

## VIEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

### *The Many Ways of Seeing British Columbia*

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To reflect on half a century of *BC Studies* is, for those of us who have variously contributed to it over the years, to see ourselves in the mirror. We come to realize how much fashions have changed regarding that about which we write, and how our likes and dislikes have come and gone. However critical or laudatory our writing might be, Canada's west coast province remains as distinctive and oftentimes discomfiting as it ever was. Looking through past issues is to glimpse the many ways of seeing British Columbia.

Pondering *BC Studies*' fiftieth anniversary, my curious self decided late one evening to visit back issues, accessible online thanks to the hard work of committed others to whom I am grateful. Perhaps because I write about the past and was in a former life a professional librarian who likes things to be organized, or maybe just for convenience, I did so chronologically, which quickly became part of the pleasure. I expected not to go beyond tables of contents but found myself delving into articles. As I did so, the power of *BC Studies* exploded in my head.

It became clearer to me than ever before how *BC Studies* is our present and our past as British Columbians and Canadians. The journal's two hundred issues chronicle and interpret both what was and what is at the time of publication. Contributors over the years have varied from academics and graduate students in British Columbia, Canada, and the world to politicians and bureaucrats and from professionals to private researchers. As I am aware as a onetime co-editor, an article contributor, and a sometimes reader of *BC Studies* submissions, contributions are scrutinized by scholars or other experts in the field prior to being accepted, returned for suggested revisions, or rejected. Reviewers of new books and other media are selected for their relevant expertise. What appears in print is not random.

The institutional home and editorship of *BC Studies* have provided leadership, continuity, and focus. Founded at the University of British Columbia and based in its Faculty of Arts, the nine academics in charge over the past half century have all been based at UBC except for founding

co-editor, political scientist Walter Young (1968–83) who, during his tenure, was recruited away by the University of Victoria. Founding co-editor Margaret Prang (1968–83), successor Allan Smith (1983–95), later editor Robert A.J. McDonald (2002–08), and incoming co-editor Paige Raibmon have all taught in UBC’s Department of History. Cole Harris (1995–2002), with whom I co-edited the journal, and Graeme Wynn (2008–16) are geographers. Leslie Robertson, who took charge in 2016, is an anthropologist. As journal co-editor (1995–2002), I am the odd person out, being for some reason I have never quite figured out grouped on *BC Studies*’ webpage not among “UBC historians” but, rather, as “a historian from UBC’s Faculty of Education,” which I was. Strange. My first two graduate degrees, as a Russia specialist and as a professional librarian, also set me apart.

*BC Studies* is, very importantly, not only about editors and an editorial board comprised of fellow academics. Talented staff have made each of the two hundred issues possible. This fiftieth anniversary issue gives each of us who reads the journal an impetus to thank them.

Reading through *BC Studies*’ tables of contents online, I was struck by the many ways of seeing British Columbia. The range of subject matter, I realized on going through past issues, has responded both to editors’ fields of expertise and circles of acquaintance and to changing perspectives regarding what matters to those of us who think and write about British Columbia. History and governance long took priority, being challenged at the editorial level towards the end of the past century by geography. While *BC Studies* now has an anthropologist in charge, anthropology and its cognate field of archeology have long been present. Indicative of general interest are articles referencing women, schooling, organized labour, and non-white British Columbians. Respecting the latter, the early focus on those of Chinese descent has grown dramatically over the years to encompass Indigenous British Columbians along with those of Japanese, South Asian, and other origins. The presence at UBC since 1959 of the eminent journal *Canadian Literature* almost certainly explains why *BC Studies* has offered few articles in that field.

#### A NECESSARY DIVERSION

What we make of *BC Studies*’ past half century depends, of course, on our scholarly and reading interests. We are each unique selves, and, in the interests of fair disclosure, here is my background in relationship to the journal and its subject matter. My love affair with British Columbia, which it is, began with the American travel magazine *National*

*Geographic*, to which my father subscribed as one of his few luxuries. With each issue I read as a child, I was seduced by that magical place called British Columbia. It was the totem poles and the mountains that did it for me. Compared to the flat farmland that was my everyday gaze, there was no comparison.

Much later, after many flirtations with other places of being – Samarkand and Tashkent in what was then Soviet Central Asia; the library collections and ways of being at Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley; the wonderment of a job on London’s King’s Road analyzing the Soviet press in an office suspiciously reached by the backstairs of a fruit and vegetable store and what was, I still suspect, a front for the British Foreign Office; the everyday of Rio de Janeiro where my husband was researching his PhD dissertation in Brazilian history and I was invited by the vice-head of the National Archives to organize the papers of a principal nineteenth-century politician – I reached the place of being of my childhood imagination. My love affair with British Columbia remains as intense and satisfying as it ever was.

