

To the Charlottes: George Dawson's 1878 Survey of the Queen Charlotte Islands, edited by Douglas Cole and Bradley Lockner. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993. 192 pp. Illus. \$19.95 paper.

Born in Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 1849, George Mercer Dawson grew up in a stimulating intellectual setting. William Dawson, his father, was an eminent Dalhousie geologist and confidant of Darwin's mentor, Charles Lyell. After attending McGill and graduating from the Royal School of Mines in London (where he studied under Thomas Henry Huxley), George Dawson got a job in 1875 with the Geological Survey of Canada. He spent four summers in British Columbia; this book concerns his last field season when, aged twenty-eight, he undertook the first scientific survey of the Queen Charlotte Islands. This elegant volume contains Dawson's 1878 journal and his ethnological essay "On the Haida," first published in 1880.

Editors Douglas Cole and Bradley Lockner call Dawson "one of the most remarkable field scientists of the nineteenth century." It is humbling to read the journal of a man with such a range of interests and such an appetite for hard work. Dawson was a one-man university expedition: he had a good practical understanding — and often an advanced knowledge — of geology and geography (hydrology, glaciology, cartography, topography, and photography), palaeontology, zoology, ethnology (including linguistics and archaeology), and botany.

Dawson arrived in Victoria in May 1878 and left for the Charlottes shortly afterwards on the Nanaimo schooner *Wanderer* ("wide of beam and good for the storage of booty"). Dawson couldn't stop geologizing even when the *Wanderer's* anchor dragged one stormy night at Skincuttle Inlet, endangering the vessel and its terrified occupants. He steadied his pen and described the predicament: "The holding ground cannot be good, & is probably a fine sandy gravel of granitic fragments." Huxley and Darwin provide an intellectual context. "There would seem to be much activity in the struggle for existence down below," he wrote near Bella Bella after pulling up his fishing line to find a starfish attached to the remains of a dogfish, which — after taking the hook — had been decapitated by a shark. The very next day, as though to assert his own position in the struggle, he levelled his rifle and shot a deer attempting to swim across a coastal inlet. The most remarkable moment came at the end of September, when the *Wanderer* put into Bull Harbour on Hope Island during a gale. Alone, Dawson walked over to Roller Bay on the exposed Pacific coast. "The impressive Sound of the Stones & pebbles along the whole beach

roaring as the broken waves retired brought vividly before one the process of the destruction of continents, & the immense sum of work which must be performed by an agent like this eternally busy. The scene almost realized that of a dream of great waves breaking on a beach, which I remember once to have had." This passage is both the private confession of a young man confronting his essential solitude and — in its acknowledgment of the great passage of time required for geological or evolutionary change — an attempt to grapple with the huge intellectual impact of Darwin. In both ways it is reminiscent of the cliff scene in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873).

Dawson's other intellectual debt was, perhaps surprisingly, an indigenous one. Like botanist Robert Brown in the previous decade, Dawson relied on the Hudson's Bay Company literate élite, consisting of officers who, in the absence of any kind of university structure in the new province, formed the intelligentsia.¹ Tolmie, McKay, Anderson, Finlayson, and others took Dawson into their homes and shared fifty years' worth of accumulated knowledge of natural and human history. Dawson drew on their skill and resources, and in places the journal almost amounts to a series of interviews with them and a recapitulation of their data. He employed vocabularies compiled by Tolmie and Work and an orthography dating from the 1820s. On his previous visits he had mastered the Chinook jargon, an artifact of the company's spatial extension. "Aukook Illaghie King George Illaghie, Aukutty Bostons tike Kapsallow fie mika Klooshnaanich," he was told at Masset. (This country is English; long ago Americans wanted to steal. Be careful).

With the aid of Hudson's Bay Company censuses Dawson calculated an "alarmingly rapid decrease of the Haida people during the century," which he attributed to the prevalence of heart disease, blindness, smallpox, and prostitution. An old man remembered a time when the beach at Skidegate had been too short to launch all the village's canoes at once, and a Bella Bella told him that "the Indians are always talking among themselves about their decrease in number. Long ago he says they were like the trees, in great numbers everywhere." "Klunas saghalie tyee Mamook," Ham-chit concluded: "I don't know what God is doing." Advocates of the "Enrichment thesis" might ponder this.

