

River is in fact to another vessel of the same name, an American stern-wheeler.

These are minor matters in a book that is a valuable addition to the library of British Columbiana. The volume is handsomely produced with good paper and wide margins, and is a credit to the designer, John Houghton, and to the publishers, Mitchell Press.

Vancouver

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*Alexander Mackenzie and the North West*, by Roy Daniells. London: Faber and Faber, 1969. 219 pp., maps and photographs. \$6.00.

Canadians have been reluctant to endow their historical figures with the qualities of legend, or to accord them symbolic lustre. With few exceptions, our history is peopled with men and women who are strictly life-size, if not a bit prosaic. Such is not the case with Alexander Mackenzie as portrayed by Roy Daniells. In this brief, popular account the author has emphasized both the symbolic and legendary aspects of the Mackenzie character and accomplishment. In doing so, he has produced a book of considerable interest.

The author's approach is, perhaps, partially explained by the fact that he is not an historian in the professional sense. Instead, he is a poet and literary scholar who was, for many years, head of the English department at the University of British Columbia. It is not surprising, then, that his book is rich in allusions to classical literature and freer in terms of speculation and conjecture than most historical accounts. In giving his imagination a wider freedom than many historians would allow, Professor Daniells is often thought-provoking and sometimes unconvincing. It is fascinating to think of Mackenzie's voyages in relation to Homer's *Odyssey* and to compare his leadership with that of Caesar. It may also be fruitful to consider his arduous and, in terms of his goal, unsuccessful trip to the Arctic as, "a parable through which to interpret Canadian history." However, there are times when the author proceeds from the specific to the general with unsettling facility. For example, in writing of Mackenzie's easy relations with Athapascan-speaking Indians, Daniells concludes that, "He was temperamentally averse to violence and had, in any case, no means of making more than a token show of force. To this day, Canadian diplomacy, even in the international field, is marked by deliberate

caution, by a consistent desire for adjustment and compromise." It is all too simplistic. One might begin countering by suggesting that there was nothing particularly unusual about Mackenzie's dealings with the Indians. Trained as a fur trader, he shared the attitude of commercial self-interest which had long conditioned the Canadian fur trade to undertake peaceful dealings with the essential suppliers of raw materials. One might also argue that Canada's "desire" for adjustment and compromise in international affairs stems from the fact that we have little choice. As Gérard Bergeron has put it, "We are among the manipulated rather than the manipulators."

The author is more persuasive when he confines himself to Mackenzie's activities and character. Quoting extensively from the explorer's Arctic journal and from *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793*, he writes of both voyages with a fine eye for colourful detail and significant incident. We are shown Mackenzie and his voyageurs pursuing white whales in their bark canoe amid Arctic icefields; narrowly averting disaster in the rapids of the McGregor River; coolly encountering hostile natives along the upper waters of the Fraser. We get a real sense of the danger, discomfort, and fear which were frequently encountered, and overcome by the explorers.

What is truly remarkable about Mackenzie, however, is the perspective he brings to the adventures of his voyages. The most hair-raising brush with death is regarded as a mere incident, noteworthy only to the extent that it threatens the progress and ultimate goal of the expedition. Mackenzie emerges as a man of steely resolution and impressive self-reliance. It is his "organized effort of will" which overcomes obstacles and allays the frequent fears of his men. Such heroic qualities, the author is careful to point out, have little to do with adventuring for adventuring's sake. Rather, they are inspired by pragmatic, business motives — a desire to extend the fur trade, and "concern for financial success." Nonetheless, there is something boldly imaginative about his plan to augment Britain's commercial empire by establishing her possession of the Pacific coast from the Columbia north to the Russian sphere of influence — a distance of about 1200 miles measured in a straight line. It is within this broad design, compounded of the pragmatic and the imaginative, that Mackenzie's wilderness adventures in a battered canoe are best understood.

In assessing Mackenzie's achievement, the author sometimes enters the realm of the might-have-been, an entertaining but not very instructive area. For example, he writes: "An interesting possibility appears when we

try to forecast what would have occurred if Mackenzie's recommendations had been listened to and implemented, if the three Pacific posts he envisaged had all been established. One can easily come to the conclusion that the territory which became the American states of Washington and Oregon would now be part of Canada." He is on more solid ground in contending that Sir Alexander's work helped to ensure the existence of British Columbia as a colony by drawing public and governmental attention to the area. Professor Daniells also suggests that the Arctic voyage led the way for fur trading and prospecting activity which did much to define the present border between Alaska and the Yukon Territory.

Aside from its major conclusions and theories, *Alexander Mackenzie and the North West* has much to recommend it to the general reader. It provides an interesting introductory sketch of the fur trade in Canada. There are good accounts (often quoted directly from contemporary sources) of canoe construction, voyaging, and the logistics of the trade, as well as insights into life at interior posts. Furthermore, the author writes with a fine sense of place, so that we feel the grandeur of the Bella Coola valley and the stormy reaches of Great Slave Lake — places invested with the spirit of Mackenzie.

It is Professor Daniell's fascination with this intangible presence, with the archetypal, heroic, and legendary qualities of Alexander Mackenzie which lends this well-written book its distinctive flavour.

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*Navigations, traffiques & discoveries, 1774-1848: a guide to publications relating to the area now British Columbia*, Gloria M. Strathern, comp. Victoria, Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Victoria, 1970. xv, 417 pp. \$18.50.

This, the second volume in a series of bibliographies published by the University of Victoria, covers works relating to the years 1774-1848 which have been published up to 1968. Volume I, which related to the years 1849-1899 was compiled by Mrs. Barbara Lowther, who recently received an award from the Canadian Historical Association for her compilation. Since the coverage of the present volume includes general histories of the province it must necessarily overlap somewhat with the Lowther bibliography. The area covered is described as "the area which is now the