

Book Reviews

Pig War Islands, by David Richardson; Eastsound, (Wash.); Orcas, 1971; pp. 362, illus. \$10.95.

Pig War Islands is a fascinating book — at least for those with sufficient knowledge of a frontier society, or sufficient imagination, to enable them to believe the almost unbelievable. For such a society is often an almost unbelievable one. It usually comprises a gallimaufry of “characters” — some “with a mission”, some “on the make”, some “on the lam” and some, as the Irish have it, “scarcely fit to be interfered with”. Doing one’s own thing is by no means only a recent phenomenon.

The life-span of such a society is always short. Compared to the first generation, the second is a colourless one. That, perhaps, is a good thing. Generation after generation of such as the first Olneys, Kellys and Browns, to name but a few, and of judges such as James Fry, might be more than even the most rugged individualist could tolerate.

The book consists largely of anecdotes — with only intermittent attempts at “interpretation”. But note is taken of the oft-repeated allegations that at least some of the Americans who strutted and fretted on the stages of the Gulf Islands were Southerners eager to generate hostility between London and Washington since that would redound to the disadvantage of the North in the worsening situation which was soon to culminate in the War between the States. Noted, too, is the allegation that General Harney, a man not without political ambitions, sought to exploit an opportunity to be the man on the white horse in the pageant of Manifest Destiny. But his less truculent — or should it be less imaginative — superior, General Winfield Scott, succeeded in working out with Britain’s Captain Hornby a jurisdictional compromise which effectively banked the fires of nationalism.

Recounted, too — and without comment — is the rather inconsistent behaviour of Sir James Douglas. At times the Governor was second to none in the matter of sabre-rattling. Yet when the chips — or better,

perhaps, the Northern Indians — were down, he refused to seize the opportunity to rid the islands of those he considered interlopers. The Haida, recurrently in the area to wreak vengeance for American treatment of the indigenous peoples, probably would have exterminated all American settlements in the Puget Sound area. But in every such instance Douglas used his enormous influence to prevent such an occurrence. As does Mr. Richardson, a reviewer must resist the temptation to speculate on what might have been.

Events which followed the shooting — on San Juan Island — of the pig with the predilection for potatoes would have tickled the fancy and prodded the genius of Gilbert and Sullivan. Claims for damages which resulted in the auction sale of the possessions of one of the disputants, including the sale, for two cents each, of sheep which were alleged to exist; attempts to round up the missing ninety-and-nine hastily abandoned when smoke on the horizon suggested the possibility of the approach of a British naval vessel; the expulsion without a hearing of trouble-makers, an expulsion which seems to have been much more effective and much less romanticized than the expulsion a century before of those who seemed likely to make trouble on the other side of the continent; the attempts by a railroad to claim all the islands as its own; the proposal of the *Toronto Globe* that a group of labourers be sent to spade San Juan into the sea with the understanding that the channel thus created be the boundary; the rumour that, in arriving at his decision, the arbiter of the boundary dispute would be guided by the outcome of a baseball game between a team representing Victoria and one representing Olympia: all these are part of the stuff of which the history of the islands is made.

The bloodthirsty will welcome the accounts of a plethora of murders — some marked by a touch of the bizarre. One was the result of a dispute over property, including a chamber-pot lid. And although there seems to have been no doubt about what had happened, a jurisdictional dispute between U.S. civil and military authorities delayed for seven years a final verdict. It seems only fitting that, when at long last the sentence of death was passed, the convicted man should make the most of an opportunity to escape.

But the annals of the administration of justice probably record no more extraordinary courtroom innovations than those which marked a murder trial of the early 1880's. The jury was made to swear that their verdict would be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; eyewitnesses to the slaying were not allowed to give evidence lest the facts prejudice the case; jury members were called upon to testify as to the good

character of the accused (a reversion to eleventh century practice?); and the worldly possessions of the slain man were confiscated and sold to pay the costs of the trial. This, it should be added, was not the end of the story — but the end was not one calculated to bring undiluted joy to the hearts of the morally rigorous.

Probably most Canadians entertain the illusion that our efforts to make more tolerable the lives of our disadvantaged neighbours reached a high point in the 1920's, when enterprising Canadians made available to those living south of the border consumption goods legal in Canada but illegal in the United States. But this was really a second effort. Fifty years earlier we were active in circumstances very similar. Then, of course, the consumption good was opium, legal in Canada but not in the United States. And in what may be a unique instance of vertical integration of enterprise, we even smuggled potential customers into the more attractive American market.

The language of the book is not unsuited to its general informality. There is no attempt to follow in the literary footsteps of a Gibbon or even a Creighton. Sentences with no principal clauses, phrases such as "bigger by a whisker", "smack in the middle of" and words such as "neatened" and "homeyness" are not out of keeping with the oral tradition of a frontier society. Less appropriate, perhaps, are such non-words as "transcursions", "scofflawry", "correspondential", which leave the disturbing impression of literary striving to create an impression.

All in all the book is quite worthwhile. In addition to providing a happy reading experience, it does point out, by implication, that the maintenance of law and order is not a wholly deplorable objective. Indeed it just may generate among some North Americans a long overdue realization that the protection of people from one another is just as important as is the protection of people from "the establishment".

University of Victoria

G. R. ELLIOTT

Indian Rock Carvings of the Pacific North West, by Edward Meade.
Sidney, B.C. Gray's Publishing Company Ltd., 1971. pp. 92, 83 plates.
\$8.00.

Petroglyphs (drawings carved into rock surfaces by use of stone tools) have been found in all parts of the world, wherever humans have been and rock surfaces were available. They range in time from the Paleolithic