

*Review Essay*

AN OCCASIONAL DISTANT  
RUMBLE OF GUNS:

*The Second World War in  
British Columbia's Historiography*

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THE SECOND WORLD WAR casts a large shadow over Canada's twentieth century. Roughly 1.1 million Canadians put on a military uniform and served in the air, on the seas, or on land, and more than forty-four thousand lost their lives. At home, the conflict transformed the country economically, culturally, socially, and politically and left it with a substantially greater international stature. The war's scale is reflected in a sizable historiography and its indelible impression in Canadians' collective memory and identity.<sup>1</sup> Yet Canadians' experiences of war on the home front have been studied through a mostly national lens, which tends to focus on central Canada with its gaze facing east to the Atlantic and European theatres that were *the* war for most Canadians. Was the war as transformative in Canada's pacific province as the historiography tells us it was nationally? British Columbia's Pacific location, distinctive geography, demographic makeup, economic structure, and historical trajectory might have shaped experiences that do not echo the national narrative.

Given the paucity of BC examples in the national war literature, we must turn to the vibrant historical writing on the province for its residents' experiences of the war. Remarkably, doing so produces slim pickings. There is simply no provincial historiographical equivalent to the war's prominence in national memory and identity. The literature is widely dispersed, disconnected, and examines only particular aspects of the war experience. The one exception is the sophisticated and growing literature on the treatment of BC residents of Japanese descent during

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Cook, *The Fight for History: 75 Years of Forgetting, Remembering, and Remaking Canada's Second World War* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2020).

their internment, removal and expatriation, and its challenge to the dominant “Good War” mythology. More books and articles have been produced on this topic than on all other wartime subjects combined. Undeniably, the appalling treatment of Japanese Canadians remains crucial to understanding the provincial story and was powerful and painful for those involved. It was not, however, the sum total of British Columbians’ experience of war and it is to that broader subject that this historiographical examination now turns.

Paradoxically, despite the fact that BC historians often use the war as the tipping point between the premodern era and the rapid economic, logistical, and socio-political modernization of the W.A.C. Bennett years and the transformative role of the war in the national metanarrative, they have made little systemic analysis of its impact. Apart from some unpublished theses and some political, social, and labour histories, finding the war in histories of the province is a bit like placer mining for gold nuggets. Academic historians, however, have largely left untapped the plethora of popular and local histories that offer rich and diverse accounts of human experiences of war. In sum, the Second World War appears in BC’s historiography as little more than an occasional distant rumble of guns. This paper charts the broad historical landscape to provide a baseline from which scholars might begin synthesizing the disparate threads of the war’s history in British Columbia.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHIES AND SURVEYS AT WAR

Historiographical examinations are a good place to start looking for the Second World War in the province’s history. Robin Fisher noted in 1993–94 that BC’s historians have not engaged in a lot of self-reflection. His observation remains mostly true.<sup>2</sup> His retrospective article, marking the hundredth issue of *BC Studies*, explores trends through the first ninety-nine issues and remains one of the few relatively wide-ranging historiographical surveys. Though he never mentions the Second World War, Fisher notes patterns that begin to explain why BC historians have overlooked it, especially their heavy emphasis on the nineteenth century, prompting him to suggest that historians “should think about getting into the twentieth century before it is over.”<sup>3</sup> Fisher points more broadly

<sup>2</sup> Robin Fisher, “Matters for Reflection: *BC Studies* and British Columbia History,” *BC Studies* 100 (Winter 1993/94): 68.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, “Matters for Reflection,” 63. Almost a decade later, Adele Perry also noted that we “do not know very much ... about the twentieth century as a whole.” See Adele Perry, “On Not Going on a Field Trip: Presence, Absence, and the Writing of BC History,”

to a lack of engagement in ideas and debate, and the dearth of work on demographics,<sup>4</sup> economics, politics,<sup>5</sup> environment and geography, and metropolis-hinterland relations (or the regions beyond the populous southwest), among others. Significantly, in the lengthy list of deficiencies, Fisher ignores military history. Subsequent historiographical articles on specific aspects of BC's history demonstrate a similar indifference and almost never mention war.<sup>6</sup> The major addition to the broader self-reflection of BC historians is undoubtedly Chad Reimer's *Writing British Columbia History, 1784–1958*, which explores the role of history as a central tool in “the construction of a new-European society – and more particularly, an Anglo- or British-derived society – on the Northwest Coast of North America.”<sup>7</sup> This reflects his focus on figures like W.K. Lamb and W.N. Sage, the first professionally trained historians who worked on British Columbia's nineteenth century, and, as a result, the Second World War appears only as a distant landmark in Reimer's narrative journey. Historiographies are in part a reflection of the literature they examine. These historiographical works demonstrate that a substantial distance separates the Second World War from the historical debates that matter to BC historians.

Another tool for assessing the current state of the art in the field of BC history is the collection of broad survey texts, produced either

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*BC Studies* 132 (Winter 2001/02): 61. Attention to the twentieth century in British Columbia has grown in the last decade.

