Book Reviews

Motion Picture Production in British Columbia: 1898-1940, by Colin Browne. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, Heritage Record No. 6, 1979.

Colin Browne's introductory study of the early years of movie-making in British Columbia is a lively look at an aspect of our social history that, until now, has been largely ignored. *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia: 1898-1940* is an extensive, carefully detailed catalogue of over 1,000 films produced in and about the province by an extraordinary range of professional and amateur cameramen. Accompanying this catalogue is a brief history of the development of a provincial film industry, such as it was, from the first years of the silent film to the establishment of the National Film Board and the beginning of World War II. This account of movie-making in B.C. is well organized and anecdotal in tone. More importantly, though, it contains a great number of surprises about the images we hold of ourselves and our cultural history.

As early as 1897, motion pictures were playing in B.C. vaudeville houses. They were mostly newsreels of boxing matches, gold prospectors heading for the Klondike, trains hurtling down mountain slopes, loggers felling timber, and picnickers smiling and waving at the camera; but audiences around the province were willingly paying a nickel or a dime for half an hour of flickering pictures. Movies "promised the illusion that a viewer, in a dark, smokey room, could duplicate a thrilling experience without leaving his chair."

The first movies specifically focused on British Columbia were described as educational or promotional, depending upon the producer's bias. The CPR, for example, produced a collection of newsreels extolling the province's scenic wonders which they exhibited across the country. Their motive, Browne suggests, was to direct public interest "to the pleasures of luxurious, restful holidays. Being there, not getting there, became all the fun . . . an important distinction for a company operating a new string of

expensive hotels across a thinly populated wilderness nation." The provincial government, intent on encouraging immigration as well as promoting tourism, began in 1908 to produce footage documenting B.C. life with scenes of downtown Vancouver, sawmills in operation, and fruit farming in the Interior valleys.

Provincial government involvement in the motion picture business extended beyond documentary productions. In 1913, in response to concerned citizenry worried about the quality of theatrical movies (virtually all of which were American in origin) available to B.C. audiences, the provincial government passed the Motion Picture Act. The legislation provided for the establishment of a provincial censor who "created what quickly came to be known as the most rigid motion picture censorship on the continent." Seven years later, an amendment to the Act established the British Columbia Patriotic and Educational Picture Service, under the aegis of the Attorney-General's Department. In addition to providing a film production and distribution service, this legislation required each movie theatre to show up to fifteen minutes of government-made or -sponsored films. Neither the legislation nor the films produced as a result of it proved to be popular. Browne notes that the Victoria *Daily Colonist* "claimed that many of the appointed films and slides showed a high degree of political motivation and that occasionally films were faked to make the Liberal government look more commendable." The BCP and EPS remained active until 1924, when funding apparently dried up after a provincial election in which both the premier and the opposition leader were defeated.

Aside from the ups and downs of the provincial government's interests in the movie business, the most intriguing aspect of B.C.'s history in film was the efforts made to establish the province as a branch production facility for Hollywood during the decade of the quota quickies, 1928-1938. With great relish, Browne outlines the schemes of some of the more notorious profiteers who were anxious to take advantage of the British legislation, passed in 1927, known as the Cinematograph Films Act. This act, designed to boost the motion picture industry in England, guaranteed a percentage of screen time in theatres in the United Kingdom for movies produced within the British Empire. It quickly became apparent that the quota system would provide an open licence for enterprising con-men with stock for sale in hastily conceived film projects.

There were a few entrepreneurs, however, who were serious about using the quota system to establish a film industry in B.C. Among them was an Englishman from Hollywood known as Kenneth Bishop. He

advertised himself as having twenty years' experience in stage and screen production, and with the assistance of some starry-eyed backers including Kathleen Dunsmuir, heiress to the James Dunsmuir fortune, he planned to make Victoria the "Hollywood of the North." How Bishop interested Columbia Pictures, additional investors and Victoria citizens in getting into the movies could be the basis for a great Canadian feature film.

This catalogue and history are an important contribution to existing studies in Canadian film and may be particularly useful to readers of Peter Morris' *Embattled Shadows*, a history of filmmaking in Canada from 1895 to 1939. It is especially valuable, however, because it expands our sensitivity to the role of film in shaping our social history.

University of Victoria NORAH HUTCHISON

Community Work in Canada, edited by Brian Wharf. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979. Pp. 272.

Community Work in Canada is concerned with the conscious intervention by professionals and their cohorts (professionals from other disciplines or, more significantly, socially conscious citizens) in the unfolding history of Canadian communities. These communities may be a neighbourhood, e.g., Regent Park (chapter 2), a city, e.g., Vancouver (chapter 8), or a rural region, e.g., North Frontenac (chapter 4). The conscious intervention is thought to be both necessary and beneficial for the social development of that community, and is justified on the basis of certain societal and professional value assumptions: e.g., strengthening social provisions for disadvantaged people (Caring) and improving the problem-solving capacities of citizens in these communities (Education).

Wharf's objectives in presenting eight Canadian case studies are manifold, but a principal one is the testing of the validity of two interrelated heuristic devices for categorizing the strategies and tactics of community work. The details of these heuristic devices are of no consequence for this particular review. What is of interest for readers of local British Columbia history, however, is the very question of conscious professional intervention in the social development of particular local communities: i.e., Michael Clague's description of "The Britannia Community Service Centre" in chapter 3, and Christiane McNiven's description of "The Vancouver Social Planning Department" in chapter 8. The former, in the light of the heuristic rubric, would be an example of locality develop-