Across time *BC Studies* has played much the same role as the *National Geographic* did for me as a child. I don’t read every word in every issue, and there are no coloured pictures, except very infrequently, but, like its predecessor in my life, *BC Studies* has reflected, and continues to reflect, the time periods, outlooks, and biases of its dates of publication. Individual issues echo consciously and by inference the essence of what we value and dispute about British Columbia at particular points in time. Having been part of the editorial direction of *BC Studies*, I plead guilty to the prejudices that, in part unrealized at the time, informed judgments of what belongs in the journal and what does not. Every time I have submitted a manuscript or been invited to assess a submission, I realize once again that, however much we might think we rise above the biases we like to attribute to others, not so.

I love, and write about, British Columbia not because of any sense of obligation but because I have chosen to do so. I realize today, more so than ever, that my goal as a historian is to draw attention to ordinary British Columbians’ ways of being. The nasty bits are there, just as they are in each of us, but there are also the sunnier moments that make everyday lives worthwhile.

However insular we might think we are and whatever our backgrounds, we each exist within larger frames of reference, the earliest in my memory being of that small child thumbing through her father’s *National Geographic*s. I still remember a few years later the excitement

when news spread through the local school that a “black” man had been spotted in town, and I vividly recall how we rushed during the lunch hour to the local drug store where he, a travelling salesman, had been seen, and waited outside to have a look. There he was, and, while he did not live up to the billing, he was firmly planted in my mind as a marker of difference that would only be challenged in college on getting to know a fellow student from Ghana, Kofi Annan, who turned out to be just like the rest of us, if a bit smarter. Each morning I breathe Vancouver’s location on the far edge of a continent looking out of our bedroom window onto mountains reaching towards the water beyond which lies faraway Asia. However small or large are our everyday worlds, we are part of larger wholes.

Over time I have become aware of how fully my goal in writing is to bring to life the ways of being of ordinary British Columbians like you and me as we connect with larger wholes. It is the ordinary of the everyday that gives our lives meaning. However much we might think that we are alone against the world, it is not the case.

As I have long since learned through my research and writing, my love affair with British Columbia is not unique to me. Almost all of what I have published over the past number of years, with the exception of two general histories of British Columbia, has its impetus in others considering that their lives matter to the extent of putting aspects of themselves on paper or otherwise making their stories known so that outsiders like myself can with permission make them accessible in the form of publications. Schoolteacher Jessie McQueen wrote letters home to Nova Scotia, as did missionary wife Emma Crosby, whose story was co-written with Jan Hare, to Ontario. British Columbian Constance Lindsay Skinner was so successful a writer that her papers are tended in the New York Public Library (*BC Studies* 137). Other stories intersecting with British Columbia that have intrigued me are held in memory by descendants, as with Joe Silvey from the Azores; Maria Mahoi, who combined Indigenous Hawaiian and Indigenous British Columbian descent; the families of every background who have long since been removed from Stanley Park; everyday French Canadians, Iroquois, Abenakis, and Chinese; and the many early British Columbian families comprised of a newcomer man and an Indigenous woman. All of these stories I have sought to tell. On the upside of the socio-economic spectrum, my UBC doctoral dissertation and first published book drew on firsthand memories shared with me by men privileged to have attended British Columbia’s early elite private schools. None of these

writings would have been possible except for others caring enough about British Columbia to ensure that these lives were not forgotten and for *BC Studies* providing a scholarly base from which to write. I am grateful.

#### BACK TO *BC STUDIES*

Returning to *BC Studies*' back issues, I was repeatedly surprised by how many earlier articles outside of my immediate research interests caught my fancy, and I read them for the first time, alternatively by how many I reread for the pleasure of doing so. The power of *BC Studies* amazed me. All of the articles of which I took note and introduce here are accessible online by issue number, which is noted in parentheses after its description.

I was repeatedly struck by how influential *BC Studies* has been to my career as a historian. Many of the articles I read online were old friends. In just the inaugural issue (1) I found the now classic account by UBC historian Charles Humphries of the banning in 1920 of a history of Canada from British Columbia's public schools for being anti-British and pro-Catholic and pro-French Canadian, which vied with fellow UBC historian Keith Ralston's percipient interrogation of the province's early salmon-canning industry (1). Humphries highlights both British Columbia's long-time British orientation and the idiocy of banning books; Ralston a principal component of the provincial economy all too easily reduced to little tin cans with fancy labels. Within just two years, who should appear on the pages of *BC Studies* but leading American labour historian Philip Foner, drawing attention, by means of a fascinating 1864 primary document, to "The Colored Inhabitants of Vancouver Island" (8). *BC Studies* has been from early on in no way a publishing backwater.