<sup>4</sup> This critique has been ably addressed by John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, “Matters for Reflection,” 63, argues that political history fell out of favour before much good work was completed in British Columbia. However, Robert McDonald's recently published political survey goes some way to addressing this critique, *A Long Way to Paradise: A New History of British Columbia Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Leier, “Whither Labour History: Regionalism, Class, and the Writing of BC History,” *BC Studies* 111 (Fall 1996): 61–67; Gail Edwards, “Writing Religion into the History of British Columbia: A Review Essay,” *BC Studies* 113 (Spring 1997): 101–105; Patricia Roy, “Active Voices: A Third Generation of Studies of the Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 117 (Spring 1998): 51–61; Adele Perry, “Writing Women into British Columbia History,” *BC Studies* 122 (Summer 1999): 85–88; Adele Perry, “Feminism, History and Writing British Columbia's Past,” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice* 25, no. 1 (2000): 69–74; Graeme Wynn, “‘Shall We Linger along Ambitionless?’ Environmental Perspectives on British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 142/143 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 5–67; Henry Yu, “Refracting Pacific Canada: Seeing Our Uncommon Past,” *BC Studies* 156/157 (Winter 2007/Spring 2008): 5–10; Susan Neylan, “Colonialism and Resettling British Columbia: Canadian Aboriginal Historiography, 1992–2012,” *History Compass* 11, no. 10 (2013): 833–44; Susan Neylan, “Unsettling British Columbia: Canadian Aboriginal Historiography, 1992–2012,” *History Compass* 11, no. 10 (2013): 845–58. Patricia Roy's 2015 historiographical self-reflections touch more thoughtfully on the war, “Reflection: From Exclusion to Inclusion: An Informal Historiographical Memoir about East Asians in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 188 (Winter 2015/16): 91–106.

<sup>7</sup> Chad Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History, 1784–1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

for university classrooms or the popular market. British Columbia is the subject of four major scholarly surveys by Margaret Ormsby, Hugh Johnston (ed.), Jean Barman, and Patricia Roy and John Herd Thompson, as well as popular histories by Daniel Francis, Terry Reksten, and George Woodcock.<sup>8</sup> The surveys provide a synthesized snapshot at a given point, showing the themes and events that dominate and frame the province's historical grand narrative, and thus assessing the place of the Second World War. Remarkably, these syntheses provide a surprisingly consistent and relatively brief story of the war. With some slight differences in emphasis, all address three key storylines: the Japanese Canadian removal and internment; the political antics of Premier Duff Pattullo, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and the Coalition government; and the growth in strength, reach, and legitimacy of organized labour, especially in forestry. Other briefly mentioned touchstones are the war's socioeconomic impact on jobs, industrialization, and women, but this material is often mainly extrapolated from the national story rather than from an examination of BC conditions.<sup>9</sup>

The overall picture is relatively thin on details and the broader impact of the conflict. Margaret Ormsby, writing in the mid-1950s, of course ended her classic history of British Columbia in 1939, with only her epilogue carrying the story through the war years to her postwar present.<sup>10</sup> Despite its brevity, Ormsby's descriptive summary reveals an immediacy from her having lived through the war in Vancouver as well as conveying a sense that the war had been important and transformative for the province. The paucity of coverage is evident in the most substantive survey, Jean Barman's excellent, *The West beyond the West*, which dedicates only three of its 420 pages of text to the Second World War's impact and five and half pages to the Japanese Canadian internment.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: Macmillan, 1958); Hugh Johnston, ed., *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996); Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007 [1991]); Patricia Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005); Daniel Francis, *Far West: The Story of British Columbia* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2006); Terry Reksten, *The Illustrated History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2005); George Woodcock, *British Columbia: A History of the Province* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> One exception to this is *The Pacific Province*, specifically Chapter 9 (Veronica Strong-Boag) on society and Chapter 10 (John Belshaw and David J. Mitchell) on economics. Drawing on BC statistics, both chapters contain brief but useful discussions on the wartime housing crunch, economic expansion, demographic growth, and women's penetration of the workforce.

<sup>10</sup> Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 481–83.

This seems tiny proportionally, but it is indicative of Barman's challenge in synthesizing the existing literature. Her conclusions about the war are necessarily general and even speculative:

Across British Columbia inequalities abounded during the inter-war years and through the Second World War. Class, race and ethnicity, and gender circumscribed opportunities. The urban-rural dichotomy probably widened ... But it took another war to waken British Columbians to the anomalies so long accepted as the way things were, and therefore ought to be.<sup>11</sup>

Roy and Thompson's treatment of the war years, though still short, is the most wide-ranging, and, along with *The Pacific Province*, provides more BC examples in examining the war's impact. Uniquely, Roy and Thompson divide their chapters at the end of 1941, with the early war years merely a postscript to the Depression. For them, British Columbians' "war started in earnest with Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor" and the onset of the Pacific War.<sup>12</sup> From 1942 on, the authors track trends in economic and social development, integrating them seamlessly into the postwar modernization of W.A.C. Bennett's era, effectively back-dating the start of that process to the mid-point of the war. This integrates the war more effectively into a broader trajectory of British Columbia's twentieth century, though arguably at the expense of ignoring the first two years and obscuring somewhat the end of the war and transition to peace. The popular histories by Francis and Reksten likewise demonstrate fleeting coverage of the usual stories, with Woodcock being slightly more in depth, especially on politics and labour.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, historical surveys with light coverage of the Second World War, like historiographical analyses, reflect the existing literature on this subject.

#### MYOPIA

Casting a broad gaze across BC's historiography reveals an unmistakable myopia around the war years. This manifests in a variety of ways, but most immediately visible is the use of 1939 or 1945 as convenient signposts. The war becomes the end point of the interwar period, as in Andrew Parnaby's study of dockworkers in Vancouver between 1919 and 1939, or the launch pad to the second half of the twentieth century, as in Jonathan

<sup>11</sup> Barman, *West beyond the West*, 285.

<sup>12</sup> Roy and Thompson, *British Columbia*, 133.

<sup>13</sup> Francis, *Far West*; Reksten, *Illustrated History of British Columbia*; and Woodcock, *British Columbia*.

Peyton's study of long-term social and environmental effects of resource-development schemes in northwest British Columbia.<sup>14</sup> One MA thesis on populism even traces developments up to 1939 and picked up the story in 1945, having skipped the war entirely.<sup>15</sup> Generally, such periodization comes without considering the war as part of the rationale for the date chosen, though some scholars briefly examine its role. Peter Twohig's article on postwar nursing in British Columbia briefly explores how difficult wartime working conditions and shortages of nursing staff set the stage for important postwar transitions.<sup>16</sup> Using the Second World War as a breakpoint in the stream of history, or the easy categories of "interwar" and "postwar," is not unique to BC's history, nor indeed is it an egregious scholarly crime, but it amplifies the inattention to the war years.

