

number of relatively prominent Italian-Canadian families in Vancouver and the activities of some of their members and the institutions with which they were associated. In fairness, and despite the author's claim in his preface, these cannot be claimed as being all of Vancouver's pioneer Italians.

Culos does incorporate, however, a wealth of detail in this volume, and

he is to be complimented for having devoted himself so assiduously to what clearly has been a labour of love. Perhaps we can look forward to other studies from him that will expand this undertaking to include the many thousands who have featured in the broader history of Vancouver's Italian-Canadians.

The Hotel Georgia: A Vancouver Tradition

Sean Rossiter

Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1998. 128 pp. Illus. \$40 cloth.

BY RHODRI WINDSOR LISCOMBE
University of British Columbia

The construction of identity, especially as the representation of social grouping, is a pre-occupation of poststructural discourse. In setting aside the authority of document or text and author, the necessary concern to account for the person has legitimated closer study of the ephemeral and anecdotal staffage of lived lives. This enables greater attention to be directed towards the manner in which we inscribe and invest meaning through the apparently commonplace. The postcard, photograph, and publicity copy are now recognized as significant bearers of meaning, especially around popular attitudes.

That resource is exploited most effectively in this entertaining, if uncritical, biography of a local landmark. Illustrative material and personal narratives relate the changing repute of the Hotel Georgia and the socio-economic context of Vancouver from the former's construction in 1927 to

the present. These are arranged in a partly chronological, partly thematic, structure obviously designed to attract the new cyberspaced reader accustomed to chatty yet seldom annotated script and highly sophisticated visual techniques. This envisioned digital medium also requires sequenced structure, which the book designer, George Vaitkunos, has mimicked with elegant discipline through the architecture of the main photographic plates. These begin with an entry grouping of tinted postcards of the hotel and its environs, which provides a timely reminder of the extent to which we establish meaning through the very process of looking or of the acquiring of visual record. The placement of the Hotel Georgia and of other civic edifices in these postcards, so as to stress the buildings' commanding scale and hence technical attainment in relation to the magnificent topography, articulate the rhetoric of the last phase of the

Imperial era in Canada. The aggrandizement of everyday commerce and social activity is signified through architectural and urban construction and its associated mapping and exploiting of the vast natural resources beyond its boundaries but under the control of its networks of transportation and influence. Later pictures – excellently chosen by Sean Rossiter and his researcher Meg Stanley – reconstruct the subsequent envisioning of Vancouver as American modern metropolis or Pacific Rim entrepot. All the while, other photographs of the building and events within or without its historicized walls display, or unintentionally deconstruct, the cementing of popular civic identity with real-estate investment. The survival of the hotel, indeed, is less the consequence of the heritage sensibility the book embodies than the result of the real-estate development opportunities accruing to the current owner through conservation of its fabric.

The conflictual aspect of the urban development in which the Hotel Georgia is involved, however, can only be inferred through the photographic material. The text excludes the problematization of such larger operations or of contingent factors; in that respect this book corresponds with the account of the Empress Hotel written by Terry Reksten and also published recently by Douglas and MacIntyre. Both Rossiter and Reksten prefer to narrate the pattern of events largely through recounting the conventional life stories of the major proponents, or actors, from the redoubtable Colonel Henry Tobin to the resourceful Peter Eng (present owner) or his architect Bing Thom. It is largely the contemporary journalistic record of doing, interspersed with the selected archaeology of related artefacts, such as the

Canadian Pacific Railway Night Letter authorizing construction. Those “human interest” stories obviously matter, pace the current preoccupation in architectural history with the ideological instead of formal-structural building of the walls.

Nevertheless, the text would benefit by a closer analysis of typology – paradigmatic models of plans and iconography – and of professional and political context. For example, the design style of the Hotel Georgia is rather loosely denominated Beaux-Arts classical of the United States stripe. More likely it corresponds with the Wrennaissance mode popularized by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker in London commercial architecture, a notable example being Britannia House 1919–20. The Georgia was erected contemporaneously with the completion of the hybrid Indian neoclassical Vice-Regal complex at New Delhi (1913–31), which marked the final vaunting of Imperial myth that still prevailed in pre-Depression Vancouver. The formal composition and internal plan of the Georgia are also less complex than is contemporary United States and eastern Canadian hotel architecture due to Vancouver’s economic and demographic situation. Its other cultural coordinate, the Bay Region, is evident in the Mezo-American (namely, Aztec) ornamentation of the ballroom: a modest echo of the exotic imagery of Hollywood movie theatres offset by the comfortably British Club décor of the original dining room.

Beyond the continuing relevance of iconographic analysis in measuring presumed and received meaning in architecture is the potential for contextual explication afforded by closer examination of technical design and development financing. Rossiter in-

cludes a useful summary of the investment network behind the commissioning of the hotel, one that underlines the intriguing happenstance of familial, professional, and service contacts. More might have been included on the statutory financial requirements, and on how these have altered over the intervening decades, so as to demonstrate the commercial politics of modern urban development. That latent privatization of the public domain through manifestation of supposedly commercial improvement is a tale but little or poorly told in the literature of town planning and political economy. Similarly, a closer comparative reading of the layout, accommodation categories, and

service facilities of the hotel would have augmented the historical contribution of the book and its visual ethnography of a site of civic memory.

Despite the relative absence of critical and contextual analysis, this visually based approach to architectural history is worthwhile. The inclusion of the popular visual record offers a legitimate means to counterbalance the more recent tendency to concentrate on the theoretical and discursive fabrication of the built environment. Architecture, more than any other cultural production, involves the popular and the commonplace in its strategies of economic, functional, and symbolic representation.

Canada and Asia: Guide to Archives and Manuscript Sources in Canada

G. Raymond Nunn

London and New York: Mansell, 1999. 2 vols. 1304 pp. \$371 cloth.

BY GEORGE BRANDAK

University of British Columbia

There has been a lengthy discussion on an archives list-server recently about how students are not making sufficient use of archival resources. A perusal of the sources relating to Canada and Asia in these two volumes should give any students sufficient information to develop studies on Asian-Canadian subjects. The index has approximately 50,000 entries and is the key to the mammoth compilation. It brings together material from various archival

institutions in Canada and enters them under both subject and location.

Raymond Nunn's extensive research trips came after the publication of *Asia and Oceania: A Guide to Archival and Manuscript Sources in the United States* (Mansell 1986). Although Canada was not a colonizing country, he noted that its research collections had features similar to those of the colonial powers. These included Asia-related documents of government departments (particularly external affairs and immigration),