and vivid. It is compelling and eloquent in its simplicity. This comes about in part through Harmer’s skilful delineation of the immediate setting, particularly when focused on his deepening relationship with his Aboriginal hosts in a seemingly barren land. Liminality is a constant theme throughout the book, and it is in the mediation of Harmer’s own ambiguous state within this new atmosphere of uncertainties that he so effectively leads the reader into grasping, or at least glimpsing, the Okanagan-Colville world view and its interrelationship with nature. This is the association between humankind and the natural world, the *sumix*, or nature power, that is spoken of so expressly in Harry Robinson’s (with Wendy Wickwire) *Nature Power: In the Spirit of an Okanagan Storyteller* (Douglas and McIntyre, 1992). Also, with the skill of a good storyteller, Harmer enters the realm of *kwil’stn* – the anthropomorphized sweathouse ritual that is central to the Okanagan-Colville people’s physical and spiritual well-being – senses the power, and

emerges an integrated man, aware of his place in the natural world and, as important, of his place in a community of family and friends.

For people familiar with the Okanagan-Colville, the landscape, personalities, and, especially, the humour will be hauntingly familiar. Harmer’s use of the indigenous language is proficient and, with few exceptions, accurate. Even its presentation in his own linguistically naive orthography is not off-putting, for Harmer employs the *nsilxstn* (Okanagan-Colville) language in situations appropriate to the contemporary Aboriginal society within which he found himself. Similarly, Harmer’s dialogue generally captures the particular dialect of English spoken by the Okanagan-Colville, although in a few cases the omission of either subject, preposition, or verb seems more Pocahontas than Okanagan.

Going Native deserves a broad audience, especially among those seeking to comprehend the cultural root of certain sentiments sometimes articulated less directly, or with less clarity, by politically active First Nations youth in British Columbia’s Interior. Apart from providing insight into the sacred domain of Okanagan-Colville society, Harmer elucidates some of the frustration and sense of futility experienced by these people as they witness the ongoing erosion of their cultural landscape. *Going Native* is a defence, both passionate and reasoned, of the importance of more British Columbians and Washingtonians finding power in nature.

*Cis Dideen Kat – When Plumes Rise:
The Way of the Lake Babine Nation*

Jo-Anne Fiske and Betty Patrick

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000. 272 pp. \$29.95 paper

DOUGLAS C. HARRIS

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THE LAKE BABINE NATION comprises a people whose traditional territory includes the drainage basin of the lake in north central British Columbia that bears their name. This book is a study of their laws.

Within the context of the unfolding treaty process and the possibility of enhanced self-government, the two authors, one an anthropologist and the other the chief of the Lake Babine Nation, began with an initial mandate "to investigate the gender implications of traditional law and to consider how greater autonomy [for the Lake Babine Nation] within the Canadian justice system might favourably or unfavourably affect women." This concern with gender relations remained a central theme, but the focus of the project shifted in its early days to reflect the community's agenda, which sought "a study of gender relations and gendered laws ... contextualized within a struggle for decolonization of ancestral territory and the revitalization of traditional government." Understanding the colonial experience – including community dislocations, Indian status, residential schools, reserves, fish and game laws, mineral and timber extraction from traditional territory, missionaries, criminal courts, racism, and the law against the potlatch – was an essential part of the journey towards a just and

increasingly self-governing society where the roles of men and women received equal respect.

At the heart of this book are three chapters describing the procedures, history, and law of the *balhats*, the Babine word for potlatch. The *balhats*, source and site of legal authority for the Lake Babine, is described not as a historical relic but as the central ceremony of a developing legal order that, although beset with challenges to its coherence and relevance, continues to have great significance in interpersonal relations, in the allocation of resources, and in the settlement of disputes within the Babine Nation and between it and other nations, including Canada.

