

## Book Reviews

*A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870*, by Richard I. Ruggles. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. xx, 300 pp. Maps, illus. \$49.95 cloth.

This book is the culmination of, in some sense a monument to, a lifetime of careful scholarly work. Through well over three decades, since his University of London doctoral thesis on "The Historical Geography and Historical Cartography of the Canadian West . . ." completed in 1958, Richard Ruggles has explored the Hudson's Bay Company archives and informed us (to borrow from the titles of a couple of his dozen or so articles) about the mapping of the interior plains of Rupert's Land (*Great Plains Quarterly*, 1984) and the ways in which imagination and reality have been combined in depictions of the Canadian west (*Canadian Geographer*, 1971). Handsomely produced, *A Country So Interesting* combines 120 pages of text; three annotated catalogues of the near 1,400 manuscript maps, charts, sketches, and plans prepared for the HBC between 1670 and 1870; high-quality reproductions of 66 of these items; and sundry lists and appendices. It is a substantial contribution to the history of Canadian cartography.

I respond to it in three ways. The first is with fascination and delight. Turning its pages reminded me that Robert Louis Stevenson found it "hard to believe" that there were "people who . . . [did] not care for maps." Although I have never met Ruggles, I can imagine him warmed — as I am — by Stevenson's insistence on "the inexhaustible fund of interest" that old maps offer anyone "with eyes to see or twopence-worth of imagination to understand with." Four summary maps, prepared by Ruggles to show the boundaries of European ignorance being pressed back across "Canadian" territory, encapsulate much of what this book is about. But for the Atlantic coast, the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes axis, and the shores of Hudson and Baffin bays, that for 1670 is deep, dark black; in 1795, the

outline of the Pacific is clear, but the line of Alexander Mackenzie's monumental journey down the river that bears his name ends in the forbidding black unknown of the north; not until 1870 does the fundamental form of the modern country appear "essentially known." Much, though by no means all, of this expansion of European knowledge came from HBC employees, and the dissemination of the information they gathered, especially after 1795, through the maps of the Arrowsmith firm. By tracing the progress of Company mapping, Ruggles reminds us — to use several phrases that he quotes from the correspondence of Hudson's Bay men — of the "industry and Exertions" of HBC employees; of their role in providing "a general description of the Country [and of the] numbers and conditions of the Natives"; of the ways in which their explorations helped eliminate from European maps rivers "made to cross other streams and mountain ranges in a marvellous manner"; and of the importance of their surveys in staving off "a repetition of Oregon annoyances" in British Columbia.

My second response is awe. Awe inspired by Ruggles' meticulous research; awe at the capacity of the indigenous peoples of the western interior to sketch maps of extensive territories; and awe at the skill and fortitude of the HBCs early explorers-mapmakers. Self-effacingly, Ruggles finds the most important contributions of his magnum opus in its revelation "to the scholarly community of the unique and rich treasure which is held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives" and its concern "to make manifest the authenticity and cartobibliographic quality of these documents." These things it does. But it also provides a definitive inventory of HBC maps, throws light on the work of such figures as Philip Turnor, Peter Fidler, David Thompson, Henry Kelsey, and Anthony Henday, and illuminates the link between Company cartography and Company trade. The native maps reproduced in this book are quite as arresting as anything else between its covers. Products of what one European described as the Indians' "peculiar faculty of finding their way over pathless wilds . . . [by] the habitual observation and retention of local objects, even the most trifling, which a white man, less interested in storing up such knowledge, would pass without notice," they are remarkable documents — artifacts of the mind that reveal much about their authors' perceptions of, and ability to impose an intellectual order upon, their surroundings. The Hudson's Bay men who made the maps that are Ruggles' main concern were genuinely remarkable individuals. Largely self-taught, braving winter cold, "want of Victuals," swamped canoes, mosquitoes and black flies and, sometimes, the admonitions of superiors who insisted that celestial obser-

