

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

for the rest of his life, first in Winnipeg, then in Calgary and Banff (1941-57) and finally Victoria, where he died in 1962. He sketched and worked with watercolours in his early years and then, almost by accident, participated in the international revival of colour woodcuts in the 1920s. He became Canada's finest artist in the medium and enjoyed some international recognition during the decade. Teaching and writing and a few sales of art work sustained his family thereafter but he never regained the popular acclaim or matched the output of that happy period.

One of the many enterprises begun by Phillips in this era was a newspaper column on art and artists which was printed in the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune* from 1926 to 1941. He also wrote articles for various periodicals and a book on the colour woodcut. These writings provide the heart of *Phillips in Print*. The volume also contains twenty-four reproductions of Phillips' etchings, watercolours and woodcuts, three of them in colour, and a strong introductory article on Phillips' career by the editors. Tippett and Cole have done an admirable job in weaving a pleasant, readable narrative from what must have been an extraordinary collection of odds and ends on the art world, nature, Canadian art, the artists of western Canada, and the art of the woodcut. That the volume is coherent and enjoyable is a credit to their editorial skills.

As one might suspect from his art, Phillips was raised in and respected the English watercolour tradition of Cotman and Turner. He put a premium upon skill and craftsmanship in the creation of works of art and believed that the revelation of natural beauty was the artist's great task. His writing reflected these opinions. On occasion his prose is striking, especially in passages concerning natural beauty ("the blue peak soared in a sky of citron"), but it was usually more commonplace. His opinions on the purpose of art ("Walls without pictures do tend to imprison the mind") were rather ordinary, and his animosity toward modern tendencies in art was strident. He struck a note familiar to modern readers of Tom Wolfe, for example, in his argument that "modernism" was a "world-wide hoax, originally perpetrated in the interests of a group of Parisian art-dealers. . . ." The student of Canadian culture will learn something of the artistic community in the inter-war years, however, and will be impressed especially by the sense of isolation current among western Canadian painters. Phillips noted the lack of western patrons of the arts in several of his essays and, indeed, claimed that the demand for artistic works in the region would not sustain "two painters' families." He lamented that the work of James Henderson, Eric Bergman and Thomas Fripp was not known in the east, whereas Montreal dealers actually had

waiting lists of buyers for works by several painters, and Toronto (“indisputably the Canadian centre for literature and art”) would inevitably become the home of ambitious artists and authors.

As Tippett and Cole suggest in their introductory essay, Phillips chose the wrong style and the wrong home if he sought national recognition. His was the era when the art world worshipped the “new,” when Canada required its painters to forge a “national identity,” and when the “east” dominated the country’s cultural organs. Phillips’ adherence to a British vision and a traditional Japanese technique was out of fashion; his disdain for the “grim and moody” landscapes of the Group of Seven (“no warmth, little sentiment and no humor”) buttered few parsnips; his own “small or quiet or delicate” perspective, though favoured increasingly by western Canadian patrons in the decades since his death, was out of tune with the times. This attractive volume — the design and typeface would have delighted Phillips himself — reminds us of his virtues and his achievement.

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