

## Book Reviews

*Barkerville days*, by Fred W. Ludditt. Vancouver, Mitchell Press, 1969. 182 pp.

*The Surrey story*, by G. Fern Treleaven. Surrey, Surrey Museum and Historical Society, 1969. 72 pp.

Local history helps compound its own dilemma. And partly because they play in a larger field, professional historians usually ignore local history, and leave it to the enthusiastic amateurs who have no training in research, no sense of “Big” history as George Bernard Shaw called it, no sense of form or of writing style or of focus, and they leave it to these people to write and for themselves to criticize. Ironically, without the local historians who press governments for archives and museums, professionals would not have the resources for their “more rewarding” studies. Without resources “Big” history will become “Little Arthur” history — another Shaw term — unless the professionally trained historians give leadership and backing to the local amateurs.

Because the professional or “name” historians back away from local history, local historians seldom become known outside their own localities. And sometimes they fail even there because they are so ineptly written that they do not even satisfy an untrained reader. As a result, the reputation of local history becomes so bad that city newspapers even refuse to review good ones and local TV stations blandly ignore the writers of local history no matter how desperate the station for Canadian content. With no free publicity, book sales become restricted and limited, and the enthusiastic writer and the enthusiastic publisher — usually an impoverished society — is stuck with a pile of copies which can only be remaindered, or bronzed and sold as doorstops. This pile of remainders discourages both the publisher and the author from making any further effort. But before long another foolhardy but intrepid bastard son of Clío tries again. At

that moment the professionals should be rising to their feet and shouting "bravo." For without these less legitimate sons of Clio, despite their lack of the blessing of Apollo, the constitution of the Muse would be in an even worse condition than it is.

Unfortunately with the appearance of another offspring to be sacrificed another would-be publisher will go to another group of people who will think at the moment that exactly what it needs is a local history, that the idea is absolutely stupendous and why didn't someone think of it before, and that the group will guarantee to buy so many hundred copies. The guarantee is usually just enough to ensure that the publisher can almost break even if he can then sell just exactly that many more. Then on the day of publication, after the publisher has been persuaded to print two thousand more copies than he had planned to print or than he could afford to print, all those people will find that the book is too liberal, too conservative, too radical; too political, too social, too religious, too economic. It has too few pages, pictures, or maps. It is "too" something or other. Then no publicity, then no sales, and then another pile to be remaindered or bronzed.

Though knowing all that, the professionals do little to help change the picture. Instead, they continue to complain that an amateur compiles a warehouse of fact which is only of interest to people who can overlook the flaws, or to people who must overlook the flaws, or to the families who are noted, one by one. Or to tourists. Many works are easy to complain about. So are such works as those by G. Fern Treleaven, whose *The Surrey story* the Surrey Museum and Historical Society published, and Fred W. Ludditt, whose *Barkerville days* Mitchell press has published. But at least these local histories by the non-professionals are in print, and while both are of value, both have obvious flaws which detract from them as artistic wholes and which might have been avoided with some professional guidance.

*The Surrey story* has no unity, but to impose a unity on Surrey would be almost an impossibility anyway. The first in a series, this book is in four sections or chapters, each concerned with ten years in the development of the area, the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties. These "ten year" chapters are further divided into smaller topics more easily handled; Section II, 1870-1879, breaks into such sections as Change, More Pre-emptions, The Woodward and John Oliver, Surrey Centre, and Provincial Money for Roads. The result is that the history of British Columbia's largest municipality, fragmented and scattered anyway, is shattered into even more pieces. And the sense of fragmentation is furthered still by the

plethora of single-sentence paragraphs which insult and exasperate good readers. The book is, in fact, loaded with information, with detail collected but not digested. The roads, the settlers, the major buildings, all are recorded, all appear, but in isolation and never as part of a larger connected unit. Each ten-year section ends with a summary which, inconsistent in format, rather than summarizing or pulling everything together, only adds more material, only adds more detail which is given no historical significance.

In addition, the manuscript should have been more carefully proofread before publication. Besides being packed with information, each section has disconcerting errors: the preface has a spelling error, page two an error in logic, page five an error in fact. Furthermore, interesting but irrelevant scraps of knowledge add to the story in no way; for instance, the information that friction matches were invented in England the same year as the Hudson's Bay Company built Fort Langley does not appear to be a force in the story of Surrey. Such criticism may seem to be quibbling, but these niggling flaws help destroy the effect created by the six excellent maps and the many fine photographs. At the very end of the book is a list of early pre-emptors and settlers, but no bibliography or index.

