

of photographs, including pictures of the labels and trademarks of the various canneries. For those whose knowledge of the industry is slight, this little book might just get them hooked!

University of Waterloo

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The Dunsmuir Saga, by Terry Reksten. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991. x, 290 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

Although Terry Reksten refers to the widespread image of Robert Dunsmuir as "King Grab" and recognizes why he and his son, James, were such unpopular employers and politicians, she is less concerned with public images and issues than with the internal dynamics of a troubled family. Indeed, the book could have been titled: "Three Generations: Making and Dissipating a Fortune."

Drawing on his knowledge as an experienced coal miner, the Scottish-born Robert Dunsmuir "discovered" the Wellington mine in 1869. A talented entrepreneur, over the next few years he developed the mine and a San Francisco market for its high quality coal. When he died unexpectedly in 1889, he was a provincial cabinet minister, the chief collier of Vancouver Island, and a major investor in such ventures as the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway, the Albion Iron Works, and the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company. He left a fortune of approximately \$15 million.

His middle-aged sons James and Alexander had only modest positions in their father's businesses. Reksten suggests Robert had good reason for limiting their responsibilities. The brighter son, Alex, was an alcoholic; the "stolidly obedient" (p. 33) James was a "simple-minded man" with modest ambitions (p. 156). Indeed, in 1900, when he was the province's leading industrialist, James was surprised to be accused of conflict of interest when he accepted the premiership of British Columbia.

Robert had left his entire fortune to his widow, Joan. Only after much badgering did she transfer parts of the Dunsmuir corporate empire to her sons; a dispute over the price of the Wellington Colliery permanently estranged her from James. Family relations were further complicated when Alex died in 1900, forty days after marrying his long-time mistress. With the exception of an annuity for his widow, who died little more than a year later, Alex left his entire estate to James. Subsequently, Alex's step-daughter, a New York actress, and Joan Dunsmuir sued for a share of the estate. A succession of courts ruled in James's favour; Joan died before she could launch a final appeal and the step-daughter ran out of money. The legal bills had been over a million dollars.

Although Reksten admits that the lack of documentation makes her “a shadowy figure” (p. 112), Joan may be the most interesting of the Dunsmuirs. She was noted for her business acumen and was as stubborn as any Dunsmuir in dealing with miners’ unions. But, as a wealthy widow her main interest was “acquiring for her daughters the best husbands Dunsmuir dollars could buy” (p. 119). Some of the older girls had made reasonable matches locally before their father became so wealthy. The younger girls were less fortunate; one married into the peerage, but the best entry for most of them to British society was through marriage to impecunious military officers. No marriage seems to have been very happy. The younger daughters spent wildly and invested unwisely. Several died in impoverished circumstances. Like their aunts, most of the eight daughters of James showed an uncanny ability to choose poor husbands and to live extravagantly. English and European country houses, extended visits to Monte Carlo, a Parisian fashion house, Hollywood, and Tallulah Bankhead are part of their story. One brother was little better. Robin, the eldest son, was of the same mold as his uncle Alex; he lacked discipline and loved alcohol. James Jr., better known as “Boy,” was stolid like his father but died in the sinking of the *Lusitania* when he was only twenty-one.

Reksten scoured the archives for Dunsmuir material, interviewed some who knew the younger Dunsmuirs, and found some telling pictures. The book incidentally throws some light on the corporate and political side of the Dunsmuirs, but it is not an analysis of their industrial empire or of provincial politics. *The Dunsmuir Saga* is a lively account that will appeal especially to those who enjoy reading about the high living of the *nouveau riche*. Reksten does not explicitly say so, but the book has a moral: money cannot buy happiness. One would be as sorry for the Dunsmuirs as for their coal miners were it not that they were largely responsible for their own misfortunes.

University of Victoria

PATRICIA E. ROY

The Forbidden City Within Victoria, by David Chuenyan Lai. Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1991. xiii, 191 pp. Illus., photos, maps. \$12.95 paper.

David Chuenyan Lai’s name is well known to the readers of this journal and to anyone with an analytical interest in the Chinatowns of North American cities. His *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada* (1988) is the best known and broadest in scope of his several writings. He is also