

Nicholas Morant's Canadian Pacific

J.F. Garden

Revelstoke: Footprint, 1999. 455 pp. Illus. \$89.95 cloth.

By Wallace Chung

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NICHOLAS Morant's *Canadian Pacific*, by J.F. Garden, is a magnificent book of photography that was first published in 1991. The present book is the fourth printing, and it was issued in 1999 as a special edition to commemorate the life and work of Morant, who died on 13 March 1999.

Morant was a "special photographer" for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), and he was employed in the Department of Public Relations from 1929 to 1981. His employment spanned the tenure of seven CPR presidents, from Sir Edward Beatty to Ian Sinclair. Being a strong-willed individual, with good credentials as a photographic reporter, he was able to extract from the company privileges and freedom of activity that was granted to no other. In 1929, Beatty needed someone like Morant to strengthen his media battle with the Canadian National Railways (CNR). Morant's photographic duties covered the many and diverse activities of the CPR, but the book is predominantly concerned with his work along the tracks; that is, it is concerned with railway activities.

The book consists of 455 pages, with the first thirty-four containing the preface, introduction, and a brief description of Morant's career. The bibliography and glossary occupy the last six pages. The remaining 415 pages almost follow the format of a CPR-annotated guide, describing landmarks as the train travels from Montreal to

Vancouver, though on a much grander scale. Like a guidebook, it is divided into Eastern Lines and Western Lines, with the division at Current River just east of Thunder Bay. Only forty-four pages are devoted to the Eastern Lines, while 371 are devoted to the Western Lines. Of the latter, 265 pages (two-thirds of the book) are concerned with sites in British Columbia. The emphasis on British Columbia is hardly surprising. Where else in Canada could one find such awesome sights as the soaring peaks of the Rockies or such vivid changes of scenery between summers and winters? Perhaps more important, both Morant and Garden are natives of British Columbia. The book, therefore, should have great appeal to British Columbians.

Besides being a talented photographer, Morant was also a perfectionist. Everything had to be right. Fortunately, this prerequisite was aided by his uncanny ability to select the right time, place, and light for his photographs. Not only have some of his photographs become internationally renowned, but many of the places that he photographed have become famous. One such place was even named after him: Morant's Curve (20). One cold winter morning in 1976 he was driving some guests along Highway 1A between Banff and Lake Louise. He instinctively stopped at mile 113.0 of the Laggan Subdivision, just as the sun broke through the storm clouds. The valley and the five snow-covered

peaks in the background were then bathed in sunlight. A gentle mist was rising from the river. At that precise moment, the *Canadian*, with its gleaming aluminium body, emerged from the mist, gracefully following the gentle curve of the half-frozen Bow River. The ethereal effect of this world-famous photograph probably could only be duplicated by computer-generated photo-animation.

Another landmark made famous by Morant is the Stony Creek Bridge, an engineering feat of massive curving steel arches (277). Here, Morant exercised his ingenuity by using his personally built scaffolding in order to obtain the correct height and angle. And here, in a famous locale, he was able to publicize the CPR's supreme achievement in railroad building and to showcase any new rolling stock as it crossed over this imposing bridge.

On the dust jacket, the publisher offers the hope that the book will be the finest produced on the CPR. If the objective is for the reader to share and enjoy Morant's wonderful photographs, then what is achieved is way beyond the book's stated goal. There are pages upon pages of magnificent photographs, superbly reproduced. Many are in colour and many have never previously been printed. Around them, Garden has cleverly interwoven pertinent facts and interesting anecdotes. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but with the added description of time, place, and occasion, those thousand words are magnified in meaning and significance. An example of this is the picture on the title page. It depicts a cold, wintry day in 1951, with the entire landscape bathed in a bluish hue that created a beautiful scene. A *Selkirk* and a *Royal Hudson*, billowing steam into the frigid air, are pulling a train across the famous

Stoney Creek Bridge. This photograph takes on special significance when we learn that this is a royal train en route to Vancouver, carrying Princess Elizabeth (the future queen) and Prince Philip within its warm carriages. It is these short anecdotes and descriptions that I found most stimulating, for they enticed me to seek more information.

This book should appeal to a wide audience, including train lovers, photographers, historians, tourists, and the many thousands whose lives were directly or indirectly associated with the CPR. The technical buff, seeing "a dramatic picture of G3b class 4-6-2 No.2308 on a double-ended freight coming around Jackfish Curve" (70), would want to look up Omer Lavalée's book *Canadian Pacific Steam Locomotives* in order to obtain more detailed information about this steam train.

For the historian the book is a gold mine of information, and it encourages further research. Such research may, for example, focus on an eccentric chairman or a special occasion (such as the visit of the king and queen in 1939). Or it may focus on a special development that profoundly altered the profile of the CPR, like the transformation of its motive power from steam to diesel in the 1960s. In these pages we see the sad sight of hundreds of sidelined steam locomotives, formerly loyal work horses, rusting neglected in railyards, waiting to be scrapped (84-7). Scrapping proceeded rapidly in 1959, when N.R. Crump, a strong advocate of dieselization, became senior vice-president. He, one may add, is not a friend of those prairie residents who mourn the passing of the steam train. Crump, astute and having a will of iron, became one of the CPR's great chairmen. He would never allow sentimentality to interfere with the bottom line. He was said to have answered his

critics by saying: "When people talk to me about the lonely cry of the steam whistle in the middle of the night on the prairie, I say bullshit!"

The steam whistle has given way to the airhorn. The water tanks are all gone. The grain elevators, for decades the trademark of the prairie landscape, are rapidly vanishing. Fortunately, all these important artefacts of our Canadian heritage are faithfully preserved in this book.

Nicholas Morant's Canadian Pacific is an important addition to the historical literature of the CPR and, indeed, of Canada. It advertises itself as a book of photographs – as a book to be shared and enjoyed. But, in fact, it achieves a

much greater objective. It is a book that gives us more than just enjoyment. By using the medium of photography, a medium whose truthfulness and objectivity would be difficult to surpass, it documents the evolution of a great Canadian enterprise – one that, for over a century, pervaded every aspect of Canadian life, be it economic, political, or social. This book helps to preserve part of a vanishing Canadian heritage – the CPR steam trains that did so much to unite and develop Canada as a nation. Our profound gratitude goes not only to Morant, but also to Garden and all those dedicated individuals who helped to craft this wonderful work.

*The Forgotten Side of the Border:
British Columbia's Elk Valley and Crownsnest Pass*

Wayne Norton and Naomi Miller, editors

Kamloops: Plateau, 1998. 238 pp. Illus., map. \$19.95 paper.

By Keith Ralston

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EARLY writing of BC history arose out of the pride of local residents in what they saw as the accomplishments of the comparatively short span of settler society. It reflected mainstream British Columbians' preoccupation with their own province and a traditional "million-miles-from-Ottawa" feeling (applicable also, on this marginal edge of European colonization, to London and New York). With the rise of institutions like the provincial library and archives and, later, the universities and colleges, scholarly insights have taken their place alongside popular history.

Strangely enough, British Columbia academic history has been a bit of a "scholarly deficit" field. Many of those trained in provincial history departments have sought their research topics in other specialties, while British Columbia has not had the influx of scholars from other areas and schools that has characterized, say, the twentieth-century study of the Canadian Prairies. The result has been a small number of academic historians confronting a dauntingly large endeavour.

Yet, in many respects, this picture is a lopsided one. British Columbians, as Margaret Ormsby, the doyenne of