Following this are several chapters that build on some of Fiske's earlier work: they explore the interplay between the colonial legal orders that have successively inserted themselves into the lives of the Lake Babine people and their laws. The authors begin with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), whose forts were a presence in Babine territory from the 1820s and which, under the terms of its charter from the Crown, was empowered to dispense British justice. To what degree the strategies and theatre of power deployed by the HBC to control its trading empire reflected either British or First Nations legal norms is still an open question, but

there is no doubt that this first permanent White presence in Lake Babine territory presented new opportunities, eliminated others, and required novel responses from the Babine legal order.

Oblate missionaries, who arrived in the waning years of the fur trade, imposed another legal order. Under a repressive regime known as the Durieu system, missionaries instituted an all-male hierarchy (consisting of church chief, captains, and watchmen) that was charged with governing the moral behaviour of village members. Within the context of continuing social turmoil, some within the Lake Babine Nation remember this community-based surveillance with approval; and, indeed, within an encroaching settler society and its state the Oblates were among the few who defended Babine rights to their traditional territory and resources.

Stipendiary magistrates, Indian agents, and fish and game officers, all emissaries of the state, brought another legal order that not only governed the Babine from a distance but also instituted new hierarchies of power within the community that continue to be disruptive. Hereditary chiefs, whose authority derives from the balhats, now vie with band councillors elected under the Indian Act and supported by the federal Department of Indian Affairs.

The analysis includes an intriguing discussion of an emerging legal pluralism, which involves Canadian courts sometimes using, sometime

rejecting, the customary family law of the Babine and their neighbours in order to determine child custody disputes. However, as the authors warn, "legal pluralism" suggests an equality of legal orders that belies the colonial reality. The economically impoverished communities that comprise the Lake Babine Nation are beset with contradictions, many of them imposed, as they struggle to heal the wounds of a colonial encounter. Any legal pluralism that exists does so within vast power discrepancies not only between the First Nation and the Canadian state but also within the Babine community itself.

Reflecting their initial mandate, the authors return frequently to the questions of gender relations, to the roles of men and women in contemporary Babine society, and to the challenge of establishing legitimate legal structures that respect the values expressed within the balhats – structures that provide space for self-government without institutionalizing the norms of a dominant society and that participate in the creation of a just society.

In grappling with these compelling questions, the authors have produced as detailed and clearly described an analysis of a First Nations legal order, situated within a continuing colonial context, as exists in the literature. It is an enormous contribution not only to the particular community but also to a larger society that is coming to terms, however tentatively, with its colonial past.

Northern Haida Master Carvers

Robin K. Wright

Seattle/Vancouver: University of Washington Press/Douglas and McIntyre, 2001. 386 pp. Illus. \$65 cloth

BY ALAN HOOVER

Victoria, BC

IN 1981 BILL HOLM, the Seattle-based Northwest Coast art historian, published an article entitled "Will the Real Charles Edenshaw Please Stand Up? The Problem of Attribution in Northwest Coast Indian Art." Holm's interest in defining Northwest Coast "tribal" styles led to a desire to define individual styles within these regional traditions. Twenty years later, in *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, Robin Wright, Holm's student, revisits the problem of identifying the work of Haida artists. This book is about puzzles, art, and historical questions of identity. The challenge is to identify the work of the Haida artists who carved the large cedar totem poles that stood in old Haida villages on the north coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands and the adjacent American islands across Dixon Entrance in Alaska.

Although Wright discusses the work of nine nineteenth-century Haida artists, her underlying focus is the history of the Edenshaw family. The project began as an attempt to identify the work of Albert Edward Edenshaw and, although it has clearly gone further, that is what remains at the core of Wright's interest. In fact, she devotes the bulk of the book to Albert Edward, his nephew Charles, their relationship, and the relationship of Charles to other artists whose work has been confused with his.