A number of studies overlap the war years in whole or in part, but with virtually no mention of the event. Christopher Clarkson's, *Domestic Reforms: Political Visions and Family Regulation in British Columbia, 1862–1940*, is one. Although advertised as ending in 1940, the analysis effectively concludes in the mid-1930s.<sup>17</sup> While the final chapter of Megan Davies's compelling examination of the history of old age care in British Columbia deals mostly with the war years in discussing hospital clearance policies and the growing professionalism of the bureaucrats and social workers who crafted policy, she does not mention the war.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to consider whether the field of elder care, its policy shifts, and personnel evolved completely untouched by wartime exi-

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Parnaby, *Citizen Docker: Making a New Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Jonathan Peyton, *Unbuilt Environments: Tracing Postwar Developments in Northwest British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017). Such practices are common and examples abound: Gabriele P. Scartellato, "Italian Immigrant Workers in Powell River, BC: A Case Study of Settlement before World War II," *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985): 145–63; Antonio Filomeno Arruda, "Rural Youth in Transition: Growing Up in Williams Lake, BC, 1945–75" (PhD diss., UBC, 2000); Becki Ross, *Burlesque West: Showgirls, Sex, and Sin in Postwar Vancouver* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Jonathan Swainger, "Teen Trouble and Community Identity in Post-Second World War Northern British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 150–79; Soren C. Larsen, "Place Identity in the Resource-Dependent Area of Northern British Columbia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 4 (2004): 944–60.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony D. Price, "Looking for Populism in Northwestern British Columbia: The Inter-War and Post-War Years" (MA thesis, UBC, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Peter L. Twohig, "'We Shall Arrive at the 'Utopia' of Nursing': Reconceptualizing Nursing Labour in British Columbia, 1945–65," *BC Studies* 206 (Summer 2020): 9–30.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Allan Clarkson, *Domestic Reforms: Political Visions and Family Regulations in British Columbia, 1862–1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007). Another example is the popular and political history by R.G. Harvey, *Head On!: Collisions of Egos, Ethics, and Politics in BC's Transportation History* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Megan Davies, *Into the House of Old: A History of Residential Care in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

gencies or whether the war just did not enter the mind of the historian as a potential factor. Certainly, scholars of the “War and Society” field must guard against a tendency for their focus on war-related change to lead to a presumption that the Second World War changed everything. Undeniably, continuity survives even a total war in many ways, and so Davies’s inattention to the Second World War may be appropriate. The problem is that, given the broad pattern of indifference to war in BC’s historiography, it is difficult to tell if scant attention to the war and its potential influences accurately reflects the evidence or whether it is an act of omission.

#### DISTANT RUMBLE OF GUNS

More commonly, the Second World War appears fleetingly in works covering the war years. Political histories reveal, and to a large extent helped set, this pattern, especially Martin Robin’s *Pillars of Profit*.<sup>19</sup> Robin dedicates two chapters to the period from 1939 to 1945, dividing them at the 1941 transformative provincial election, which saw no party achieve a majority. He notes the broader context in 1939–40, in which, if there were any consensus, it was “around Canada’s sacred war mission, which implied a national patriotism and a willingness to sacrifice local claims to the larger national interest.”<sup>20</sup> But the significance of this was only to indicate that Premier Duff Pattullo was out of step in his pugnaciously defending provincial rights in the federal-provincial wrangling over the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission findings.<sup>21</sup> Pattullo’s subsequent election failings, political decline, and the performance of the Liberal-Conservative Coalition government hold centre stage in these chapters. That stage was the legislature in Victoria; the leading provincial political figures, the actors; and their interpersonal relationships and machinations, the narrative.<sup>22</sup> Robin’s tight focus seems odd given his assessment that:

Provincial politics became, in the year 1942, parochial politics, shrunken to insignificance by an international war of awesome

<sup>19</sup> Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province, 1934–1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Robin’s interpretation of this has since been challenged by Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); and George Abbott, “Pattullo, the Press, and the Dominion-Provincial Conference of 1941,” *BC Studies* III (Fall 1996): 37–59.

<sup>22</sup> George Abbott examines these events in more detail, but he, too, focuses on the politics, with only slight attention to the wartime context in the motivations of the various political actors in “Duff Pattullo and the Coalition Crisis of 1941,” *BC Studies* 102 (Summer 1994): 30–53.

dimensions in which Canada's commitment daily grew. Provincial governments became co-operative caretaker regimes, local adjuncts of the federal government which directed the huge war effort. Provincial political news was shunted to the back pages of the newspapers replete with screaming headlines dramatizing events in the blazing Pacific theatre.<sup>23</sup>

Through the latter half of the conflict, war news occasionally intrudes into Robin's contextual references, but it rarely disturbs his analysis and narrative. This pattern has been largely replicated in the key political biographies of Duff Pattullo and W.A.C. Bennett, even though the latter served on the Post-War Rehabilitation Council in 1942–43.<sup>24</sup> Gordon Hak's history, *The Left in British Columbia*, proves more attentive to the war, given the undeniable influence of wartime socioeconomic factors and broader military and geopolitical shifts in elevating the profile of the left generally and the provincial CCF in particular.<sup>25</sup> These influential works bequeathed the political core to the provincial historical syntheses discussed previously and inspired the military metaphor in my article's title.

