

Outpost: John McLoughlin and the Far Northwest

Dorothy Nafus Morrison

Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999.

641 pp. Illus., maps. US\$45 cloth.

By Morag McLachlan

Vancouver

IN 1957 THE STATE LEGISLATURE of Oregon conferred the title "Father of Oregon" on John McLoughlin. Statues have been erected in his honour, his home has been preserved, his portrait has been painted, and many places carry his name. He has become in many respects a mythical figure.

In 1824 McLoughlin arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River to take charge of the commercial interests of the Hudson's Bay Company, which had been granted the sole British trading rights to the area west of the Rockies between 54'40" and 42'N. During the long and fractious process of defining the boundary between the expanding United States of America and British territory, this area was held in joint occupancy. This condition obtained until the border was finally settled in 1846, a much longer period than was originally intended when the agreement was reached in 1818.

As Americans ventured into the territory, McLoughlin gave those in need assistance rather than following the Hudson's Bay Company policy of discouraging settlement and vigorously opposing all competition. When McLoughlin failed to implement policies to Governor George Simpson's satisfaction, he was forced out of the Company, became an American citizen, and attempted to establish his own business. On a frontier where no rule of law yet existed, some greedy Americans

persuaded Congress to enact legislation that deprived McLoughlin of most of his holdings. Many of the accounts written about Oregon's early history have been a mea culpa for this shabby treatment and, in the process, Hudson's Bay Company policies have been vilified.

In this study, Dorothy Nafus Morrison has taken advantage of the wealth of material available to reveal the known facts about McLoughlin's life, from his early family history to his post-humous awards. She provides background information that places him in his own time and place. Although the book is a heavy tome, the print is clear and readable, and all references are confined to an appendix and identified by page number. The large collection of interesting pictures and illustrations make it evident that this work was not produced in haste. Morrison corrects many of the exaggerated accounts that fed the myth, but even though she cites incidents that reveal poor leadership, her portrayal of McLoughlin is, on the whole, warm and sympathetic. She sees him as a tragic hero who "shows courage and skill but is destroyed by implacable fate, by his virtues, and by his own character flaws" (xix).

Simpson's decision to replace McLoughlin was made easier because one of the members of the triumvirate that took control was James Douglas, a man of undoubted ability. When Douglas became governor of the

colonies of Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, he was fiercely resented by many of the settlers who remained after the gold rush. He faced a much more difficult situation than had McLoughlin. Although historians have restored his reputation, he has not received the acclaim accorded McLoughlin. The smouldering resentment among Americans against the

British as an outcome of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 made a hero of a man who was rejected by a British company and betrayed by rogue Americans. Douglas, striving to maintain British control on a volatile frontier, was perceived to be autocratic by settlers from Upper Canada, who had very recently achieved responsible government.

Ranald MacDonald: Pacific Rim Adventurer

Jo Ann Roe

Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1997.
256 pp. Ilus., map. \$28.95 paper.

The City of Yes

Peter Oliva

Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999. 336 pp. \$21.99 paper.

By Jean Wilson
UBC Press

IF YOU ARE a fur trade aficionado, especially of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) lore and lives, you will have heard of Ranald MacDonald. His life, by any measure, was adventurous and his legacy long-lasting, and references to him crop up in many HBC and Pacific Northwest histories. The first son of HBC clerk Archibald McDonald (his children adopted the "Mac" spelling) and Koale'zoa, daughter of the Chinook leader Concomly, Ranald lived a long life (1824-94) during which he spent time as a child and young man at Ft. George and Ft. Vancouver in the Columbia District as well as at Red River in Rupert's Land and St. Thomas, Upper Canada.

Between 1848 and 1858 he wandered the world as an ordinary seaman and as a whaler, visiting ports in Britain, Europe, Africa, the United States, Hawaii, and Asia. He also lived for a year in Japan and in Australia before returning to North America to participate in the Cariboo gold rush and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition (VIEE 1864), and to settle into the roadhouse business and then ranching near Ft. Colville, where he died.

It is MacDonald's experience in Japan that is perhaps most noteworthy and that is the focus of Jo Ann Roe's biography and a parallel theme to the main narrative in Peter Oliva's novel.