Wright begins with Sqiltcange, the "earliest known name and attributed work of any Haida artist" (104), who was identified by Charles Edenshaw as the carver of the large, very archaic-looking frontal pole from the village near Tow Hill on the north coast beach east of Masset. Wright attributes the famous triple mortuary pole at Kiusta (the northeast corner of Graham Island) to Sqiltcange. She also detects his hand in the style of carving seen on two wooden and two argillite pipes. In fact, she wonders if Sqiltcange could have been one of the artists who initiated the tradition of carving in argillite (106). The other six artists whom she discusses and to whom she attributes work are all involved to some degree in the art history of Charles Edenshaw (ca. 1839-1920). Charles is the most famous of all Haida artists and is the touchstone against whom the work of contemporary artists is measured. Part of the story involves sorting out Albert Edward Edenshaw's work from that of Charles, his much better known nephew. The other part of the story involves identifying other artists whose work has been confused with that of Charles Edenshaw: John Robson (ca. 1846-1924), Isaac Chapman (1880s-1907), Simeon Stithhda (d. 1889, age ninety), and John Gwaytihl (ca. 1820-1912). Wright also discusses the work of the Kaigani (Alaskan)

Haida artists Duncan *ginaawaan* and Dwight Wallace. She suggests that Charles Edenshaw learned the art of silver engraving from Duncan *ginaawaan* (his wife's mother's uncle) and that Reverend Charles Harrison was incorrect in stating that Albert Edward Edenshaw was the first Haida to engrave silver; rather, it was his brother-in-law, Duncan *ginaawaan* (174).

What Wright does in her analysis of the oral and written history is to bring all existing documentation to the project of painting as complete a picture as possible of the production of Haida art in the nineteenth century. And of course she speculates as to the identification of the artists who produced the work that can be seen in historic photographs and museum and private collections. Although it is easy to see the problems with attribution, Wright herself does not pretend that this project does not sometimes use slender evidence to put a particular artist's name beside an unsigned work.

Wright's chronologically structured, descriptive treatment of Haida art history, which focuses primarily on

large monumental sculpture, is well researched, richly illustrated, and well written. In identifying the work of particular artists, Wright uses the standard practice of comparing stylistic traits on documented pieces with undocumented pieces, thus expanding the number of works that can be associated with each artist. Wright's decisions, however, would have been easier to follow if she had included schematic illustrations of the stylistic traits used in the attributions (e.g., Holm 1981, fig. 10). Wright's book is a welcome addition to Northwest Coast art history. It not only summarizes past work in the area, but it also offers important new information.

REFERENCE

- Holm, Bill. 1981. *Will the Real Charles Edenshaw Please Stand Up? The Problem of Attribution in Northwest Coast Indian Art*. In *The World Is as Sharp as a Knife: An Anthology in Honour of Wilson Duff*, ed. Donald N. Abbott, 175-200. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum.

On Kiddie Porn: Sexual Representation, Free Speech and the Robin Sharpe Case

Stan Persky and John Dixon

Vancouver: New Star Books, 2001. 247 pp. \$20.00 paper

BY KAREN DUBINSKY
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I AGREED TO REVIEW this book as a bit of a test. As a writer and teacher of the history of sexuality, I pay close attention to current sexual

politics. But I have pretty much ignored the past couple years of national debate about Canada's pornography laws, not for ideological but for

practical reasons: I have a new baby, I have no time. So Persky and Dixon's new book gave me a great opportunity to catch up on an important topic as well as to measure my response to the intellectual, political, and social morass that is child porn, this time as a new parent. Parenthood is a life-changing experience. Along with everything else, did it change my views on censorship?

Not really. But parenthood has made it more complicated. Parents know, in a way that few other people do, that children are different from adults. Parents know this, I hasten to add, simply because we spend more time with them than do most people. (Biology has nothing to do with it; my child is adopted.) I have a friend, a fifty-something man, who learned only recently that babies are not born with teeth. In our culture if you don't want to learn much about children you really don't have to. When you spend a great deal of time in the company of children, and realize how malleable they are, you become suspicious of people who make claims for or about them. And people who think children can fully and unambiguously consent to adult overtures (of whatever sort) know *nothing*.