Robert A.J. McDonald's recent sweeping re-examination of a century of the province's political history has altered that landscape and the place of the Second World War in important ways.<sup>26</sup> McDonald focuses less on the idiosyncratic personalities of political leaders, partisan squabbles, or even social class, and more on the political culture that shaped them, arguing that "ideology lies at the heart of the province's political fault lines."<sup>27</sup> Though the first two years of the war warrant hardly a mention, from 1942 onward he repeatedly notes its contextual impact on British Columbians, suggesting that the "war years reinforced an emerging belief that the state should play a larger role responding to the challenges of modern life, especially through social legislation."<sup>28</sup> He does not explicitly explore the mechanisms of how wartime contexts reshaped BC political culture, a topic that cries out for further research, but claims that British Columbians were the fastest to move towards embracing an enhanced

<sup>23</sup> Robin, *Pillars of Profit*, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia*; David J. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Gordon Hak, *The Left in British Columbia: A History of Struggle* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> McDonald, *Long Way to Paradise*.

<sup>27</sup> McDonald, 6.

<sup>28</sup> McDonald, 172.



role for the state and state intervention – something that all Canadians were desiring by war's end. McDonald concludes:

the mid-war years appear to have been the point at which all parties accepted some measure of progressive social reform as a normative part of political discourse ... [and] that the modernist embrace of specialized expertise, bureaucratic management structures, and welfare state reforms emerged as a transformative force in British Columbia's political culture.<sup>29</sup>

In saying this, McDonald integrates the war years into the broader chronology of BC politics and political culture in the twentieth century.

Across the regional literature on social and cultural history, the picture is decidedly mixed. Numerous works cover the mid-twentieth century but touch only fleetingly, if at all, on the Second World War. Robert Campbell's nuanced examination of the regulation of Vancouver's beer parlours is such a case.<sup>30</sup> His fifth chapter highlights a number of seemingly significant wartime influences: at home these included shortages and rationing, and increased restrictions and overcrowding due to a lack of licensing of new establishments; and, overseas, the men and women in the armed forces increased their consumption of alcohol and returned home with a very different drinking culture. But after only two pages on these important changes, Campbell shifts to the postwar upswell of demands for, and achievement of, the reform of Vancouver's restrictive regulatory regime, without referring back to the wartime experiences: the war is prequel but not catalyst.

It can be similarly challenging to find the war in works that structure their arguments and chapters thematically rather than chronologically. Sometimes this creates an almost complete lack of distinction between prewar, wartime, and postwar, as in a number of the chapters in the edited collection *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*.<sup>31</sup> More commonly thematic structure creates episodic vignettes in the larger conceptual or narrative flow. These can sometimes be fairly superficial, as in Melanie Buddle's *The Business of Women* or Ben

<sup>29</sup> McDonald, *Long Way to Paradise*, 192.

<sup>30</sup> Robert A. Campbell, *Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1925-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Jean Barman and Mona Gleason, eds., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 2nd ed. (Calgary: Detselig, 2003). The two chapters by Neil Sutherland and another by Barman all fit this pattern. Emilie L. Montgomery's chapter, "The War Was a Very Vivid Part of My Life: The Second World War and the Lives of British Columbia Children" (161-74), is an excellent counterpoint and rich exploration of the conflict's impact on children and schooling.

Bradley's *British Columbia by the Road*, both of which have chapters that cover the war chronologically or thematically but do not engage wartime conditions in any systematic way.<sup>32</sup> There have been a number of works that employ a similarly thematic structure but still succeed in integrating war contexts in insightful and thoughtful ways.<sup>33</sup> John Lutz's *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* demonstrates this ably, exploring the Second World War experiences in the chapters on the Lekwungen and Tsilhqot'in First Nations as well as in a chapter on Indigenous labour.<sup>34</sup> All these works can be important in reconstructing a broader picture of the war's place in BC's history, but the scattered and limited nature of historians' collective attention explains why this had not yet happened.

A few social histories provide sustained and systematic examinations of wartime conditions.<sup>35</sup> One such is Eric Sager's important quantitative study of women's participation in British Columbia's industrial labour force from the 1920s to the 1950s.<sup>36</sup> His data set, drawing on statistics produced by the Department of Labour in concert with census data, enables a more continuous view of the war years, and his sensitive attention to broader contexts situates the war years in long-term trends.

<sup>32</sup> Melanie Buddle, *The Business of Women: Marriage, Family, and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1902–1951* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Ben Bradley, *British Columbia by the Road: Car Culture and the Making of a Modern Landscape* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017). Other examples include Robert Kenneth Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917–1981* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); and a number of the chapters in the important collection on rural British Columbia edited by Ruth Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), especially those by Brian Low, Ken Favrholt, and David Peterson del Mar.

<sup>33</sup> A good example is Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia*, as is J.I. Little, "Vancouver's Playground: Leisure and Sociability on Bowen Island, 1902–57," *BC Studies* 171 (Autumn 2011): 37–68; Chris Madsen, "Technology Adoption and Adaptation in Canada's West Coast Shipyards, 1918–1950," *Northern Mariner* 23, no. 3 (2012): 235–82; Robert A. McDonald, "The Quest for 'Modern Administration': British Columbia's Civil Service 1870s–1940s," *BC Studies* 161 (Spring 2009): 9–34.

<sup>34</sup> John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008). Comparable coverage and depth is produced in Patricia Katharine Wood, *Nationalism from the Margins: Italians in Alberta and British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> For example, see Helen Raptis's consideration of place and career stage in shaping the degree to which teachers actually put into practice government directives to foster wartime unity and participation, "My Job Was to Teach: Educators' Memories of Teaching in British Columbia during World War II," *Pedagogica Historica* 54, no. 4 (2018): 447–67; and Patricia Roy's examination of the relationship between military service and citizenship and belonging for ethnic communities in British Columbia, "The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens," *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 3 (1978): 341–58.

<sup>36</sup> Eric W. Sager, "Women in the Industrial Labour Force: Evidence for British Columbia, 1921–53," *BC Studies* 149 (Spring 2006): 39–62. This piece is a useful complement to Melanie Buddle's work on women entrepreneurs.

