

White Bears and Other Curiosities: the First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum, by Peter Corley-Smith. A Royal British Columbia Museum Special Publication. [Victoria, B.C.]: Friends of the Royal British Columbia Museum in association with Crown Publications Inc. and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture, 1989. Pp. 148.

The one hundredth anniversary of any institution is cause for celebration in a country as young as Canada, and a popular way in which to commemorate such an event is to write the history of the institution. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Royal British Columbia Museum, which celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 1986, would publish *White Bears and Other Curiosities: the First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*. What is surprising is that this book, on which time and money has obviously been lavished, falls short of the high standard that one would expect from a publication of the Royal B.C. Museum.

What the observant reader notices first is that, although the sub-title says that the book is about the first one hundred years of the museum, in reality *White Bears* only tells the first 82 years of the story, from 1886 to 1968. This, however, proves not to be a real flaw as 1968, the year the museum moved into its present accommodations, is a natural stopping point; the second part of the story, from 1968 to 1984, also written by Peter Corley-Smith, was published in 1985 under the title *The Ring of Time*.

Corley-Smith has taken a unique approach to the history of the museum, in *White Bears*, by attempting to tell it through the lives and work of its three, rather unusual, curator/directors and the other men and women who worked for, with, or against these men. The museum itself began with a petition, signed by thirty of Victoria's prominent men, urging the provincial government to create a museum of Indian and natural history before collectors from the U.S.A. and Europe managed to export all of the artifacts of native history. The legislature approved the idea of a museum, and the Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology opened on October 25, 1886, in a room in the legislature building.

The first curator was John Fannin, a man of many talents and interests, who worked indefatigably to build up the natural history collection and to acquire larger accommodations for the growing collection. He was succeeded by his own assistant, Francis Kermode, of whom little is known. Kermode was not as universally liked as was Fannin, and his curatorship was marred by staff conflicts. Clifford Carl, who took over from Kermode

in 1940, brought the museum into the post-war world, introducing public and school programmes and laying the foundations for what we now know as the Royal British Columbia Museum.

The lives and work of these men provide the makings of an excellent book. Unfortunately, in trying to make the story interesting and readable, Corley-Smith has written a book which comes across more as a series of unconnected anecdotes than as a logically progressing narrative. Each "anecdote" is separated from the preceding by a heading, and some of the pages have two or more of these short sections. Many of these anecdotes, such as the four lines devoted to the visit of Theodore Roosevelt or the ten lines in which the reader learns that Thor Heyerdahl used workspace in the museum for a few months, may be interesting tidbits of information but seem irrelevant to the larger history of the museum when they are left to stand alone.

With so many small pieces of information and large holes in the story, such as those in the life and career of Kermode, Corley-Smith might have been wiser to work all his pieces of information into a straight narrative than to leave each incident to prove its own worth to the history of the museum. This anecdotal style which Corley-Smith has chosen to use will be doubly disappointing to those who have read *The Ring of Time*, in which Corley-Smith so neatly weaves the history of British Columbia into the story of the creation of the exhibits in the new museum.

For all that, *White Bears* is an enjoyable book. Much care has gone into the choosing of the marvellous photographs and drawings with which the book has been bountifully supplied. And the anecdotes used are, for the most part, quite interesting stories of fascinating characters. *White Bears* is, overall, an attractive companion volume to *The Ring of Time*. One could only wish that some of the money that was spent on reproducing photographs and drawings had been spent to have the book properly bound.

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The Beloved Island: The Queen Charlotte Islands, Volume 3, by Kathleen Dalzell. Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1989. Pp. 200. \$24.95.
The Ghostland People: A documentary history of the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1859-1906, by Charles Lillard. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1989. Pp. 318. \$18.95.

The recent volumes by Kathleen Dalzell and Charles Lillard attest to a burgeoning interest in the people and events that have shaped coastal