

normal schools is better understood through Lord's view as a representative of centralized educational control. This book succeeds both as a slice of rural conditions in the past and as a solid contribution to the history of education in British Columbia, and as a result bears the unique attribute of appealing to the casual reader and serious scholar alike.

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Duff Pattullo of British Columbia, by Robin Fisher. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. xv, 445 pp. Illus., index. \$40.00 cloth.

From John Foster McCreight to Rita Johnston, British Columbia had twenty-eight premiers. With few exceptions their most common characteristic was their mediocrity. In his "Preface" to *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*, Robin Fisher argues that four premiers — Richard McBride, John Oliver, Pattullo, and W. A. C. Bennett — "dominated British Columbia politics in the twentieth century"; and that of the four "Pattullo was the most significant" (p. ix). In addition to his central task of rescuing the life and career of his subject from the obscurity into which they have fallen, Fisher set himself a number of other goals. He hopes that his biography will help to disprove the notion that the genre throws little light on "class, gender, and race"; to counter the false characterization of Pattullo as an "unthinking and dogmatic opponent of Ottawa's attempt to centralize further Canadian government" by means of the recommendations of the Rowell Sirois Commission; and to employ his subject's life as an embodiment of a British Columbia perspective, as contrasted to "the centralist" interpretation of Canadian history (p. x).

The Pattullo that Fisher has successfully rescued is mostly a public Pattullo. Only very occasionally, as when he quotes the poignant poem entitled "Alone" that Pattullo wrote in his old age, does Fisher reveal much about Pattullo's private self or even his private life. Perhaps warned off by the dismayingly bad examples set by those who have searched for the "essential" Mackenzie King, Fisher was wise to eschew psychohistorical approaches to his subject. Within, then, the natural limits of a mostly public biography, Fisher has painted an often lively portrait. He opens with an account of Pattullo's comfortable Ontario childhood and his sometimes floundering, youthful years. He shows that many of the qualities that came to characterize his public life took form after Pattullo moved west, first to Dawson City during the Yukon gold rush and later to a

Prince Rupert eagerly awaiting the completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific. In describing Pattullo's early years in the west, Fisher places his subject in two vividly realized frontier settings. In both cities Pattullo revelled in being a "man's man," one who lived vigorously ("be up and doing") and generously, and one who gambled, generally unsuccessfully, in real estate in pursuit of the fortune that always eluded him. He entered municipal politics in both cities, and "revelled in the conviviality and banter of election meetings and he seemed to draw energy and confidence from the election campaign" (p. 94). As a municipal politician in cities whose growth, he believed, was held back by a lack of essential services, Pattullo also came to the view that public works could be an engine of general economic prosperity.

In 1916, and as part of a Liberal sweep of the province, Prince Rupert elected Duff Pattullo to the provincial legislature. At forty-three he had, at last, found both the career — he came to describe himself as a "professional politician . . . an expert in the science of Government" — and the success that had so long eluded him (p. 242). Fisher lays out Pattullo's subsequent career in straightforward fashion. The central figure in Fisher's narrative, one who regularly "travelled throughout the province" for the whole of his career, still stands out clearly, but the provincial setting beyond the legislative buildings is less sharply realized than the Dawson City and Prince Rupert of the early years (p. 291). We see Pattullo as an extremely able Minister of Lands, and as an increasingly effective performer in the legislature and on the public platform. Fisher carefully recreates Pattullo's masterly effort at rebuilding his party after its defeat in the 1928 election, and his shrewd fashioning of the victory that took him to the premier's office in 1933. Fisher shows how, despite an extremely severe financial situation, Pattullo's new government quickly embarked on a modest programme of reform; as Fisher reports, "Pattullo believed in an interventionist state and his government would be arguably the most active in Canada during the 1930s" (p. 248). After its re-election in 1937, however, Fisher explains, "much of the reformist heat had gone out of the Pattullo government" and its second term was "a good deal more cautious than the first" (p. 299).