The result is a convincing portrayal of the war's impact on women's labour force participation as being more disruptive than transformational, with prewar growth trends re-emerging in the later 1940s and 1950s. Equally important are Jill Wade's *Houses for All*, Lisa Pasolli's *Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma*, and Michael Dawson's *Selling British Columbia*, all of which integrate wartime conditions as key elements in their studies.<sup>37</sup> Wade's examination of the long campaign for affordable social housing in British Columbia between 1919 and 1950 dedicates two of its five chapters to researching the housing crisis of the 1940s and the responses to it. Wade intensively examines the war-related demographic changes, economic expansion, and supply and labour shortages that amplified an already serious housing inadequacy coming out of the Depression. Activism during and after the war encouraged all governmental levels to respond in diverse ways that eased the shortages for middle-income earners, if not for the working poor. Pasolli argues that childcare debates intensified in British Columbia during the war but that state-sponsored daycares never came about because the province lacked central Canada's substantial wartime industries. Private organizations, not the state, organized small-scale daycares in parts of Vancouver during the war on charitable grounds related to need rather than to the social rights of working mothers and then quickly disappeared at war's end. Dawson's work dismantles the assumption that the tourism industry had all but ceased through the Depression and war years, with the pent-up demand explaining the postwar boom. By actually examining the events and changes between 1939 and 1945, he makes clear that the postwar boom only makes sense in the context of wartime consolidation, organization, and regulatory systems established by both industry and government.<sup>38</sup> As such Dawson's work connects Second World War conditions with a key provincial industry, as well as British Columbia and the tourism industry with national literature on the genesis of the consumerism that is mostly associated with the postwar era.<sup>39</sup> All these diverse works

<sup>37</sup> Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994); Lisa Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma: A History of British Columbia's Social Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004). Dawson's wartime chapter first appeared as "From 'Business as Usual' to 'Salesmanship in Reverse': Tourism Promotion in British Columbia during the Second World War," *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2002): 230–55.

<sup>38</sup> Nor is Dawson alone in revealing continuity, and even growth, in tourism during the war years, as Little makes clear in "Vancouver's Playground."

<sup>39</sup> Graham Broad, *A Small Price to Pay: Consumer Culture on the Canadian Home Front, 1939–45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Bettina Liverant, *Buying Happiness: The Emergence of Consumer Consciousness in English Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

provide crucial beachheads from which to begin constructing a socio-cultural understanding of British Columbians' experience of the Second World War.

Graduate students have written much of the most concerted social and cultural history of British Columbia in the era of the Second World War. Some theses and dissertations reflect the established broader patterns, such as ignoring the war, glossing over its events, or using it primarily as an era-marker, but many explicitly examine social and cultural topics in the crucible of the Second World War.<sup>40</sup> Leading examples include Emilie Montgomery's excellent work on schooling and children; two MA theses on the Chinese Canadian community by Shelly Chan and by Judy Maxwell, respectively; and Gregory Kier's and Kerry Ragnar Steeves's social studies of the Gumboot Navy and the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, respectively.<sup>41</sup> Others have broader topical and temporal canvasses and yet still provide a systematic examination of the war years. Consider, for example, Jenny Clayton's examination of provincial park creation in twentieth-century British Columbia or Leonard Kuffert's treatment of the formative years of the Social Credit movement in British Columbia between 1932 and 1952.<sup>42</sup> Sadly, only a small percentage

<sup>40</sup> For examples, see: Anjan K. Chaklader, "The Impact of Royal Commissions on Public Policy: Workers' Compensation in British Columbia, 1941-1968" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1992); Colin MacMillan Coates, "Death in British Columbia, 1850-1950" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984); Jacqueline P. O'Donnell, "The Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, 1931-1945: A New Phase in Native Political Organization" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1985); Kathleen Joan Trayner, "Historical Origins and Collective Memory in British Columbia's Community-Based Museums, 1925-1975" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2003); Sheila Yeomans, "Delivery of Medicine to the Northwest Region of British Columbia, 1880-1960" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Emilie L. Montgomery, "'The War Was a Very Vivid Part of My Life': British Columbia School Children and the Second World War" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991); Shelly Chan, "War and the Crystallization of a Double Identity: Vancouver's Chinese Community, 1937-1947" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2003); Judy Maxwell, "A Cause Worth Fighting For: Chinese Canadians Debate Their Participation in the Second World War" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005); Gregory David Kier, "The Gumboot Navy: Securing or Sundering British Columbia" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2014); Kerry Ragnar Steeves, "The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-1945" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990). Others to be included in this category include: Mia Reimers, "The Glamour and the Horror: A Social History of Wartime Northwestern British Columbia, 1939-1945" (MA thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, 1999); Ramona Marie Rose, "'Keepers of Morale': The Vancouver Council of Women, 1939-45" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990); and Bruce Colin Stadfeld, "Electric Space: Social and Natural Transformations in British Columbia's Hydroelectric Industry to World War II" (PhD diss., University of Manitoba, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Jenny Clayton, "Making Recreational Space: Citizen Involvement in Outdoor Recreation and Park Establishment in British Columbia, 1900-2000" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2009); Leonard B. Kuffert, "'Easier to Believe Than to Reflect': The British Columbia Social Credit Movement, 1932-1952" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994); Marilyn

of this graduate research is ever published, so its impact on the broader understanding of the place of the Second World War in BC's history has been quite muted.