vations be made and distances be measured “without breaking into the necessary Business of the Factory,” they were a resilient and resourceful, if small and often unsung, army of amateurs who unveiled vast areas to European eyes. Tall among them, and of particular interest to readers of this journal, stood Joseph Despard Pemberton, sometime Professor of Practical Surveying and Engineering at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester, England, despatched from Britain by the HBC in 1851. Atypical by virtue of his training and his appointment as surveyor and cartographer for the Company and the colony of Vancouver Island, Despard nonetheless exhibited the energy and effectiveness characteristic of most of his predecessors. In eight years he ranged widely through coastal British Columbia, and was responsible for the development of a triangulation grid, the establishment of a land survey and registration system, and the production of topographical, geological, and other maps, including the first three town plans of Victoria (dated 1852, 1855, and 1859) and an 1853 map of southern Vancouver Island from Sooke to “Cowitchin.”

*A Country So Interesting* contains a great wealth of such information, yet I find myself finally (and reluctantly) disappointed by this book. It reflects its long gestation, and hardly begins to address intellectual issues that have come to the fore as it was being brought to conclusion. Ruggles tells us how HBC maps were made in the field and how they were returned to England; he traces the spread of Company mapping with care; and notes that most of the maps he examined were drafted to inform the HBC's London-based principals about those territories in which they had a trading interest. But his purpose is inventory and his account essentially assumes that maps are mirrors of nature. Some are more congruent with reality than others, but these are the “good” and the “accurate,” and they stand, by and large, at the end of a linear progression of increasingly precise representation. Implicit in all of this is what a prominent student of historical cartography, Brian Harley, called “the epistemological myth . . . of the cumulative progress of an objective science” (on p. 247 of “Deconstructing the Map,” in Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, eds., *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, London: Routledge, 1992). Questions about the social and cultural forces that shaped maps and their makers, about the omission or commission of information (by selection, classification, symbolism), and about the power embodied in, or inferred from, maps are left aside. Yet they seem particularly pertinent since Foucault, Derrida, Hayden White, and others have alerted us to the importance of reading between the lines and in the margins of texts, and warned us of the “new fictions of factual

representation" that confront us every day. Although Ruggles describes most of the HBC maps as unremarkable in cartographic design, drafting technique, and innovative quality, and characterizes them as "sketch maps" compiled for reference, the overarching lesson of this recent literature is that documents (such as maps) are never neutral. To view the HBC maps through the lenses of discourse analysis, to pay more attention to their unregarded details, and to broach questions of intertextuality, metaphor, and rhetoric in relation to these documents would surely open the way to fresh and fascinating perspectives on several facets of the Canadian past. Contemplating them, I am led to remark, as Hudson Bay man Edward Smith did to the London Committee of the Company in 1825, "what a field to face the imagination, what a number of ideas rushes in at once, all for the means to investigate a Country so interesting," for there is no doubt that Ruggles' book will be an invaluable companion on that enticing journey of exploration and interpretation.

*University of British Columbia*

GRAEME WYNN

*Life Lived Like a Story*, by Julie Cruikshank in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. xvi, 405 pp. Illus. \$50.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

*Life Lived Like a Story* is the result of a unique collaboration carried out over a number of years between anthropologist Julie Cruikshank and three native women of Athapaskan and Tlingit ancestry: Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. The written narratives presented in the book do not correspond with our usual notion of a life history or autobiography. Indeed, Cruikshank explicitly deals with the extent to which the Western life history/autobiography genre is appropriate for rendering these native women's life experiences.

As Cruikshank worked with her collaborators — all residents of the Yukon territory — she gradually shifted her research focus from documenting their lives and the changes that had taken place in the Yukon to examining the actual way they talked about, remembered, and interpreted their lives. In doing so, she also considers the larger question of what is history and what is myth. Each life history consists of from nine to seventeen segments which include not only stretches of familiar personal narrative (such as stories about getting married and travel) but also