

Vancouver's First Century: A City Album, 1860-1960, edited by Anne Kloppenborg, Alice Niwinski, Eve Johnson and Robert Gruetter. Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1977. Pp. xix, 154; \$19.95.

Regular subscribers to the *Urban Reader* will find little new material in this book, but those who are unfamiliar with the periodical will find it an attractive and entertaining volume. Most of the material in *Vancouver's First Century* first appeared in the pages of the *Urban Reader*, a periodical that began publication in March 1973. The *Urban Reader* started as a LIP project but by 1974 was being funded by the Social Planning Department of the City of Vancouver. The magazine was "initiated to bring urban issues into focus for the general public." Issues focus on such diverse subjects as transportation, family violence, housing, alcoholism, pollution and drug addiction, as well as carrying regular features like book reviews, notices and letters to the editor. The most popular editions, however, were five historical issues published between July 1974 and February 1976. Each covered a particular period in Vancouver's history, ranging from the "Pioneer Days" of the 1860s to the era of the "Crewcuts and Chrome" in the 1940s and 1950s. And it is these five issues — together with some new material — that make up *Vancouver's First Century*.

The book is a visually striking volume. It is divided into eight chronological sections and the editors have chosen a number of excellent photographs from the collections of the Vancouver City Archives, the Provincial Archives and the Vancouver Public Library. The photographs are interspersed with a series of old advertisements, vignettes and excerpts from newspaper clippings, diaries and journals. There is also a general introduction and a capsule (one page) history for each section.

In spite of its price, *Vancouver's First Century* will probably be enjoyed by a large audience. The more than 150 illustrations provide a vivid and absorbing series of images. The editors deserve full marks both for locating so many superb photographs and for producing such a beautiful picture book. *Vancouver's First Century* is, as well, a fine tribute to such Vancouver photographers as H. T. Devine, Philip Timms, C. S. Bailey and Stuart Thomson.

Unfortunately, *Vancouver's First Century* is nothing more than a picture book and — whatever the editors' stated goals — can be severely criticized for a number of omissions, failures and distortions. The most obvious of these is the absence of any substantive written material to balance or counter the nostalgic, sentimental image of the "good old days" presented in the illustrations. The one-page introductions to each section

barely identify the issues of the various periods, let alone analyze them, and the general introduction by David Brock is romanticism of the worst sort, appealing, at best, to older Vancouverites who lived through many of the years covered in the volume. Why the editors did not invite one of the many scholars working on Vancouver's history to write the general introduction is a complete mystery; at the very least, this might have given the volume a coherence it now lacks. Unconnected anecdotes succeed one another in a random fashion, and each section is little more than a scrapbook chronicle of a decade or so. Moreover, each section generally remains unrelated to the sections that precede and follow it. The fact is that *Vancouver's First Century* is only concerned with visual impressions; it makes no deliberate judgments and contains no interpretation or analysis.

These are common enough complaints to make about local histories. Yet, although they deserve to be repeated here, these criticisms are only part of the problem. The most significant criticism goes beyond content and style and concerns the role volumes like *Vancouver's First Century* play in formulating and elaborating concepts of community. In many volumes the local past is seen as a continually unfolding success story of an essentially monolithic urban community in which all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic standing or their ethnic origin, were united in meeting challenges and resolving common problems. Viewed from this perspective, local history is a powerful tool in maintaining the existing social order and justifying conformity to goals and values established by local elites. The accuracy of the history is less important than the use of the past to promote contemporary views. While *Vancouver's First Century* contains some mention of "unfortunate" incidents such as strikes and race riots, the reader is never told why these happened or even how frequently they occurred. Instead, the reader is informed that Vancouver's "faults and losses have defied the laws of physics and justice by not subtracting much from its total good," and "that it is better to love her still and know not why, so dote upon her ever."