The old company hands also gave Dawson a sensitivity to history and place that was generally lacking in the works of the American

¹ See Robert Brown, "The Present State of Science on the North-Western Slopes of the Rocky Mountains," *Journal of Travel and Natural History* 3:1 (1868), 173-80.

professional ethnographers who followed him. Dawson's writing contains a large amount of contemporary British Columbia that was absent in the (published) work of Boas and his students. The history of British Columbia had not yet been written in 1878, but Dawson learned it firsthand by talking to early settlers and reading such texts as Dixon's *Voyage Round the World*. His account of the Haida contains almost as much history as ethnography. He wanted to know what had happened to the Haida since contact, and he possessed the curiosity and resources to find out; he was more interested in understanding the demographic catastrophe that had befallen them than reconstructing the totality of their pre contact past.

Dawson's work shows a consistent concern with historical and cultural change. From Edensaw he obtained the "first account of these Indians by the Whites," and others recalled their naivety for hanging trade axes and gun flints around their necks as ornaments. "Aukutty Indians dam-fools," they said. He was intrigued by adaptations to British material culture: the replacement of slate fish knives and nephrite adze blades with steel knives and files; of bone spear and harpoon tips with iron tips; of bone halibut hooks with iron facsimiles. He noted the carving of argillite for commercial sale, and he speculated that the traditional Haida proficiency in copperwork had made for a natural transition to working silver and iron. The introduction of "spurious coppers" by traders had reduced the value of the originals. He traced the arrival of Hudson's Bay Company blankets as the "currency of the coast," and he recorded adaptations everywhere, including the addition of sails to canoes and the baking of bread by Native women. Dawson's essay on the Haida, therefore, possesses a discrete historical context and integrity, for which there was really no need for the editors to apologize, or to treat with "caution" as the product of a "prejudiced" and "necessarily imperfect" cultural understanding. As a piece of historical writing the essay stands on its own.

Moreover, while the editors do justice to the historical context in the footnotes, they don't transfer this information to the introduction: they haven't made the most of the data they have uncovered. "On the Haida" could have been annotated as thoroughly as the journal, and there was no need to omit Dawson's ten-day exploration of Quatsino Sound. Darwin's influence could have been traced more rigorously. The index is thorough, but the listing of only the chiefs seems élitist. The lack of a good map is a real hindrance to finding one's way around the text, and Dawson's original sketches are not reproduced.

Cole, Lockner, and UBC Press should, however, be commended for locating and publishing these valuable accounts by British Columbia's first notable Darwinian. This volume marks the beginning of the serious study of the history of science in British Columbia.

Courtenay, BC

RICHARD MACKIE

Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775-1920: A Geographical Analysis and Gazetteer, by Robert Galois. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994. xviii, 470 pp. Maps, tables. \$60.00 cloth.

This book is a terribly important work. As the sub-title indicates, it is made up of two parts, a geographical analysis and a gazetteer. The latter is modestly described as "a research tool, guiding others to, and facilitating the use of, available documentary sources" (77). It certainly is that, but it is much more.

As a research tool and reference work, the gazetteer is not meant to be a good read, but any researcher or writer trying to make sense of the bewildering complexity of Central Coast groups, locations, and names will find it indispensable. Galois, building on Franz Boas's 1934 *Geography of the Kwakiutl* and Wilson Duff's ninety-five page manuscript of the 1950s, has added elaborations that almost exhaust available sources on Kwakiutl sites and their history up until the recommendations of the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission or about 1920. The information provided in the gazetteer deserves consideration, but first something about the "geographic analysis" portion.

While the great majority of this fat book is given over to the gazetteer (and appendices), no one interested in the history of the Kwakiutl, of Northwest Coast peoples, or of Native-White contact should treat it as only that. The earlier essay, "Kwakwaka'wakw Settlement Patterns, 1775-1920" (19-74), constitutes a model of interpretation of the data provided in the gazetteer. Galois begins with an overview of his sources, the structure of the later gazetteer, some brief ethnological observations on social structures, especially the numaym and tribe, and the seasonal cycle, before launching on his interpretation of the effects of 145 years of the contact process upon territorial patterns. He deals with trade, demographic disaster (disease and warfare) and its consequences to tribes (divisions and amalgamations), to tribal territories, to settlement patterns, such as altered criteria for winter village sites, and, of course, the loss of land to Whites.