

provided more guidance regarding the content and the organization of this book.

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*British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers in association with The Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations at the University of British Columbia, 1992. x, 451 pp. \$21.95 paper.

Collections of previously published material provide an excellent opportunity to assess the development of a field. This is true with respect to *British Columbia Reconsidered*. It consists of twenty-two articles published between 1980 and 1991, divided into six sections: pioneering, politics, domestic life, culture, work and poverty, and one excellent bibliographical essay. The introductory essay by the editors places the articles which follow within the context of previous examinations of British Columbian society and points out that few, if any, of these examinations took gender into account. The editors describe the developing intricacies of studies on women, how researchers are becoming more sensitive to the interrelationship between gender, race, class, etc., and how these researchers are revising accepted theories on women's oppression in light of the experiences of women who have remained outside the mainstream of Canadian society. Not all the articles exhibit that sensitivity, but this reflects the rapidly changing field more than any intransigence on the part of the authors.

What also stands out in this collection is the breadth of work being done in women's studies in general and on British Columbia women in particular. For example, the pioneering section consists of two articles which taken together reveal the variety of experiences of women living in isolated areas of mid-nineteenth century British Columbia. The article by Sylvia Van Kirk examines women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, certainly an event not ignored in the traditional historiography of B.C. But what Van Kirk has revealed is the involvement of women on this frontier in a multitude of roles. The politics section follows with four studies on the early efforts of women to gain the franchise, the role of Dorothy Gretchen Steeves and Grace Mac-

Innis in the CCF, the modern difficulties of women in political parties in B.C., and Sechelt women and the issue of self-government from their perspective. What emerges from this section is the reality of solitudes which separates many women. The section on domestic life consists of five essays, all of which reveal the breadth of topics that only begin to make up a study of this vast area: domestic training in schools, the changing experience of childbirth, life in the suburbs, the power which comes to women in some Native societies because of their mothering responsibilities, and the violence that seems to be part of so many domestic situations. All these studies expose the complexity of what early analysts referred to as the private sphere and the difficulty of generalizing women's experiences. The section on culture and work, too, highlights the tension between various group experiences of particular women and the position of women as a collective separate from men.

The essays in *British Columbia Reconsidered* reflect the changing approaches of scholars both to research on women and to the experiences of women. An example of the first is the increasing emphasis on oral tradition. It provides immediacy and a reality to topics which might otherwise not have existed. This is particularly true in Melody Hessing's study of the role of office conversation among women who are balancing both home responsibilities and paid employment and in Sheila Baxter's study of the poverty experienced by women. With respect to the actual experiences of women, what starts to emerge is a tension between variety and standardization. As scholars expand their areas of research, the diversity of women's experiences is revealed. At the same time, there does seem to be an underlying thrust in the society to standardize those experiences. For example, the introduction of domestic science in schools as studied by Barbara Riley reveals that increasingly domestic labour was to approach an ideal norm. Even childbirth came under this conforming force.

For anyone desiring an introduction to the work being done in women's studies, this collection would be an excellent beginning. It reveals how the study of women can change received interpretations of a society, in this case the development of British Columbia. It introduces the reader to the remarkable variety of topics that scholars have been probing and continue to probe. Some of these topics are traditional and some force the reader to think about the nature of what it is we do in our daily lives. More questions are asked than answered, but this is as it should be. More topics come to mind than are covered — where are women on the right in this study, investigations of women in science,

women in the arts, or analyses of gendered language? That this collection may stimulate the expansion of more research is something about which all the contributors should be proud.

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*Law for the Elephant, Law for the Beaver: Essays in the Legal History of the North American West*, edited by John McLaren, Hamar Foster, and Chet Orloff. Pasadena and Regina: Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society and Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1992. ix, 322 pp. \$24.00 paper.

Writing in 1979, historian J. M. S. Careless bemoaned the explosion of work on regional interests, observing that "[l]imited identities threaten to take over and settle the matter of a Canadian national identity by ending it outright, leaving perhaps a loose league of survivor states essentially existing on American outdoor relief."<sup>1</sup> Just over a decade later, in the wake of the failed Meech Lake constitutional accord, one of his graduate students, Michael Bliss, argued (in, appropriately enough, the 1991 Creighton Lecture at the University of Toronto) that Careless's prediction was close to being realized. The "sundering of Canada," Bliss suggested, was in large part due to the diminution and actual loss of a national sensibility, something Canadian historians had contributed to by pursuing their own increasingly specialized research. "The situations of interest to historians now tend often towards the private and personal," Bliss wrote. "This is so true it's become a cliché: political history has been out, social and personal history have been in." "Really," he asked, quoting Jack Granatstein, "who cares?"<sup>2</sup>

If the essays contained in *Law for the Elephant, Law for the Beaver* are any indication, all of us should. This collection of papers given at the transboundary conference on the legal history of the West and Northwest of North America in 1991 would seem to represent just the kind of historical writing Bliss *et al.* have criticized: not only is it social history — dealing with topics like violence, ethnic and aboriginal groups, and legal culture — but it is also social history of a specialized

<sup>1</sup> J. M. S. Careless, "Limited Identifies — Ten Years Later," *Manitoba History* 1 (1980): 3.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bliss, "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26(1991-92): 6, 11.