However, Robin Sharpe wasn't charged with having sex with children; his is a story about representation. And there really is a difference between the two. He calls himself the "most hated man in Canada." He has also allowed that "if stupidity were a capital offence, I should be dead." I am not inclined to disagree. But after reading Persky and Dixon's compelling and well told tale of the demonization of Robin Sharpe, determining the forces of good from the forces of evil in the current child porn wars becomes tricky. This

book lays out a veritable rogues gallery, beginning with the ambitious and extraordinarily opportunistic former justice minister Kim Campbell, who oversaw the creation of Canada's ridiculously loose and vague pornography laws. Let us not forget the neighbours of Robin Sharpe, who drove him out of his apartment building. Or the "Family Caucus" of the Conservative Party, and virtually the entire Reform Party, who learned quickly that manufacturing a moral panic about children and sex grabbed plenty of headlines – many more than did tired old issues like "children and poverty" or "children and affordable daycare."

Dixon, president of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, was an advisor to the deputy minister of justice during Campbell's tenure, and he provides a close-up look at the crafting of the law that was used against Sharpe. The book covers the creation of the law, Sharpe's arrest and subsequent notoriety, and the challenges to the law issued by various BC courts. There's a lot here – including excruciatingly detailed legal decisions – but the topic is by no means exhausted. I'm left wondering about, of all things, geography. Somehow this has become a BC story – from former Justice Minister Campbell, to Sharpe, to Persky and Dixon – and I have no idea why. What is regionally or culturally specific here? Similarly, I remain curious about the extraordinary power of this moral panic. Persky and Dixon use the ideas of Ian Hacking and Wendy Kaminer to analyze current anxieties about child pornography, setting them within the context of late twentieth-century fears about child abuse. There's a much longer history of scary ideas about children, however, and this is by no means confined to North America. How and why do our

anxieties about children become sexualized? What is the relationship between the demonization of child pornographers and actual demons – sexual and otherwise?

Debate about child pornography brings out the worst in everyone. This book is a rare and valuable attempt to approach the topic with a level head.

*Pender Harbour Cowboy:
The Many Lives of Bertrand Sinclair*

Betty C. Keller

Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 2000. 224 pp. Illus. \$18.95 paper

*Literature and Loss:
Bertrand William Sinclair's British Columbia*

Richard J. Lane

London: The London Network for Modern Fiction Studies,
2000. Open Archive Volume 1. 102 pp. £14.95 paper
(Department of English, South Bank University,
103 Borough Road London SE1 0AN)

BY LAURIE RICOU
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BERTRAND SINCLAIR is more quotable than his disappearing presence in Canadian literature would suggest. One of my favourite Sinclair passages, from *Poor Man's Rock* (1920), explains who fishes near the southern tip of Lasqueti Island:

The foul ground and the tidal currents that swept by the Rock held no danger to the gear of a rowboat troller ... Poor Man's Rock had given many a man his chance ... And because for many years old men, men with lean purses, men with a rowboat, a few dollars, and a hunger for independence, had

camped in Squitty Cove ... and seldom failed to take salmon around the Rock, the name had clung to that brown hummock of granite lifting out of the sea at half tide. (22-3)

This passage marks Sinclair's abiding interest in the individual entrepreneur overwhelmed by an emerging industrial capitalism. It is also a statement of faith in the intuitive perception that understands how non-human creatures inhabit a space; and, in some respect, it's a plea for an alliance of the hidden and hiding creatures.

