

BOOK REVIEWS

HR: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan, by Ken Drushka. Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1995. 400 pp. Illus. \$39.95 cloth.

In the early months of 1960 Harvey Reginald MacMillan, founder of British Columbia's largest forest products company, set off from Lima, Peru, on his private yacht, the *Marijeau*, for the Galapagos Islands. Aboard was Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the controversial Royal Air Force commander famed for the bombing raids he launched on German cities during the Second World War. On the first morning out to sea, "Harris arose and, for some reason, presumed to order the captain to make a change of course. When MacMillan . . . learned of this, he ordered the captain to take the ship back to Lima. Harris was put ashore, and they departed (again) for the Galapagos without him." In the words of author Ken Drushka, "No one but MacMillan gave orders on his ship" (p. 342).

Of the many stories that Drushka tells in *HR*, a biography of British Columbia's most successful lumberman, none captures more succinctly the force of MacMillan's personality, or the power that MacMillan commanded over all who worked with or around him. MacMillan presided over the expansion of British Columbia's forest industry through the first half of the twentieth century. He was the quintessential entrepreneur, a man who in 1919, at the age of thirty-four, saw the possibility of making substantial profits by coordinating the sale of BC lumber in world markets, a function to that time controlled by American agents. The H.R. MacMillan Export Company succeeded brilliantly, so much so that eventually it provoked a rival group of mills to establish its own marketing company, known as Seaboard Lumber Sales. Their bitter competition provides the dramatic tension around which Drushka tells the story of MacMillan's rise to business prominence. Whether by skill, stealth, or good luck, MacMillan always seemed to outmanoeuvre his opponents. By 1958, when he retired as chief executive of the firm, MacMillan had successfully incorporated into the company the coastal region's largest logging enterprise, Bloedel, Stewart, and Welch, and had laid the foundation for a merger with the province's largest producer of pulp and

paper, the Powell River Company. Out of these acquisitions emerged a large, bureaucratic, and professionally managed corporation far different from the H.R. MacMillan Export Company of the interwar period.

HR traces the public life of MacMillan in a detailed manner for the first time. Discussion of MacMillan's early history as a professional forester, his work during the two world wars as a servant of the federal state, his endlessly clever responses to competitors, his views on the new forest management practices implemented by the Coalition and Social Credit governments of the 1940s and 1950s, and his disillusionment with J.V. Clyne, his successor at MacMillan Bloedel, adds significantly to our understanding of this important industrialist. The intensely personal nature of the forest industry in British Columbia to the 1940s is strongly suggested through the author's careful documentation of MacMillan's many friends and contacts both inside and outside of the business community. MacMillan seemed to know everybody. However, apart from some very insightful suggestions about MacMillan's relationship of more than thirty years with his private secretary Dorothy Dee, who devoted her life to serving him, Drushka's approach does not tell us much about his domestic life, or about his family.

The other strand that runs through *HR* — the part that is less about MacMillan and more about the industry — finds its fullest expression in Drushka's discussion of government forest policy. MacMillan disliked the forest management practices implemented in the 1940s and 1950s because they left too much control in the hands of the government and bureaucracy. He attacked the concentration of ownership among fewer and fewer large corporations, a tendency that the new forest management licensing system would reinforce. Regeneration of the forests would suffer because responsibility for reforestation was divided between the public and the private sectors, and because the British Columbia government — owner of most of the province's forest land — would divert forest income into the province's general revenue rather than reinvest it in the resource. In his submission to the second Sloan Commission in 1955, MacMillan argued for small, independent operators working alongside large corporations. This position, says Drushka, made MacMillan an overnight "hero and champion" to the thousands of people in coastal communities whose livelihoods depended upon the viability of small operators. In several previous publications Drushka has also criticized the big business/big government/big labour approach to forest management that emerged in British Columbia after the Second World War, and Drushka's empathy with MacMillan on these matters may explain, at least in part, his very favourable portrayal of MacMillan. The apparent contradiction of a corporate executive criticizing monopolistic forest companies is not, however, well explained.

While not an official biography, *HR* is written primarily from sources generated by, or sympathetic to, MacMillan and his company. "Much of the information" in the book, including audiotapes of interviews with several of MacMillan's friends and colleagues, "came from material collected and a

manuscript written [from 1980 to 1991] by MacMillan's grandson, the late Harvey Southam" (p. 14). Two collections of H.R. MacMillan's papers, one personal, the other corporate, constitute the other major source. From these materials Drushka has drawn many insightful quotations that allow us to hear MacMillan's voice on a wide range of issues. However, the author is much less comfortable with "secondary" literature relating to the historical context within which MacMillan operated. A case in point is Drushka's handling of MacMillan's enthusiastic support for the recommendations of the Kidd Commission, which in July 1932 suggested draconian cutbacks to government expenditures and a weakening of democratic institutions as the provincial government's response to the Great Depression. Historical literature on the relationship between business and government across North America in the 1920s and 1930s is extensive, and includes a fine master's thesis by Robert Groves on the "business government" of Simon Fraser Tolmie in British Columbia from 1928 to 1933. Reference to it might have broadened our understanding of whether MacMillan's antipathy to government was unique to the man, or a product of his class.

HR: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan presents a well-written and engaging portrait of a very influential British Columbian. Drushka succeeds admirably in telling the story of a forest industry leader and, through MacMillan's biography, of the industry itself in its formative years. The book is highly accessible to the general reader yet suggests many possibilities for additional research in the fields of British Columbian business and forest history. The latter may be its enduring legacy.

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Logging the Globe, by M. Patricia Marchak. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995. 404 pp. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

In *Logging the Globe*, Marchak takes on the global manifestations of themes she first explored in *Green Gold*, her seminal contribution to the study of forest-imbedded communities. The new book sweeps broadly over the forest industry and society from its roots in industrialized Scandinavia to the timber-mining invasions of tropical rain forests and the establishment of fast-growing plantations on natural grasslands and degraded secondary forests in the Southern Hemisphere. Case studies of five producing regions (British Columbia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brazil, and Chile) and one consuming region (Japan) comprise the data and illustrate the broader points.

The power of the book comes as it draws links between communities separated by thousands of kilometres and great spans of culture. For example, Marchak demonstrates how logs exported from the US Pacific Northwest pressure rural Japanese communities traditionally dependent on forest-