In contrast to social historians, labour historians have been more attentive to the war years and their resulting work has come to form a core component in the survey histories. Perhaps this is not so shocking given the importance of the war years to organized labour after the hard years of the Depression. The war caused a growing labour shortage that, combined with urgent demands to maximize production, strengthened the collective hand of labour unions, grew their membership, and produced real gains for workers. As important, the government's need to sustain war production encouraged greater willingness to step in and settle strikes in workers' favour and to extend recognition of the rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the relative wealth of labour studies, in 2010 Chris Madsen observed that the "degree of continuity or change brought on by the onset of World War II, the dramatic rise in employment for war production, and the effects in British Columbia still await serious study by labour historians."<sup>44</sup> Some exceptions exist. Madsen himself has investigated the labour implications of the exponential explosion in shipbuilding;<sup>45</sup> Gillian Creese produced a remarkable gendered examination of BC Hydro workers forming a white-collar union in 1944;<sup>46</sup> and Richard Rajala and Gordon Hak have extensively researched the forest industry,

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Joan Harrison, "The Social Influence of the United Church of Canada in British Columbia, 1930–1948" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975); Michaela Freund, "The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver, 1934–1945" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995); Roy Alfred Smith, "Vancouver Longshoremen, Resilient Solidarity and the 1935 Interruption: Company Unionism 1923–1945" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2013); Brian Dale Stauffer, "Resource Development Patterns of the British Columbia Salmon Canning Industry, 1870–1970" (MA thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, 2002); Ronald William Verzuh, "Divided Loyalties: A Study of a Communist-Led Trade Union's Struggle for Survival in Trail, British Columbia, 1943–1955" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> A good brief overview is available in Rod Mickleburgh, *On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2018). There are other studies of various aspects of the world of work and labour that cover the war years, including two graduate theses on Trail: Verzuh, "Divided Loyalties"; and Takaia Larsen, "Sowing the Seeds: Women, Work and Memory in Trail, British Columbia during and after the Second World War" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Madsen, "Organizing a Wartime Shipyard," 77.

<sup>45</sup> Chris Madsen, "Continuous Production in British Columbia Shipyards during the Second World War," *Northern Mariner/Le marine du nord* 14, no. 3 (2004): 1–26; Chris Madsen, "Organizing a Wartime Shipyard: The Union Struggle for a Closed Shop at West Coast Shipbuilders Limited 1941–44," *Labour/Le Travail* 65 (Spring 2010): 75–108.

<sup>46</sup> Gillian Laura Creese, *Contrasting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944–1994* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

particularly the IWA's fight to unionize North Coast loggers and mill-workers.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, what Madsen said about the need for more work on labour and the war remains valid.

#### PROXIMATE RUMBLE OF GUNS

British Columbia is not without a military historiography. These works fall into several distinct categories. The longest established, and in some ways showing its vintage, is the collection of regimental histories of BC-based battalions that served overseas during the war, most by the venerable R.H. Roy.<sup>48</sup> Such histories are important to the story of the war; unfortunately, after the brief initial recruitment rush the regiments left for the real action overseas. Thus, their historians often ignore the regimental organizations that continued to recruit and train young men. These locally based units were focal points in their communities' experience of war, and their uniformed members participation in parades and public events provided a tangible sign of the distant war. A deeper examination of these local military organizations would add significantly to an understanding of the war on the home front.<sup>49</sup>

More important is the literature on Pacific defence and security. Roger Sarty's article, "There Will Be Trouble in the North Pacific," helps set the broader historical context of inadequate defences and, more significantly, the deep-seated sense of vulnerability that West Coast residents felt in the decades before the outbreak of war in 1939.<sup>50</sup> This is complemented by the rich work on the fortifications built to defend Esquimalt and Vancouver by Sarty, Peter Moogk, R. Lovatt, and Murray Hunter.<sup>51</sup> Also

<sup>47</sup> Richard Rajala, *Up-Coast: Forests and Industries on British Columbia's North Coast, 1870–2005* (Victoria: Royal BC Museum, 2006); Gordon Hak, *Capital and Labour in the British Columbia Forest Industry, 1934–74* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006). Also noteworthy for its coverage of the Interior industry is Ken Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters: The History of Logging in British Columbia's Interior* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> R.H. Roy, *Ready for the Fray (Deas gu cath): The History of the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's), 1920–1955* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1958); R.H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, 1919–1965* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1969); R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel: The History of the British Columbia Dragoons* (Kelowna, BC: British Columbia Dragoons, 1965); and J.E. Oldfield, *The Westminster's War Diary: An Unofficial History of the Westminster Regiment (Motor) in World War II* (New Westminster, BC: Mitchell Press, 1964).

<sup>49</sup> An example of what this might look like is Sarah Sewell, "Making the Necessary Sacrifice: The Military's Impact on a City at War, Calgary, 1939–45" (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Roger Sarty, "There Will Be Trouble in the North Pacific: The Defence of British Columbia in the Early Twentieth Century," *BC Studies* 61 (Spring 1984): 3–29.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Moogk, *Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859–1949* (Surrey, BC: Antonson, 1978); Peter Moogk, "Yorke Island and the Uncertain War: Defending Canada's Western Coast during WWII," *BC Studies* 182 (Summer 2014): 233–34;

essential is Whitney Lackenbauer's playfully titled article, "Guerillas in Our Midst," which examines the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, and Timothy Wilford's excellent article on security intelligence in British Columbia during the war.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, there is a strong body of research on Canada and the war in the Pacific, dominated by the work of Galen Perras on Canada-US alliance relations, the Aleutian campaign, and Canada's role in the Pacific more broadly.<sup>53</sup> Also important are R.H. Roy's biography of the military commander on the Pacific Coast, Major General George R. Pearkes, and Timothy Wilford's *Canada's Road to the Pacific War: Intelligence, Strategy and the Far East Crisis*.<sup>54</sup> The coverage of the 1944 conscription protests and Terrace Riot by Peter Russell, Daniel German, and R.H. Roy also fit this category because their focus is on larger Canadian conscription policies, censorship, military structures, and official responses rather than on local conditions and communities.<sup>55</sup> The military history raises an overarching challenge, as important as it is to the puzzle of British

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Roger Sarty, "Canada's Coastal Fortifications of the Second World War," *Fort* 33 (2005): 3-39; Roger Sarty, "Silent Sentry: A Military and Political History of Canadian Coast Defence, 1860-1945" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1982); R. Lovatt, *Shoot Shoot Shoot: A History of the Victoria-Esquamalt Coast Artillery Defences, 1878-1956* (Victoria, BC: Rodd Hill Friends Society, 1993); and T. Murray Hunter, "Coast Defence in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities," *BC Studies* 28 (Winter 1975/76): 3-28.