Richard Lane wants to make of this writer-worker, despite his anonymity,

a representative of British Columbia (as do I): "of course this most marginal of British Columbian writers is also somehow the most central, writing about industries and idealisms that have constructed the modern-day place called British Columbia" (6). Richard Lane is the world authority on Sinclair's work. He is also a former student of mine, who first encountered Sinclair in one of my classes, and who says complimentary things about me in his Introduction. So my reviewing his book is considerably less "objective" even than these things usually are. But, as apparently ironic as the term "world authority" is within this context (worldwide in recent times; Sinclair may have had only a score of readers), it also defines what this book is about. And that is that Lane, reciprocating Sinclair's interest in poor men's rocks, attends to the hidden. He makes a commitment to take the ignored and read it as significant. And he does so within a world context: writing from London he confidently discusses Sinclair in the same breath as Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Sometimes the theory will seem a little weighty for Lasqueti, but then, on a turn, Lane takes us easily from Fredric Jameson to an insightful re-reading of a brown hummock of granite: "The 'rock' as central signifier in this novel thus serves to undermine the revenge-plot and the romance narrative, by always returning critical attention to the 'solid referent' hidden by a web of false ideology" (21).

Even dedicated readers of Canadian literature may not know Bertrand Sinclair's name. Many of the rest will have found general neglect a good reason to ignore him. And the very few current readers who have searched out his work may despise all of it.

Every reader should despise some of it, particularly the unintentional but commonplace racism. The fiction is often formulaic (and Sinclair agonized endlessly about the economic necessity of writing to formula); readers will smile to read such archaic diction as "vouchsafe" and will bemoan the sexism of the "soft reddish-brown of her hair" (150, my emphasis). However, if you were to get by all these barriers, you might find a practical knowledge and challenging analysis, and be able to follow those paths through several fields: fishing, logging and finance, labour history, romantic Marxism, careful toponymy, sociology, and the history of publishing.

Lane takes us to most of these centres of interest and finds there counters and complements to Malcolm Lowry, Emily Carr, Martin Grainger, and the history of the potlatch. *Poor Man's Rock* appears on very few official charts, although it can be found on locally produced cartoon maps of Lasqueti. Lane appreciates the intimate folk-naming of locale and the intimate knowledge of workplace that it implies, and he honours it by placing Sinclair in the world, in some ways the world where he wanted to be. *Don Quixote* provides an analogy: "the whole narrative [of *Wild West*, or of Sinclair's life in his own letters] ... is contained within the book in an infinite regress" (26). Seeing Sinclair through Friedrich Nietzsche and Edmund Husserl, as well as within the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, Lane enacts his own directive: that Sinclair's fiction must not be read as a "realistic" portrait of a region, but as an *interpretation* of the forces that construct regional identity." (40)

Lane keeps asking, Why is Sinclair hidden? What does our hiding of him mean? What does "unhiding" him tell

us? While Betty Keller is neither so precocious nor so discerning as is Lane, her compact popular biography is also, in some measure, hiding narrative. She follows the line set down by Alan Twigg in *Vancouver and Its Writers* (1986), which is that Sinclair is “the most successful of British Columbia’s totally unknown authors.” (219)

Sinclair always maintained an *organic* view of fiction: “stories grow” (my emphasis) out of experience (to Mrs. Bodger, 7 December 1924). He repeatedly boasted of “lead[ing] a more active life than writing persons are presumed to” (to Clayton Bower, 8 September 1930). Typically styling his writing in self-deprecating terms – the “fairly good performance” – he finds cause and validation in “first-hand” knowledge, both of locales and occupations. Keller catches this aspect of Sinclair’s life nicely, I think, by introducing him as an exemplar of the “strenuous life” (7) and by building narrative that proposes that hard work equals strong character.

Her title, too, serves well to link place and demanding work while extending it to the contradiction Sinclair negotiated all his writing life between the “unmotivated, rip-snortin’ action” demanded by the pulps and the mortgage, and the analysis of economy and society demanded by his independent-troller’s socialism. Sinclair was successful in large part because of his facility with the rip-snortin’. Keller points out that his best novel, *Poor Man’s Rock* (which Howard White should reprint), sold 80,000 copies, while *North of Fifty-three*, set in territory of which Sinclair had no first-hand knowledge, sold an astonishing 340,000 copies (219). Now he

is unknown both because the taste for the rip-snortin’ must be contemporary or medieval and because the quest for the authentic, in which Sinclair believed, is so un-postmodern.