Fisher does a fine job of laying out a British Columbia perspective on the history of federal-provincial relations in the 1920s and 1930s. From Arthur Meighen's cavalier treatment of the visiting provincial Minister of Lands in 1919, though discussions of the deleterious effect of prevailing freight rate practices on the provincial economy, and the province's persistent claims for a renegotiation of the terms under which it entered Con-

federation, Pattullo and his Liberal predecessors found successive federal governments unwilling even to listen to the often telling cases that they made. In 1941, Fisher reports in a culminating example, "Pattullo was simply off to Ottawa for yet another one-way conversation with the federal government" (p. 330). Pattullo rightly found the federal government's attitude towards public works in British Columbia during the depression as especially galling. Despite a long history of national investment in the economic infrastructure of central Canada, especially in canals and railways, R. B. Bennett and Mackenzie King persisted in seeing Pattullo's sensible requests that Canada begin to counter the effects of depression through modest programmes of public works as, as King confided to his diary, "the most absurd ideas about the extent to which public monies should be spent at this time" (p. 286). Fisher is particularly effective in countering a view, first propounded by journalists and politicians and later uncritically accepted by "national" historians, that cast Pattullo as "one of a terrible trio of wilful wreckers" at the dominion-provincial conference on the Rowell-Sirois report in January 1941. Fisher makes clear that, in the short run, Pattullo was entirely correct in arguing that the commission's proposals were unnecessary to the war effort; even without the agreement of the provinces the federal government possessed virtually unlimited powers and employed them vigorously. Fisher also emphasizes a fact that later critics have ignored — namely that, in the long run, the Rowell-Sirois proposals were "political nonsense" (p. 335). Nonetheless, both provincial and national critics ensured that this "political nonsense" played a major role in ensuring that the Liberals won less than half of the seats in the provincial election of 1941, that John Hart replaced Pattullo as provincial Liberal leader and premier of a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives, and that Pattullo would, after almost thirty years, come to lose his seat in the legislature in the 1945 election.

I want to take issue with two already mentioned claims that Fisher makes for his book and for his subject. First, as in very different ways Brian Young's *George-Etienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois* (1981) and Terry Crowley's *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality* (1990) illustrate the point, biography can, indeed, provide insight into such matters as "class, gender, and race." Except in the most general sense that he shows that his subject came from a middle-class family and made a success of a middle-class career, however, Fisher does not add to our knowledge in any one of these important areas. Second, although Fisher claims that Pattullo was the most significant of those on his list of dominant premiers, he makes no case for this evaluation. Although such judgements are neces-

sarily subjective — I myself find the public Pattullo far more engaging a man than the public Bennett, for example — there may perhaps be some objective evidence as well. W. J. (Bill) Asselstine, who served in Pattullo's (and Hart's) cabinets and later sat as a Social Crediter during part of W. A. C. Bennett's premiership, once explained to me that, in his opinion, the two men shared a similar imaginative vision for transforming the provincial economy and the important role that public works should play in that process. The difference between them, Asselstine concluded, was that post-war prosperity provided Bennett with substantial means by which he might implement the vision. If having a vision together with the political will, the financial means, and the public support necessary to put it into place are measures of "significance," then Bennett must take first place and a Pattullo a respectable second.

Such concerns do not obscure the substantial merits of *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*. Robin Fisher has provided us with a detailed, insightful, well-written and well-illustrated account of the life of an important Canadian. All can read it with pleasure, while those much in need of a more balanced perspective on the concerns of the "west beyond the west" can read it with both pleasure and profit.

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Sherwood Lett: His Life and Times, by Reginald H. Roy. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Alumni Association; distributed by University of British Columbia Press. xvi, 180 pp. Illus. \$29.95 cloth.

Well-meaning efforts to write the life of a worthy man do not always make a good biography. The way to this one was paved with good intentions: a widow who wished her brave husband to be remembered, and offered papers, memories, and money to effect it. Perhaps it can be said that men and women can only be what is in the archives they leave behind them, either their own or those of others. In the absence of bibliographical information (other than end-notes), the archives for a life of Sherwood Lett would seem to be a diary he kept from 1915 to 1922, a fair run of letters to his wife Evelyn, and some few other papers. It is possible that the author has done the best he could from what he had available.

A good biography was not made any easier by Sherwood Lett's own writing, the major source, which is prosy and surprisingly naive. Lett was B.C. Rhodes Scholar in November 1919; but despite two years at Oxford,