<sup>52</sup> P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Guerrillas in Our Midst: The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45," *BC Studies* 155 (Autumn 2007): 31-67; Timothy Wilford, "The Enemy Within and the Pacific Threat: Canadian Security Intelligence in British Columbia, 1942-45," *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 4 (2012): 531-58.

<sup>53</sup> Galen Perras, "Canada as a Military Partner: Alliance Politics and the Campaign to Recapture the Aleutian Island of Kiska," *Journal of Military History* 56 (July 1992): 423-54; Galen Perras, "No Need to Send an Army across the Pacific: Mackenzie King and the Pacific Conflict, 1939-45," in *Mackenzie King: Citizenship and Community*, ed. John English, Kenneth McLaughlin, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2002), 124-50, 227-34; Galen Perras, "Once Bitten, Twice Shy: The Origins of the Canadian Army Pacific Force, 1944-1945," in *Uncertain Horizon: Canadians and Their World in 1945*, ed. Greg Donaghy (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1997): 77-99; Galen Perras, "The Defence of Alaska Must Remain a Primary Concern of the United States: Canada and the North Pacific, May-June 1942," *Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord* 7, no. 4 (1997): 29-43; Galen Perras, "Who Will Defend British Columbia? Unity of Command on the West Coast, 1934-1942," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88 (Spring 1997): 59-69.

<sup>54</sup> R.H. Roy, *For Most Conspicuous Bravery: A Biography of Major-General George R. Pearkes, V.C., through Two World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977); Timothy Wilford, *Canada's Road to the Pacific War: Intelligence, Strategy, and the Far East Crisis* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Peter A. Russell, "BC's 1944 'Zombie' Protests against Overseas Conscription," *BC Studies* 122 (Summer 1999): 49-76; Daniel German, "Press Censorship and the Terrace Mutiny: A Case Study in Second World War Information Management," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1996-97): 124-42; and R.H. Roy, "Major-General G.R. Pearkes and the Conscription Crisis in British Columbia, 1944," *BC Studies* 28 (Winter 1975/76): 53-72.

Columbia's Second World War, it might be closer to the guns but it is often farther away from British Columbia and British Columbians.

This is not uniformly the case. Carol Popp's popular history of the Gumboot Navy is connected to the places and local residents that served in the Fisherman's Reserve, and both Lackenbauer and Moogk effectively evoke a sense of place and community in their works. Ron Verzuh's fascinating article on the contributions of Trail's COMINCO smelter to the Manhattan Project similarly speaks to local perspectives and memory. Broadly though, the analysis of local communities' war experiences remains seriously underdeveloped in the academic literature.<sup>56</sup> Ken Coates and William Morrison's important collaborative work, *The Alaska Highway in World War II: The US Army of Occupation in Canada's Northwest*, along with a more focused article ensure that we know vastly more about Fort St. John in the Second World War than about any other municipality in the province.<sup>57</sup>

This is not to slight the significance of Fort St. John or its transformative experiences between 1939 and 1945, but it does flip the typical script in BC historiography, which tends to privilege the populous southwest of the province. British Columbia lacks anything comparable to Serge Durflinger's careful analysis of wartime Verdun, Quebec, or Stephen Kimber's nostalgic romp (told mostly by way of interviews with service personnel and locals) through Halifax at war.<sup>58</sup> In recent decades the War and Society field in Canada has evinced a strong trend towards local histories, though most of these have focused on the Great War, including Ian Miller's excellent *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War*, and Robert Rutherford's important *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War*.<sup>59</sup> Arguably community-centred histories, given the geographic variation, division, and relative isolation

<sup>56</sup> One important exception to this rule is Keith Thor Carlson's examination of Stó:lō communities' responses and experiences of war in, "Stó:lō Soldiers, Stó:lō Veterans," in *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Chilliwack, BC: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1996), 125–38.

<sup>57</sup> Ken Coates and W.R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in World War II: The US Army of Occupation in Canada's Northwest* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); and Ken Coates and W.R. Morrison, "Wartime Boom Town: Fort St. John During World War II," *Journal of the West* 36, no. 4 (1997): 36–42.

<sup>58</sup> Serge Durflinger, *Fighting from Home: The Second World War in Verdun, Quebec* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).



of many parts of British Columbia throughout its history, might best reflect the diversity of responses to war across the far-flung regions of the province.

#### THE WORM'S-EYE VIEW: POPULAR/LOCAL HISTORIES

Finally, it is worth discussing a last body of relatively untapped literature often dismissed by academic scholars for a litany of real and imagined deficiencies: local and popular histories. I am still in the process of compiling these histories but agree with Jean Barman that such works “have particular utility in British Columbia, whose large size and diversity makes it extremely difficult for any single person to interrogate every place closely and, thereby, to understand the province as a whole, cognizant of all its parts.”<sup>60</sup> Chad Reimer expresses such sentiments in a similar review essay of recent popular publications, suggesting he found in the collection “a focus on social history and on previously voiceless groups, a heightened critical edge, efforts to link the local to the larger context, and the multiplicity of perspectives in history.”<sup>61</sup> He suggests that academic historians should recognize that many of these histories are produced as commercial ventures and that their success reveals a BC audience hungry for “accessible, well written, engaging, and human history.”<sup>62</sup> If we did turn our gaze to this body of material we might find wonderful works like Sylvia Crooks’s *Homefront and Battlefront: Nelson BC in World War II*, the only popular Second World War history of a BC community that I have located.<sup>63</sup> Beyond this are a host of local and community histories that often contain a chapter or section on local war experiences, such as such as Daniel Francis’s *Becoming Vancouver: A History*, Warren Sommer’s works on North Vancouver and Langley, or Charles Kahn’s history of Saltspring Island.<sup>64</sup> Also useful, but chal-

<sup>60</sup> Jean Barman, “Taking Local History Seriously: A Review Essay,” *BC Studies* 165 (Spring 2010): 103.