Notwithstanding, some of my students dare to take on this successful unknown. Then I urge them to consider, before they throw the book aside, the range of industries and idealisms Richard Lane appreciates in Sinclair. Keller, even though her first aim (like Sinclair’s) is to tell a good yarn without exhaustively identifying sources or providing a trackable index, does a fine job of suggesting literary, historical, and economic contexts. Her book is a story of the writer in British Columbia, and in West Coast industry, as well as a story of one unique individual.

Although Keller’s subtitle promises “many lives,” she tracks Sinclair’s *career* as a writer quite carefully without having much to say about his writing *per se*. For the most part, story and novel are conveyed in brief plot summaries. Where and how Sinclair resists formula, his oblique use of parody, his sensitivity to vocational dialect, his revisions and their implications: these receive little or no attention. We follow, with a touch of salacious interest, the shifts in Sinclair’s love life and his uncertain relationship with editors and agents. Keller’s affecting a breezy, in-the-saddle style leaves Sinclair’s ideas distinctly in the misted background: his tideline socialism only appears a sentence at a time. But Lane engages Sinclair’s politics with zest, so that the two books combined might give the successful unknown writer a twenty-first-century chance.

*Past Reflections:
Essays on the Hudson's Bay Company in the
Southern Puget Sound Region*

Drew W. Crooks, Foreword by Jerry Eckrom

Tacoma: Printed Privately, 2001, 118 pp., Illus. US\$17.00 paper
(Fort Nisqually Foundation, 5400 North Pearl Street,
Tacoma, Washington, 98401)

BY BRUCE M. WATSON
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DREW CROOKS is one of a small but dedicated group of historically minded individuals south of the forty-ninth parallel determined to keep alive memories of the Hudson's Bay Company's role in the development of Euro-American life in that area. Unfortunately, much visible evidence has already been lost to neglect and the elements. With the sites of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts Okanagan, Colville, Nez Percés, and Hall under water; with Boise washed away; and with George (Astoria) built over, few sites remain. The minor post sites of Umpqua, Flathead/Connah, and Saleesh, as well as the more important Spokane, remain as open fields. Running counter to this trend, Fort Vancouver has been rebuilt and has become a vibrant tourist and research centre. Often overlooked is Fort Nisqually, a centre from 1832 to 1869 for the mainly agricultural activities of the HBC and its subsidiary, the Puget Sound Agriculture Company. (A recreated site at Tacoma's Point Defiance Park has assured public visibility since 1940.) Crooks, an HBC-ophile and now in charge of the Lacey Museum, has taken twelve of his post-1988 essays

and compiled them in one publication, the profits from which go to the Fort Nisqually Foundation to support the restoration of Dr. William Tolmie's home to its 1855 appearance.

This compilation is not meant to be a scholarly treatise. The titles of the first three essays ("An Eventful Life: Pierre Charles in the Pacific Northwest," "Diverse Peoples of the Hudson's Bay Company," "Shipwreck, Captivity and Rescue: The *Georgiana* Expedition to the Queen Charlotte Islands") give some indication of the scope of the papers in this volume. They range from biographies to descriptive vignettes and present an interesting glimpse into an era both before and after the border was drawn.

Of value to the historian are the several biographies of servants who retired, married, and stayed in the area. They reveal a hint of the dynamics of adjustment engaged in by retired HBC servants, their Aboriginal or mixed-descent wives, and their American counterparts. They also present a glimpse into their roles in the Aboriginal resistance to the American settlers in the War of 1855-56 as well as into how they fared (either as mixed-descent or White) with the Donation Land

Claims, the system of apportioning land to American settlers. Another essay on the ten years of uneasiness between the settlers and the retired HBC servants reveals an interesting comparison with conditions north of the border. The remainder of the essays reveal a complexity of interactions and are a reminder that British Columbia's history does not stop at the forty-ninth parallel. Of further value are the extensive endnotes, many of which are drawn from local American sources.