Fred Ludditt's *Barkerville days* has most of the faults of *The Surrey story*, but is a much more ambitious production. It has an index that does not always work, maps as end papers only, and no bibliography. The book begins with a chapter on Ludditt's going to Wells, and ends with two chapters on how the restoration of Barkerville came about and how it is progressing. The fourteen other chapters tell the story of gold in the area from 1858 to 1939 and later. The whole is a racy reworking of the familiar, but with more of the personal and social approach than is usual, and with new information about the early days and about the gold rush of the 1930's. He quotes sparingly and gives the whole a sense of being reminiscences; of course it cannot be reminiscences because Mr. Ludditt did not arrive in the area until 1930, but his long association with the community may be what makes this seem to be a "personal" book.

Like *The Surrey story*, *Barkerville days* has no real focus, no real theme, though it too is packed with information, especially those chapters directly on the historical gold rush. But the book is difficult to read, partly because it has no direction, partly because the writing is choppy, and partly because of the organization within chapters. Ludditt will begin telling about something, shift to something else, and then perhaps come back to his original point. And, like the author of *The Surrey story*, he cannot tell a

story on paper. Quite often he attempts to give local colour through anecdote, but he cannot inject that knee-slapping laughter that comes from and goes with a good story teller. And he cannot reproduce dialogue. Such efforts at stories are better left to people who can tell them, who know the techniques of telling a story on paper. This province sorely misses such men as R. M. Campbell and B. A. McKelvie in that field.

It is a shame that this work too was not edited more carefully in manuscript. A good editor would have excised much of the first chapter and the last two which leave an uneasiness in a reader who worries about why the book was published. These last two chapters are based on very shaky ground. They make some exceedingly good points about restoration and reconstruction but assume far too much. Mr. Ludditt forgets or did not know that some people in Victoria had quietly been working for years to save old Barkerville. A civil engineer by the name of Potter was one, and though also unsung he too knew Lottie Bowron, who was born in Barkerville, and Ralph Chetwynd, the Minister of Trade and Industry, and he too knew Willard Ireland and others on the Centennial Committee. What really prods one to question these chapters, however, is a comment about the members of the Cariboo Historical Society stealing the headboard from the Chartres Brew grave in the old Barkerville cemetery. Mr. Ludditt says that they stole it to draw attention to themselves. Mr. Ludditt is dead wrong. The three people who planned the theft and stole the headboard would not have dared tell anyone what they were going to do because they knew that they could be charged with desecrating a grave. And they stole the headboard to attract province-wide attention to the shocking and neglected condition of that old town. When more than a month had passed and no one had yet noticed the disappearance of the headboard, no one from Barkerville or Wells or Quesnel, no one from the Provincial Government, the "thieves" then tipped off the authorities that the headboard was missing. Anonymously, of course. The hue and cry following was exactly what the "thieves" wanted, especially when the board was reported as having been seen in a car crossing the U.S. border, as having been seen in Regina, Toronto, and Calgary. Their plan was working. In the fall, when tipped off in turn that an arrest was soon to be made — again anonymously tipped off — the three immediately informed the authorities that the board was safely hidden in Quesnel. The Provincial Archivist "discovered" it, had his picture taken with it, and wisely said nothing. As a result of their foolhardiness, the still unnamed three might have been as effective as any other group or person in drawing attention to the need for making Barkerville an historic site. Mr. Lud-

ditt would have had difficulty in learning the truth about that theft because the desecrators had been very quiet about the escapade themselves, but of Mr. Potter, Mr. Ludditt should have been aware. And should have been content to bring out the history, and keep away from current events and editorial comment.

In spite of this carping though, and because of the problems of writing and producing local history, these books would be worthwhile and interesting if only for having been done — *The Surrey story*, the first about Surrey; and *Barkerville days*, refining and expanding earlier work. But again, such efforts need leadership from the professionals. Leadership and encouragement. And from both local and provincial governments. Subsidies, perhaps?

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*S.S. Beaver: The ship that saved the West*, by Derek Pethick. Mitchell Press Ltd., Vancouver. Ill. index. 160 pp. \$9.75.

The career of the Hudson's Bay Company's S.S. *Beaver*, the first steam vessel in the North Pacific, covers the years 1836 to 1888, a period that spans the transition from wilderness to civilization, the discovery of gold, the birth of the colony of British Columbia, the establishment of responsible government and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. She played a part in every major development of the era, and thus a history of the *Beaver* must in itself comprise a history of the men and women who brought this province into being.

Derek Pethick has written a scholarly and detailed account of the faithful little steamer from her launch on the Thames in 1835 to her death on the rocks of Stanley Park 53 years later. He has consulted all available log books, (many are unfortunately missing), her fur books in the Provincial Archives, the invaluable correspondence of Simpson, McLoughlin, Eden Colville and other Hudson's Bay officials, and the files of contemporary newspapers during her later years. He gives an interesting account of recent salvage work on the *Beaver's* wreck, and devotes a chapter to the authenticity or otherwise of the surviving *Beaver* relics. The number of these must be as numerous as those of the true cross, and some are equally spurious.

The exhaustive footnotes show the extent of Mr. Pethick's research,