

Voices: A Guide to Oral History, edited by Derek Reimer, David Mattison and Allen W. Specht. Victoria, B.C.: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Sound and Moving Image Division, 1984. Pp. vi, 74.

British Columbians can be proud of a work which does credit to their province and deserves a very wide circulation. Intelligently constructed and superbly produced, *Voices* is for many reasons second to none among the guides now available on oral history in the anglophone world. The work avoids the dry approach and the concern for technical minutiae which abound in Willa Baum's works. It eschews both the strident, crusading tone found in Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* and the simplistic, almost patronizing style of guides such as Sitton, Mehaffy and Davis' *Oral History*. *Voices'* great achievement, and what makes it excellent, is its success in being simultaneously a practical guide for undertaking oral history interviews and a good theoretical analysis.

No mean feat this, because the distance between theory and practice in oral history is very wide. It is possible to be an expert on its place within the larger discipline of history without having once conducted an interview and, at the other extreme, to have undertaken many excellent interviews without ever having written a word as a historian. The ten years' experience garnered by the staff of the Sound and Moving Image Division of the Provincial Archives in not only choosing people to interview and conducting the interviews but in editing and producing the forty volumes of the *Sound Heritage* series makes them ideally equipped to transcend the gap between theory and practice and to publish a work as excellent and as enjoyable as *Voices*.

Voices is important for another, quite separate reason. From the beginnings of the fur trade, at every stage in its history, British Columbia has been quintessentially a society of immigrants. Their experience both journeying here and in becoming part of our society has left comparatively little trace in the standard historical sources. If put down on paper, the records are most likely to be found in the distant lands the immigrants left and to which they sometimes wrote back. Much more frequently, their experiences never reached paper. British Columbia has been, moreover, a peculiarly regional, even fragmented society. The historical development and diverse character of the little communities on the Island, along the lower Fraser and in the interior valleys have been largely overshadowed in the official records and on newsprint by events in the province's twin metropolises.

Oral history provides the unique means of capturing those experiences

before time hurries them away. It is still possible (as was done just weeks ago) to interview a ninety-two-year-old woman who came to British Columbia in 1919 and whose memories, still lucid, describe a small immigrant community in the interior which lacked a newspaper and which had no local historian. If *Voices* succeeds in accelerating and facilitating the already considerable activity among individual enthusiasts, local history societies and academic historians striving to tape record such memories before death intervenes, then this work will have done no small service for British Columbia's history.

Voices serves, finally, as a fitting conclusion to the *Sound Heritage* series which, like so much else of value, has been swept away by the provincial government's hunger for budget cuts. If the book does stimulate an expansion in the practice of oral history, then there is at least the consolation that at some future date, in more humane and opulent times, the series may be revived, drawing upon the tapes inspired by this guide.

Buy *Voices*, read it, enjoy it, but above all use it. And, if you do, please make sure that copies of the resulting tapes reach a safe public depository, so that the voices of our common past may continue to speak to us. *Voices* is available at \$4.50 from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Sound and Moving Image Division, Victoria, B.C. v8v 2R5.

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Phillips in Print: The Selected Writings of Walter J. Phillips on Canadian Nature and Art, edited by Maria Tippett and Douglas Cole. Volume VI, Manitoba Record Society Publications, Winnipeg, 1982. Pp. xxxiv, 156.

Walter Phillips has received considerable attention in the last decade despite the fact that, according to Tippett and Cole, he was only a "minor figure" in the Canadian art scene during his lifetime. His work has been the subject of a recent National Gallery exhibition and catalogue, a grand coffee-table celebration by Roger Boulet and now this volume from the Manitoba Record Society. The reasons for the lack of acclaim in earlier years and for his substantial reputation today are evident in this attractive volume.

Phillips was born in Great Britain in 1884 and spent his early years there and in South Africa. An artist and art teacher, he joined the stream of British emigrants to the Canadian west in 1913 and there remained