The general mood and tenor of the essays is summed up in the preface in a quotation of one descendant, Cecelia Carpenter: "When the British had come, they had stated their goals of fur gathering and farming, had given the Indian people protection from their enemies, had offered them employment and, as single men, had married their daughters. A bond had been formed." The book is worth the price. Besides, it supports a worthy

*Citizens' Hall:
Making Local Democracy Work*

Andre Carrel

Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001, 176 pp. \$19.95 paper

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Moyie, BC

cause.

In *Citizens' Hall: Making Local Democracy Work*, Carrel lays out his proposal for establishing municipal charters – or constitutions – that recognize that government legitimacy resides in citizens rather than in other governments. He starts by considering the well known state of municipal government in Canada, where local government is the creature of a provincial government. Carrel laments the inherent colonialism involved in this situation, which ensures that, although citizens may have rights, they have no power. This is not a new lament, but Carrel approaches it from many angles. He argues that because municipal governments are structured to carry out the will of provincial gov-

ernments they are non-democratic. They are not so much governments as administrative arms of the province, unable to respond to citizens in a democratic fashion.

In fact, in British Columbia, local governments can behave democratically only if they brave the daunting Local Government Act. Carrel's example is Rossland, a community of about 4,000 in the West Kootenays, where he served as municipal administrator. There he and the team he centred brought Rossland a constitutional bylaw (bylaw no. 1728, entitled "A bylaw to regulate the use of referenda and elector initiatives in local government matters"), that gave citizens the right to challenge any proposed bylaw, put it to referendum,

and, with 20 per cent of the voting public agreeing, send it back to the town council to be fixed. This constitutional bylaw also gave the councillors the right (again with the consent of one in five voters) to initiate a referendum that, if approved, council would have to act upon within a year. According to Carrel, these approvals can be accommodated under the Local Government Act, thus rooting the political power of the council in its citizens.

Nevertheless, Carrel continually points out that many people consider the constitutional bylaw to be "illegal" because it refers political decisions to the citizens rather than to provincial statutes and regulations. He believes that it is the council's task to enable citizens to define the problem and empower them to contribute to its solution; it is *not* the council's task to "make the tough decisions" on its own.

In the constitutional bylaw's first decade, Rossland voted on thirteen referenda. The result, Carrel assures us, was an enhanced trust between the voters and their town council; a better understanding of, and more participation in, the affairs of the town; and council elections that depended upon the character of the candidates rather than upon the character of the issues. Rossland's constitutional bylaw cannot overcome all the town's problems; however, in many communities something like it could start a municipal evolution away from provincial domination.

Carrel, who was born and raised in Switzerland, where referenda are

frequent, has studied his subject widely, and he finds strong support for his belief that citizens have the right to differ and that centralization douses creativity. He critiques provincial folly, which he sees as the product of citizen apathy – an apathy that has come about due to provincial suppression of municipal aspirations.

The reader is asked to regret bungling and waste. For example, Carrel tells us how provincial authorities require only bookkeeping, not accounting, from local governments. Because of this, there is nothing on the books about the value of community-owned capital works. Sewers are recorded only as expenditures, and, in the cash-flow world of municipal politics, that means that the scarce financial resources used to maintain them do not show up on the books. Carrel is right in his description of the problem, but the problem is one of administrative requirements rather than one of democratic rights.

The value of Carrel's book is to be found in his idea of citizen participation, of how Carrel would draw citizens into intelligent discussion by making a referendum involve much more than a yes/no decision. What worked in Rossland would not work everywhere, and it offers only one step towards what Carrel and scores of others have been seeking for decades. But *Citizens' Hall* does propose a useful response to municipal powerlessness. It is an intriguing case study and, for those interested in governance at the local level, is worth reading.