

BOOK REVIEWS

*Once Upon This Land:
Archaeology in British Columbia
and the Stories It Tells*

Robert J. Muckle

UBC Press, Purich Books, 2025.
222 pp. \$29.95 paper.

SEAN P. CONNAUGHTON
North Vancouver

PURICH BOOKS, an imprint of UBC Press, has distinguished itself in 2025 by presenting a range of books that complement each other by engaging with the intertwined topics of Indigenous history, anticolonial and anticapital approaches, contemporary politics, and archaeology and heritage. Among these are *Unceded* by George M. Abbott and *Unearthing Forgotten Values* by yours truly. Such publications contribute to an informed, democratic society.

In Purich's latest release, *Once Upon This Land*, archaeologist Bob Muckle takes the reader on an archaeological journey throughout British Columbia. The book provides an accessible overview of the archaeological research currently undertaken in this province, explaining what archaeology is (and what it isn't)

and what archaeologists do (and don't do). Through his exploration of BC archaeology, Muckle advocates for First Nations as stewards of their own heritage, broadening the reader's understanding of human history and the importance of archaeology to descendant communities today.

Once Upon This Land is brief by design, comprising five chapters, along with a foreword, introduction, epilogue, glossary, and suggested further readings. Each does a good job of encapsulating what archaeologists do fundamentally – that is, tell stories by reconstructing the past – and illuminating the genius of ancestral peoples. In particular, Chapter 5 provides an excellent contextualization of contemporary archaeological practice in British Columbia as it intersects with legislation, First Nations' interests and research, and the wider "culture of archaeology" 138–141). The epilogue is critically important, especially for novices, as it concisely summarizes the value of archaeology and First Nations history in British Columbia. Moreover, the glossary and further readings are helpful for those eager to learn more on their own.

The book's central themes of change, diversity, sustainability, and resilience spread across all five chapters are

demonstrated in multiple “spotlights” throughout the book. The spotlights are employed effectively, enhancing the accessibility of the book by providing specifics on archaeological sites or key concepts within the discipline while also adding structure, visual interest, and welcome reprieves into archaeological nerdery. Examples include illustrations of lithics, useful explanations and definitions (e.g., cultural resource management archaeology, Indigenous rights, ground penetrating radar), and deeper dives into important archaeological sites such as c̓əsnaʔəm in Vancouver and SGang Gwaay on Haida Gwaii. Throughout, this book reveals the many passionate individuals engaged in BC archaeology – whether academics, professionals, Indigenous archaeologists, or museum staff – and how they all contribute to constructing narratives of ancestral lifeways.

Among the many successful aspects of this book, the powerful foreword by Karen Rose Thomas stands out. Thomas situates herself and her connection to the lands, the waters, and her communities across the Lower Mainland. By sharing her perspective and experiences as an Indigenous woman archaeologist in British Columbia, including personal stories about working alongside her late aunt and her graduate research, her words offer readers poignant and timely insights into the vulnerability around heritage. Thomas champions this book because it compels the reader to act with a good heart and mind, to be a good neighbour by learning about the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and to find ways to reconcile daily with colonial oppression rather than continue the wave of hate through ignorance. Her message is clear: when it comes to Indigenous heritage and issues in this province, we are all accountable.

I really enjoyed Thomas’s voice. In fact, that it is limited to the foreword is my only real quibble with this book – a co-authored volume by both Muckle and Thomas would have been superb. I believe *Once Upon This Land* should be on every BC resident’s bookshelf. It is accessible, charmingly written, and will satisfy those seeking to understand how archaeology transpires in this province.

*John Horgan:
In His Own Words*

John Horgan with
Rod Mickleburgh

Harbour Publishing, 2025. 256 pp.
\$38.95 hardcover.

HAMISH TELFORD
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WHEN I WAS an undergraduate student way back in the last century, I took an introductory course on Canadian politics at the University of Toronto. The unofficial university calendar published by the student union renamed the course *Fireside Chats with Jack McLeod*. This book could just as easily be called *Fireside Chats with John Horgan*. The book was constructed from a series of interviews John Horgan recorded first for Royal Roads University and subsequently with veteran labour reporter Rod Mickleburgh. The book covers the entirety of John Horgan’s life, but with just 256 pages it does not go into great detail on any one subject. The book has no references or even an index.

