

*The Nine Lives of a Cowboy*, by H. "Dude" Lavington. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1982. Pp. 216.

Told in a conversational style that lends both authenticity and charm, this autobiographical account makes an attractive addition to the small but growing body of literature on the ranching frontier in British Columbia. This is a book that also fits comfortably within what is perhaps the largest category of Western Canadiana — pioneer reminiscences. The author commences with recollections of his childhood on a cattle ranch near Big Valley in east-central Alberta. These memories, many of which have a humorous dimension, provide the reader with an attractive window through which to view the daily routine of ranch life and the rites of passage from youth to manhood in the cattle country. In addition to inculcating certain values and attitudes, such rites had much to do with demonstrating a competence in the traditional cowboy skills, especially the handling of horses.

Among the author's earliest memories is one of homesteaders moving in upon the cattle range in 1910 following the arrival of the railway in the vicinity of the family ranch. This occupation of traditional grazing areas, combined later with the onset of the depression, meant that the next generation of would-be cattlemen literally would have to look for new and greener pastures. For Lavington and his brother, new pastures were to be found in the Cariboo back-country west of Quesnel, and the greater portion of the book focuses upon their efforts between 1931 and 1945 to convert into a ranch several moose meadows along the upper reaches of Baker Creek. After filing pre-emptions on the hay meadows upon which they proposed to centre their ranching enterprise, the brothers' strategy was to obtain summer work as packers or freighters and helping to put up hay or "break" horses on nearby ranches. The money earned was for a winter grubstake that would allow them to spend the winter months isolated on their "ranch" where they could put up buildings, build fences, clear access roads and make other improvements that would eventually earn them title to their pre-emptions and prepare for the day when they might at last acquire cattle. This routine was repeated for a number of years and finally, in 1937, the Lavingtons obtained their first cow. The next stage was wintering the surplus stock of other cattlemen on a cash and share basis. In the autumn of 1938 there were three Lavington steers in the annual Nasko beef drive to Quesnel. They had become legitimate cattle ranchers at last!

In reading such an account one cannot but be impressed by the physical and mental stamina demanded of the pioneer. The back-breaking work, the constant pressures to innovate and adapt and the isolation were still hallmarks of the frontier experience in North America even in the third decade of the twentieth century. This example would seem to suggest that Frederick Jackson Turner's ascription of special formative qualities to the frontier environment may not have been too far off the mark. The frontier tolerated only those whose vigour and determination could endure the unrelenting routine of physical labour. Isolation and limited capital necessitated innovation and adaptation, the second key to survival. Both were qualities that the Lavingtons seem to have possessed in good measure.

Regrettably, the reader, after following the author through his pioneering trials, is left hanging. The story is unfinished, and one is left to speculate what happened once the ranch was operational. An epilogue outlining the subsequent history of Lavington and the L<sup>c</sup> ranch would have solved the problem.

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*Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition*, by David Breen and Kenneth Coates. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982. Pp. 192; illus.

The history of a fair like the PNE can provide "a glimpse of how people view themselves and their region, what they feel they have accomplished and what they see as still to be done" (p. 155). As Breen and Coates note in their brief introductory chapter, such a fair comprises a selection of traditional elements descending from English and European fairs of the eighteenth century and before — agricultural and industrial marketing, competition for rewards offered by government or other elites to encourage progress in agriculture and husbandry, entertainment *per se*. It is in the particular forms and relative importance of those elements in a fair that it displays the mentality of its time and place.

When the first Vancouver Exhibition (as the fair was styled before World War II) was held in 1910, its entertainment catered to frontier tastes for burlesque shows, games of chance, horse races and wrestling matches; by the late 1940s it was more family-oriented, featuring Shrine Circus, Miss PNE contest and stage shows by famous entertainers like