

the operations of the RAC. He is, therefore, well placed to examine the interaction of the fur trade and agriculture in the Oregon Country. Moreover, as he points out, the study fills an important gap in the existing literature. "Farming the Frontier" assembles, in a clear and straightforward manner, a body of detailed information on agriculture and the fur trade. As such it is an important contribution and will be required reading for anyone seriously interested in the operation of the fur trade in the Cordillera.

Yet the rather narrow focus of Gibson's study leaves this reader with the sense of an opportunity not fully grasped. Despite the solid empirical foundation he has established, Gibson has not pursued some of the broader, and intriguing, issues which his study raises. One obvious topic concerns the nature of the cultural divide created (or perhaps confirmed) by the Oregon Treaty. Did the agricultural developments and the social forms in which they were embedded, as described by Gibson, have any lasting impact upon the development of American society in the Pacific Northwest? More significant, from a Canadian and British Columbian perspective, is the question of the lessons learned by the HBC and the British government from the events which culminated in the Oregon Treaty. Surely there was more involved than the recognition of a lost heritage. How far, for example, did the loss of the Columbia help to shape colonial society as it developed, once again, around the fur trade and agriculture on Vancouver Island? To ask such questions is to ask for a different and more ambitious study than that undertaken by Gibson. "Farming the Frontier" provides some of the information necessary for a re-assessment of our understanding of economy and society in the Cordillera before the gold rushes. Let us hope that Gibson will not be content to let matters rest here.

Vancouver

BOB GALOIS

"We Were the Salt of the Earth!" The On to Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot, by Victor Howard. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1985. Pp. 208; 43 illustrations.

The Canadian Plains Research Centre is to be complimented for bringing out a book that marks the fiftieth anniversary of the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935, and author Victor Howard (a.k.a. Victor Hoar) for producing a popularly written though closely documented account of

these events. "*We Were the Salt of the Earth*" is the first monographic study of any aspect of unemployed movements in Canada during the depression, and as such is to be welcomed. Students and teachers will find his extensive quotations from newspapers, police reports and government documents useful, and the general reader will be given an undiluted taste of the flavour of the times. Specialists will be disappointed by the absence of a historiographical discussion or an argued thesis — the subtitle is accurately subtitled "A Narrative" — but some readers will find the book controversial indeed. Veterans of the left-wing activity of the 1930s, and those who celebrate its memory, may be positively irked by Howard's treatment. Certainly he has left himself open to criticism or misrepresentation as a result of an idiosyncratic writing style which is a cross between traditional narrative, Pierre Berton and John Steinbeck.

I take, as an example, the treatment of women's activism in support of the Trekkers in Vancouver on pages 60 and 61. Entirely non-analytical, it is viewed only through the prism of male factionalists and cynical authority:

"I have never seen so many women running around. One would think it was election night" [Vancouver cop] . . . Saturday, 28 April. The women of the CCF have been at it for two days, preparing for the great rally in the Area, arranging the programme of speakers, drafting their colleague, Sarah Colley, as leader of the parade to the auditorium, handing out tags, circulating a petition which calls for humane treatment of the camp men [Howard writes] . . . "Again the CCF leaders proved themselves masters of manoeuvres and sent Mother Colley to [Relief Camp Workers Union Leader and Communist Smokey] Cumber to ask him for the head of the line for the women. Cumber agreed . . ." [The RCMP version of events].

Were the women merely cyphers? Really we do not know.

Howard's narrative does succeed in carrying the reader along through the depression background, political context and dramatic events of the Trek itself, which are at once far too complicated and, in broad outline, too well known to recapitulate here. An apparent scepticism towards the motives of both the Communist Party and the CCF (as well as Grits and Tories) is tempered by a real sympathy toward the unemployed themselves and a respect for their "grassroots" movement. The last three chapters of the book, however, dealing with the Regina Riot, show one of two things: either Howard's belief that the Red-led unemployed were to blame for much of the mayhem, or the inadequacy of the semi-documentary semi-journalistic approach to history.

A vast dossier exists on the civil disturbance at Regina on 1 July which

claimed the life of at least one participant: plainclothes city constable Charles Millar. The *raison d'être* of this dossier was to shift the responsibility for Millar's death from the shoulders of the RCMP to the backs of the unemployed and their "Bolshevik" leaders. Howard draws, like a court reporter, on this official dossier, without playing the role of cross examiner. It makes for plenty of bloody detail, but a rather one-sided story. Does Howard honestly believe that the strikers were stockpiling stones and otherwise preparing themselves for the unprovoked RCMP assault on the Market Square, where the main evidence rests on the testimony of a constable who claimed to have overheard a relevant conversation, but who "has not reported the conversation he has overheard and will not think to do so for several days to come"? Does he believe that Millar was bludgeoned by a striker armed with a piece of cordwood, then shot at as his ambulance sped away ("the only time that evening when someone other than a constable fires a gun.")? The informed and careful reader can make up his or her own mind on the evidence presented; beware the conclusions drawn by others.

Popular violence and state violence, communist and socialist agitation in the streets — these are unfortunately not favoured topics in Canadian history. Perhaps it was necessary for an American, Victor Howard, to bring them to our attention. Despite its flaws, *"We Were the Salt of the Earth"* is recommended reading for British Columbians. Fifty years after the famous Trek, the rate of unemployment is roughly where it was in 1936 or 1937, and holes in the modern safety net are yawning wide. If normal political channels fail once more it is safe to assume serious trouble on the horizon.

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ALLEN SEAGER

Matt and Jenny in Old Vancouver, by Terry Stafford. Illus. Terry Stafford. Fort Langley, B.C.: Children's Studio Books, 1986. Pp. 72, \$5.95.

I find it particularly daunting to be asked to review a book such as Terry Stafford's that specifically announces that it is aimed at children from grades 1 through 6. One solution, of course, is simply to say that a good book is a good book, whatever the age of the reader. A more reasonable solution, however, is to consult a member of the audience for whom the book is written. I chose the latter course and discussed it with a second-grader, Emma Dawson-Halpern.