

*The Buildings of Samuel Maclure: In Search of Appropriate Form*, by Martin Segger. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1986. Pp. 274; illus.

It is always easier and more rewarding to write a favourable rather than an unfavourable review of a book. I found this review very difficult to write. Martin Segger set a number of tasks for himself in *The Buildings of Samuel Maclure*. He wanted to plot the development of Maclure's style — as the book's subtitle suggests — by showing the influence on him of the Victorian Queen Anne style, the Elizabethan revival, the Rustic style, the Chicago School, and the work of British architect C. F. A. Voysey, among other styles and architects. He wanted to give short descriptions of as many Maclure houses as was possible. He wanted to devote separate chapters to well-known features of Maclure's buildings such as the garden and the hall. Had Segger woven these themes into a biographical narrative he might have succeeded in writing a coherent book, but he wanted to do so many other things as well. He wanted to devote long passages to detailed discussions of Maclure's Victoria and Vancouver contemporaries. He wanted to address a learned audience, referring to the "Cary Castle Controversy" and to R. B. Bayne's 1894 lecture on local architecture with little explanation of the significance and meaning of these things. At the same time he wanted to instruct the uninitiated as to the evolution of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural styles and movements. He also wanted to write about the upper stratum of Victoria society, the local arts and crafts movement, and many other things which related only tangentially to his subject.

Segger had little in the way of letters, diaries, or other Maclure writings on which to draw. He therefore relied heavily upon the reminiscences of Maclure's delightful daughter, the late Catherine Maclure, for autobiographical material. A sizeable *lacuna* nonetheless remained, and the author's inability to fill it has resulted in a hodge-podge of unrelated information, unsatisfactory portrayal of the central character, and a lack of overall focus. One comes away from the book admiring Segger's capacity to gather detail but questioning his ability to relate these details to one another and to a central theme.

But all is not lost. There is one short section in *The Buildings of Samuel Maclure* that is admirable. It is the discussion of Captain M. H. T. Hodgson's home "Kitsuksis," constructed in Alberni in 1913. Here we have a splendid mingling of the biographies of Captain and Mrs. Hodgson, of the landscape in which the house was built, and of Maclure's blending of local materials and setting with his clients' needs and with his own imaginative

expression. The discussion is enhanced by superb interior and exterior photographs and drawings of “Kitsuksis.” The only omission — as in all the author’s work — is in the paying of attention to local craftsmen and the part they played in carrying out Maclure’s plans.

Sono Nis Press is to be congratulated for producing so handsome a volume and the author for amassing so many informative photographs. It is a pity, however, that the reader does not see the complex character Segger tells her Maclure possessed but is instead swamped by unrelated references, unimportant detail, and, again, a general lack of focus.

*Vancouver*

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*Eyes of a City: Early Vancouver Photographers 1868-1900*, by David Mattison. Vancouver City Archives Occasional Paper No. 3 (1986). Pp. 75; illus.

Historical photographs are often presented casually, as curiosity or illustration. Such treatment, according to Vancouver City Archivist Sue Baptie, “squanders the photograph’s true potential.” In her Foreword to *Eyes of a City*, she explains that the book is “intended to provide context and explanation” so that familiar images may be appreciated in a “new and richer light.” To this end, *Eyes of a City* succeeds. The images chosen for reproduction are not new ones, but what separates Mattison’s publication from so many nostalgic visual romps through Vancouver’s past is its obvious respect for the photograph as historical document.

*Eyes of a City* is an exploration of early Vancouver through the photographs that have managed to survive. It is also a tribute to Vancouver’s early photographers. In his eleven-page Introduction, Mattison points out that knowing who took a photograph, how, and why is as important as the subject content. He goes on to survey the photographers “who focussed their cameras on pre-1900 Vancouver” — not just the professionals but also the tourists, the amateurs, and the journalists. In the first few paragraphs, Mattison attempts to set the context of the history of photography and to explain the dearth of early photographs (pre-1860) of Burrard Inlet. Here he has some difficulty, offering a hodge-podge of information, some inappropriate or incorrect in the context of the Pacific Northwest. In the final paragraph of his Introduction, Mattison undermines his own arguments with the dubious and contradictory conclusion that “the only proof a photograph contains is that of its own existence.” However, he quickly moves from general nineteenth-century developments to specific Vancouver