

Lions Gate

Lilia d'Acres and Donald Luxton

Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1999. 176 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

By Cyril Leonoff
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LIONS GATE is the rags to riches story of Alfred J.T. Taylor and the bridge that he promoted, which now spans the entrance to Vancouver harbour. Small by present-day standards, Lions Gate Bridge, with its graceful lines and high visibility, has nevertheless become a local icon.

Fred Taylor, born in Victoria in 1887, was the eldest of the four children of George Taylor, an itinerant scientist/preacher, and Elizabeth Williams, the daughter of an Anglican minister. At the age of nine, with the death of his mother in childbirth and the frequent absences of his father, Fred had the responsibility of caring for his younger siblings. He dropped out of school at fourteen and, with an interest in mechanics, he secured a position as apprentice at a Nanaimo foundry and later at a Vancouver shipyard. Brilliant at his jobs with various industrial companies, Fred quickly climbed the management ladder. At the age of twenty-five, principal of his own firm, Taylor was establishing international contacts in mining and engineering. In 1923 he moved to London with his Scottish wife and family, where he engaged in international entrepreneurial ventures. Overnight the Taylors moved up to "the manners and mansions of British high society" (28).

In 1928 A.J.T. Taylor formed British Pacific Securities as a tax haven for British investment capital in the Empire. For his most speculative venture he

looked homeward to 4,000 acres of prime residential properties in West Vancouver at the foot of the North Shore mountains. These British Pacific Properties were financed mainly by the Guinness brewing family. Taylor obtained civic approval for a private-enterprise bridge needed to gain access to these lands. However, because of the Depression and federal political manoeuvring, it took ten years before the bridge was built in 1937-8. The authors attribute delays to covert lobbying against the project by the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had its own lands to market on the South Shore. Taylor had a fallout with his financial backers, largely because of dormant land sales; the housing project would not take off until after the end of the Second World War. On completion of the bridge, he resigned from the presidency into obscurity and died of cancer at the age of fifty-seven. His only monument is Taylor Way, leading up to the British Properties.

In retrospect, Lions Gate Bridge has served its purpose in opening to development some of the best residential subdivisions in Canada. The negative impact has been the environmental damage caused by the south approach driveway, which bisects Stanley Park, and the north approach driveway, which trespasses on land belonging to the Squamish Indian Band. Sixty years later, the success of Taylor's venture may be measured by the incapacity of the bridge to cope with traffic.

The authors give short biographies of other minor players, including Charles Marega, sculptor of the pair of massive concrete lions who guard the south portal; Palmer and Bow, architects of the Taylor home at Kew Beach; and such incidental persons as the *News-Herald's* Evelyn Caldwell (Penny Wise), who hazarded a dizzying walk across the construction catwalk. Surprisingly, no background information is offered on the engineering designers, Monsarrat and Pratley of Montreal, who are described only as "the leading bridge design firm in Canada" (37), or on their associate, W.G. (Bill) Swan, Vancouver's foremost civil engineer of the day. And little information is provided on the contractors who built the bridge.

Admittedly, D'Acres and Luxton are out of their depth when it comes to describing the engineering features of the suspension bridge and "can only

wonder at the complexity of the calculations ... undertaken with nothing more than a slide rule" (65). Yet such problems as pier construction in the turbulent waters of the First Narrows, aerodynamic stability in the windy inlet, and earthquake resistance would be of interest to this reviewer. Also missing is a tabulation giving length of channel span, ships' clearance, and width and length of roadway and approaches – all statistics upon which great bridges are judged.

Handsomely designed and profusely illustrated, *Lions Gate* will appeal particularly to heritage conservers, the tourist industry, and nostalgic Vancouverites. The strength of the book lies in the excellent series of photographs taken throughout the construction period, many the work of industrial photographer Leonard Frank.

Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings

Jonathan Raban

New York: Pantheon (Random), 1999. 435 pp. \$37.95 cloth

By Nancy Pagh

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DURING his cruise from Seattle to Juneau, Jonathan Raban stops at a Ketchikan restaurant, orders a glass of Merlot, and muses: "the dining room seemed a good perch from which to survey the voyage so far, and to try to see if anything resembling a pattern or story was discernible in its tumble of places and events. Not much, not yet. While a number of wispy narrative strands had begun to emerge, I knew that journeys hardly ever disclose their true

meaning until after – and sometimes years after – they are over" (366). Too impatient to allow this story to age into "true meaning," Raban seems rather quick to offer the loosely knit account of sailing his thirty-five-foot sailboat north. The narrative's shapelessness (even by the standards of the travel "ramble"), predictability, and occasional misinformation are irritating and disappointing. Yet for readers particularly interested in exploration, sea literature, and, more specifically, the layers