The problem with this kind of rhetoric is that it makes the possibility of a real sense of community developing even more difficult since it advances an urban community based on voluntarism without any basic revision of the prevailing system of social and economic inequality that exists in the city. The notion that all classes share the same basic interests and goals is based more on wishful thinking than reality. Class differences, poverty, crime, pollution and racism existed in the past and continue to exist in Vancouver, and these problems can hardly be confronted or solved when their existence is either ignored or denied. Only when studies like *Van-*

couver's First Century come to terms with some or all of these realities will Canadians be able to begin to order their urban environments in a more equitable and humane fashion. A study that ignores the essential historical reality delimits a particular range of alternatives and channels the thinking of its adherents in certain directions. And, as the basis of current urban policy, its flaws and inconsistencies are all too apparent.

The shortcomings of *Vancouver's First Century* do not end here. The second major criticism has to do with the use of the photographs themselves. Photographs are powerful tools for conveying emotion and for telling us things we cannot get easily or at all in other ways. Photographic documentation is especially useful in describing physical growth and internal spatial patterns of cities. In no other way can the successive stages of development be seen; no other source shows so clearly the transformation of land to urban purposes or so well traces the intensification of urban use over a period of time. In a unique way, too, the camera records the changing skyline from the first wooden shacks to the dominant skyscrapers of the present. An aerial view can convey the pattern of a city; a snapshot can catch the tangled texture of the neighbourhood or street. And a photograph handles problems of scale — the size of things in the environment — in a way that cold statistics never can.

Yet, like all documentation, the photograph has its limitations. The photographer, no less than any other observer, selects his material. Out of an almost infinite range of possibilities he chooses the subjects which interest him most. Thus any photographer will capture only a small part of a city's life. In addition to omissions, photographic documentation also contains the problem of bias. A picture — at least a good one — conveys more than it records. Perhaps the "camera never lies," but the photographer does select. The finger that snaps the shutter may also write a message or grind an axe. Moreover, the limitations are technical as well as personal. The camera works best in strong light and so the city after dark is rarely recorded. In addition, until recently, the long time exposure of cameras made it difficult to handle movement and photographers went about their work when traffic was lightest and when few people were around. When people do appear they are usually holding a pose. A final limitation of photography as documentation stems from the fecklessness of historical preservation. Since photographs have only marginally been used by historians, few libraries or archives have collected them systematically. Interest has certainly increased, but there are still many gaps that may never be filled.

There are, of course, many ways to attempt to overcome these short-

comings. The compilers of illustrated volumes can inform the reader of omissions and of the problems encountered with selection. Maps and statistics can be used both to correct false impressions and to orient the reader. Most important, however, are the more traditional resources available to the historian — archival material, diaries, newspapers, and so on. Unfortunately, the editors of *Vancouver's First Century* not only made precious little use of any of these resources, they did not go to the trouble of including a bibliography directing readers to the growing body of secondary literature on Vancouver.

In general, then, *Vancouver's First Century* is a failure made all the more regrettable by the fact that it was such a good idea. The plan of illustrating a volume with superb photographs and other visual materials deserves enthusiastic endorsement. Fortunately, the book has served one very useful purpose — its production has resulted in the rescue and collection of many valuable photographs. Future historians of the city will owe the editors a substantial debt.

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The Practical Application of Economic Incentives to the Control of Pollution: The Case of British Columbia, edited by James B. Stephenson.

Published for The British Columbia Institute for Economic Policy Analysis by the University of British Columbia Press, 1977. Pp. 441.

Pollution control in British Columbia consists largely of government regulations prohibiting excessive rates of discharge of particular kinds of pollutants from industrial outfalls and smoke stacks and from (as well as to) municipal sanitary sewers. This basic policy is supplemented by a number of ad hoc government measures such as (a) prohibitions on the use of particular kinds of materials (such as DDT) or on the method of application of some materials (such as insecticides), (b) land-use regulations (such as those prohibiting the clear cutting of forests close to streams), (c) subsidies (such as those available to municipalities to build sewers and treatment plants), and (d) charges (such as those paid by households for garbage removal).

This system of controls has been criticized from a number of different quarters during the 1970s, and on a number of different grounds. Some environmentalists as well as some people connected with the commercial and sports fisheries have complained about its inadequacy in preventing