<sup>61</sup> Chad Reimer, “A Sense of Place: The Local in British Columbia History,” *BC Studies* 127 (Autumn 2000): III.

<sup>62</sup> Reimer, “A Sense of Place,” 114.

<sup>63</sup> Sylvia Crooks, *Homefront and Battlefront: Nelson BC in World War II* (Vancouver: Granville Island Publishing, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Francis, *Becoming Vancouver: A History* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2021); Warren Frederick Sommer, *The Ambitious City: A History of North Vancouver* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2007); Warren Frederick Sommer, *Nothing without Effort: A History of Langley* (Langley, BC: Township of Langley, 2008); and Charles Kahn, *Salt Spring: The Story of an Island* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2001). Many others might be mentioned here, including Rolf Knight’s, *Along the No. 20 Line: Reminiscences of the Vancouver Waterfront* (Vancouver: New Star, 1980); Wayne Wilson, *Kelowna: One Hundred Years of History, 1905–2005* (Kelowna, BC: Kelowna Publishers, 2005); James Crockett, Patti

lenging to locate, are popular histories and biographies that focus a personal lens on the war experience, such as Paul Jones's *Out of the Rain: A Prairie Boy's Struggle for a New Life in Coastal British Columbia, 1939–1949*, Brigit Moran's *Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John*, or Leslie Hempsall's *Those Were the Days: A Sentimental Journey by a Young Canadian Man Growing Up in Vancouver, British Columbia, between 1921 and 1941*.<sup>65</sup> In all of these we find rich stories and local memories of the Second World War that clearly marked an important era in the lives of many British Columbians. The fact that these stories remain largely ignored by academic historians only reinforces the blinders that obscure scholarly awareness of the Second World War, and it indicates that Barman's and Reimer's encouragement to pay attention to these works continues to fall on deaf ears. Working with this genre is not always easy. The quality can be uneven, they sometimes lack a critical lens, and often they are more likely to be found in a used book store than in a university library. In addition, while the tight local or personal lens undeniably conjures a sense of a local community, it is often not sensitive to such broader contexts as the war. Nevertheless, the heightened sense of place and human experience these works offer makes them an essential contribution to building a broader understanding of the Second World War in British Columbia.

## CONCLUSION

The overriding impression from this canvas of the historiographical coverage of British Columbia and the Second World War is disconnectedness. BC history as a whole is so far removed from the war that it appears only as a distant rumble of guns over the horizon. Just as important, the practitioners in their various subfields are disconnected from

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Morris, and Leslie Norman, eds. *Pitt Meadows: Celebrating the History of Our Great City* (Pitt Meadows, BC: City of Pitt Meadows, 2007); Doreen Armitage, *Around the Sound: A History of Howe Sound–Whistler* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2001); and John Saywell, *Kaatza: The Chronicles of Cowichan Lake* (Sidney, BC: Cowichan Lake District Centennial Committee, 1967).

<sup>65</sup> Paul Jones, *Out of the Rain: A Prairie Boy's Struggle for a New Life in Coastal British Columbia, 1939–1949* (Surrey, BC: Hancock House, 2005); Bridget Moran, *Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1997); Leslie Hempsall, *Those Were the Days: A Sentimental Journey by a Young Canadian Man Growing Up in Vancouver, British Columbia, between 1921 and 1941* (Surrey, BC: Coomber Publishing, 2008). Other (auto)biographies include: Elsie Paul, in collaboration with Paige Raibmon and Harmony Johnson, *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (?əms ta?aw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); W. Leonard Crawford, *The Way It Was: The True Story of Growing Up in the Logging Industry through the Hungry 30's and the Nineteen Forties on the BC Coast* (Campbell River, BC: Ptarmigan Press, 2007).

each other: there is scant cross-referencing across the military, labour, political, and social literature. And the aversion of academics to popular works – and perhaps the reverse is true as well – adds to the disconnect. What does exist is thus widely scattered, eclectic, and episodic in nature, with large topical and geographical gaps. These conditions make it difficult for scholars, whose primary focus might not be the war, to find the context for connections between their work and the Second World War. Arguably some of this present state derives from the marginalization of military and political history from the mainstream of the academic discipline following the social history revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, just as BC history began to grow and diversify. This process, combined with the persistent national lens of the War and Society field, left BC's war history in relative obscurity. The combined disconnections severely complicate efforts to create broader syntheses of this era, as the cursory coverage in each of the survey histories attest. Perhaps most important, it also prevents a broader situating of the war years within the trajectory of the province's narrative, though Robert McDonald's and other scholars' work has begun to address this shortcoming. Nevertheless, we are left with a largely bifurcated twentieth century, where we have a strong and diverse body of work on the first few decades and a growing and exciting body of work building on the postwar W.A.C. Bennett years. But the tipping point, the pivot, the transitional era that separates them, is still only vaguely understood.

This state of the literature is surprising because it is apparent from reading the fragmentary work that does exist provincially, as well as by extrapolating from the richer national historiography, that the Second World War was in fact a significant event in British Columbians' history. This total war made its effects felt across the province's complex geography in multifaceted ways and affected most of the population to some degree. The depth of its impact and the length and significance of its legacy remain to be explored – demographically, environmentally, economically, logistically, socially, and culturally. At the very least, if we insist on using the war years as the dividing point between the early and the modern eras, we ought to ask if they are indeed the most appropriate pivot, and, if so, why and how they fulfill this role. Only by doing this will we begin to meaningfully integrate the Second World War into the broader flow of BC's history.