

Book Reviews

Robert Brown and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition, edited by John Hayman. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989. Pp. xi, 228, illus. \$29.95.

With this eighth volume of the recollections of the pioneers of British Columbia, the University of British Columbia Press has made another relatively unused primary source available to a wider public. Although the Scotsman Robert Brown, whose journal of the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition of 1864 constitutes most of the book, did not remain in the colony to become a pioneer, his observant eye, keen ear, and knowledge of history make him a reputable chronicler of the island scene during the mid-1860s.

Twenty-one-year-old Brown arrived on Vancouver Island in 1863 as a botanical seed collector for the British Columbia Botanical Association of Edinburgh. Unhappy with that task and ambitious for more prestige and higher pay, he ingratiated himself with the local establishment and became a natural choice for the commander of the expedition established by Governor Arthur Kennedy.

The journal is valuable for its descriptions of the island as far north as Comox, its sympathetic treatment of the native Indians, and its forecast of the economic potential of the land and its resources. Drawings by artist Frederick Whymper, also published together here for the first time, enhance the text. Like many educated European newcomers to North America, Brown thought of himself as a gentleman experiencing the wilderness. It comes as no surprise to find his journal infused with the spirit of the romantic explorer pushing back the frontiers of knowledge as well as coping with adventure and danger. With him also came an aesthetic perception which caused him to seek out the beautiful, natural, park-like open spaces with which he was familiar and to dislike the wet, dense underbrush of the coastal forests.

In common with many resource surveyors of this era, those involved with the survey on Vancouver Island sought to reveal the basis of future progress and greatness for the region. Although Brown saw possibilities in coal, turpentine manufactured from resin, and even oil from dogfish, his emphasis was on the more traditional sources of wealth. First among those in importance was agriculture. Every advance from wilderness desert to potato patch or grain field was noted, with the stress placed upon the few months or years involved in the great leap forward. Second in importance, possibly because of the terrain through which the expedition journeyed, was forestry. Brown generally limited future possibilities to spars and knees for ships and stressed the amount of unusable timber in the resource. With all of the recent gold rushes, however, it was this resource which preoccupied the expedition. Every streak of black sand was noted, every stream panned.

Brown displayed a deep anthropological interest in the native Indians of the island. The editor includes in the appendices an account of a potlatch and studies of Indian mythology. In these writings Brown reveals a familiarity with the ancient legends of the world. Yet there is an ambivalence in his attitude towards the Indian. Although he attempted to understand their mythology in an international framework, sympathized with their plight of poverty and unsuccessful land claims, and admired their talents with the canoe and in finding drinking water, in his descriptions of individuals he maintains an ethnocentric distance with the use of terms such as "savagery" and "barbarism." Such phrases as "lazy set," "loafing," and "war-like" appear frequently. Brown seemed unable to accept the Indians' time-honoured desires to take part in their annual harvest of food if that meant that they would be unwilling to work for the expedition irrespective of the wages offered. His romance searched for war-like savages in their natural environment, but the message which emerges from the pages most clearly for the modern reader is that of a dying and doomed race.

The editing by Professor John Hayman is thorough, and, with the exception of recent coal-mining history, accurate. Details surrounding Fort Rupert, Nanaimo, and Cumberland contain some factual errors as well as a lack of historical context. While the journal has been meticulously related to other contemporary documents and information, it has not been placed in the intellectual context of the mid-nineteenth century. We are not told why there was a British Columbia Botanical Association in Edinburgh, nor is Brown placed in a context of the inventory science of the day. The Linnean and Jussieuan systems of botanical classification are mentioned

but not explained. Recent Canadian and British works on aesthetic perception would do much to set Brown in a proper context and to help the reader understand his journal. Hayman has made more solid anthropological connection but, even here, the reader is left without sufficient insights into the emerging discipline.

Irrespective of these criticisms, this is an attractive volume, carefully edited and deserving of a wide readership. Too few books of substance have been published about Vancouver Island. This one is a significant addition.

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The Journals of George M. Dawson: British Columbia, 1875-1878, edited by Douglas Cole and Bradley Lockner. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989.

The transfer of the North West to Canada in 1870 and the addition of British Columbia the next year opened a vast new region that was, from a geological perspective, largely unexplored. The result was that over the next quarter century Canadian geologists and surveyors faced a task that was both daunting and challenging: the investigation of thousands and thousands of square miles of territory. The men of the survey became well-known public figures whose reports were awaited by government officials, railway magnates, and land promoters. The geologists themselves worked under arduous conditions, travelling vast distances under often adverse conditions. It was the "heroic age" of Canadian geological work.

This high profile and the sense of newness about their work meant that many felt it worthwhile to publish diaries, notebooks, sketches, or anything else that they might have. In some instances the works quickly became standards of travel narrative. Typical was George Munro Grant's well-written celebration of the potential of the North West, *Ocean to Ocean* (1873), written after he accompanied railway engineer Sandford Fleming across the west. In other instances, as in John Macoun's *Manitoba and the Great Northwest* (1882), spontaneity and enthusiasm spilled over into outrageous hyperbole. In between there were works from the mundane to the ridiculous.

One individual who was neither outrageous nor ridiculous was George Mercer Dawson. This young man (he was in his twenties when these diaries were written) was the well-brought-up son of the famous J. W. Dawson, principal of McGill University. Meticulous in geology and experienced