The more issues I read the more I realized *BC Studies*' influence on my writing life. Going through tables of contents, I was struck by the number of seminal articles I had long since read explicating core aspects of British Columbia's history and ways of life that can now be pleurably reread online. Among the many ways of seeing British Columbia are Wilson Duff's "The Fort Victoria's Treaties" (3); Gordon Selman's "Adult Education in Barkerville, 1863 to 1875" (9); Barry Gough's "The Royal Navy and the Oregon Crisis, 1844-1846" (9); Robin Fisher's "Joseph Truth and Indian Land Policy" (12); Nelson Riis's "The Walhachin Myth: A Study in Settlement Abandonment" (17); Frances Woodward's "The Influence of the Royal Engineers on the Development of British Columbia" (24); Keith Ralston's "John Sullivan Deas: A Black Entrepreneur in British Columbia Salmon Canning" (32) and his

“The Canadian Pacific Railway and Vancouver’s Development to 1900” (35); Peter Ward’s “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870–1939” (45); Eleanor Bartlett’s “Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901–1929” (51); Cole Harris’s “Moving Amid the Mountains, 1870–1930” (58); Jean Barman’s “Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver: Residential Differentiation and Civic Voting Behaviour” (69), which I had in the moment forgotten I wrote; Richard Mackie’s “The Colonization of Vancouver Island, 1849–1858” (96); Adele Perry’s “‘Oh I’m Just Sick of the Faces of Men’: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia” (105–106); Keith Carlson’s “The Lynching of Louie Sam” (109); Paige Raibmon’s “‘A New Understanding of Things Indian’: George Raley’s Negotiation of the Residential School Experience” (110); Sylvia Van Kirk’s “Tracing the Fortunes of Five Founding Families of Victoria” (115–116); and Bob McDonald’s “He Thought He was the Boss of Everything: Masculinity and Power in a Vancouver Family” (132). Where would our thinking about early British Columbia be today if not for these critical pieces of scholarship?

The many ways of seeing British Columbia extend well beyond these memorable articles. Exemplary is the longstanding attention that, from its beginning, *BC Studies* has accorded British Columbians of Chinese descent (noted in 1, 4, 13–15, 18, 22, 27, 30–31, 39, 45, 59, 62, 64, 69–70, 75, 80, 107, 134, 136, 148, 154, 156–157, 169, 177). I am more than a bit embarrassed that, when my “Beyond Chinatown: Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia” (177) appeared in *BC Studies* in 2013 and I was in consequence honoured with a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, the feat was in no way unique, as I had liked to think.

Far more prominent on the pages of recent *BC Studies* are Indigenous British Columbians. I was particularly impressed by Theresa Jeffries’s “Sechelt Woman and Self-Government,” which begins “My band, the Sechelt Indian band...” (89), and in the same issue, Shirley Joseph skilfully concluding “Assimilation Tools: Then and Now” with a poem whose first and last lines read, “I grew up near Canada” (89).

Some of us who are non-Indigenous have been privileged to contribute to the understanding of this important topic animating British Columbia past and present, as with my “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850–1900” (115–116), which *BC Studies* unbeknownst to me nominated for and won the Joan Jensen-Darlis Miller Prize awarded by the Coalition of Western Women’s History for best article on the history of women west of the Mississippi,



and was thrice reprinted in American and Canadian textbooks; “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver” (155); and “Reflections on Being, and Becoming, Métis in British Columbia,” co-written with Métis scholar Mike Evans (161).

Along with a growing flow of articles on Indigenous topics have been whole issues. “Indians in British Columbia” (19) appeared now almost half a century ago. It was followed later in time by “British Columbia: A Place for Aboriginal Peoples?” (57); “In Celebration of Our Survival” (89) with almost wholly Indigenous authors; “Anthropology in the Courts” (95) respecting the *Delagmuukw* case; “The First Nations in Canada” (101); “Native Peoples and Colonialism” (115–116); “The Nisga’a Treaty” (120); “Perspectives on Aboriginal Culture” (135); “Native Geographies” (138–139); “Past Emergent” (152); “These Outer Shores” (187); and the recent issue entitled “Indigeneities and Museums” (199).

These many ways of seeing British Columbia have been intuited by a range of others, both in this special issue and across time in *BC Studies*. British Columbia’s first quarter of a century was perceptively assessed (100) by founding editor Margaret Prang, successor Allan Smith (also in 45), and scholars Gillian Creese (also with Veronica Strong-Boag in 105–106), David Elkins, and Robin Fisher. Allan Pritchard has interpreted “the shapes of history in British Columbia writing” (93).

#### TO SUM UP

As a historian of British Columbia and onetime *BC Studies* co-editor, I expected to revisit the familiar on reading through past issues of the journal, which I did do to my pleasure, but I also came across many contributions of interest that I had passed over the first time around. I relearned British Columbia from a host of perspectives, including from the time periods in which articles were written. The power of *BC Studies*, it strikes me, lies not only in each new issue, which matters, but also in our having an ever-growing number of past issues at hand.

Just as do individuals, *BC Studies* has over the years sought, and continues to seek, to intuit the larger meanings of who we have been and are as British Columbians, Canadians, and just plain human beings. Whatever the frame in which we make our everyday lives and however much we might sometimes think that we are alone against the world, we are not. For half a century *BC Studies* has helped to bring us together as a people and a place. The journal has reflected, and continues to reflect, the prejudices and priorities of the time periods in which issues are

published, which for those of us who think of ourselves as historians is part of what we continue to value about the journal. The ways of seeing British Columbia are many, and *BC Studies* is among them.