The book will appeal mostly to political junkies who want to know the inside gossip in Victoria. Horgan liked Justin Trudeau and got along well with conservative premiers Doug Ford and

Scott Moe. He laments his feud with fellow NDP premier Rachel Notley, but he seems to accept that she had to serve a different constituency. He did not get along with Christy Clark. “Not at all. Not at all,” he says (80). He does not appear to have held grudges, except perhaps against Jenny Kwan (now a member of parliament with the NDP), who led the Baker’s Dozen that ousted Horgan’s close friend Carole James from the leadership of the party in 2010. He admits to briefly thinking about crossing the floor to the BC Liberals after his party’s devastating loss in the 2013 election. “Fuck, I can’t do another four years in opposition,” he recalls thinking (70). He claims he might have even been in Christy Clark’s cabinet but was glad that he was talked out of it by “a right-wing friend.” Along the way, he reveals himself to be a sports junkie, a science fiction fan, and a lifelong pot smoker. “There’s not usually a big crossover between sports people, druggie people and geeks, but I was comfortable with all of them,” he boasts (17).

All too often, though, the narrative is disappointingly thin. Asked why he wanted to be premier by his future campaign advisor, Horgan says, “It had a lot to do with my values. Someone with my background had never done the job before and I thought that I might be able to add something to the equation that others hadn’t” (83). Later, he writes, “People often ask me what I was most proud of as premier. I can’t really pick out one thing, but perhaps I’m proudest of the fact that I had the opportunity to be premier and I didn’t fall completely on my own face” (231). Of course, he had to stickhandle some major files over his five years as premier: the Site C dam, LNG, the Trans Mountain pipeline, the pandemic, the opioid crisis, UNDRIP, and some major natural disasters – the heat dome in 2021, which killed more than 600 people, and the floods in

the fall of 2021, which devastated the Fraser Valley and wiped out parts of the Coquihalla Highway. While we get some glimpses into how he handled these files, we get precious little insight.

John Horgan is the most successful NDP leader in BC history, but the book reveals that he did not have a well-defined ideology. He repeatedly refers to himself as a centrist and a pragmatist. He also unapologetically describes himself as a populist: “If you’re going to affect people’s lives, the best way to do that is to engage them. That’s what populism is all about” (228). He was a fan of big energy projects, and he argues that good social policy depends on a robust economy. Perhaps there are some lessons here for New Democrats across the country. But in the end he says, “So much goes back to values. People who are jerks don’t get rewarded for being jerks” (238). Perhaps there is a lesson here for politicians of all political stripes. The story of John Horgan is ultimately the story of a thoroughly decent man who, through the fate of history, ended up serving as the leader of his province for an eventful five years. It was his decency that makes him one of the most beloved premiers in BC history.

While entertaining, this book is not going to be the definitive book on the Horgan government, unlike Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh’s 2012 book *The Art of the Impossible* on the Dave Barrett government. Perhaps Meggs – who was John Horgan’s chief of staff for five years – and Mickleburgh could mine the Horgan tapes together and produce that definitive account. This is a story that needs to be told in a more fulsome way.

*They Called Him a Radical:
The Memoirs of Pete Maloff and
the Making of a
Doukhobor Pacifist*

Pete Maloff with Vera Maloff

Caitlin Press, 2024. 228 pp.

\$26.00 paper.

DUFF SUTHERLAND

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They Called Him a Radical: The Memoirs of Pete Maloff and the Making of a Doukhobor Pacifist describes the spiritual and intellectual development of Pete Maloff, an Independent Doukhobor and peace activist. Maloff's granddaughter, Vera Maloff, a writer and teacher who grew up near her grandparents in Thrums on the Kootenay River near Castlegar, British Columbia, edited her grandfather's memoirs and includes valuable commentary to help readers understand the work. Maloff wrote his memoirs in the late 1940s as part of a larger history of the Doukhobors in Canada. The memoirs detail the growth of Maloff's passion for Doukhobor beliefs and history and how this passion led to a life of writing and peace activism beginning in his late twenties. In an earlier work, *Our Backs Warmed by the Sun: Memories of a Doukhobor Life* (2020), Vera Maloff documented this activism, which led to Maloff's lengthy imprisonment by the state during the 1930s and 1940s. Maloff's memoirs offer a sensitive interpretation of the diverse and difficult Doukhobor experience in the 1920s.

Pete Maloff was born in 1900 in a Saskatchewan communal village. Maloff's parents left the community for a time, becoming Independent Doukhobors to escape the restrictions

of communal life and to ensure that their sons attended school. When Maloff was a teenager, his family joined the Doukhobor Colony of Freedom in Oregon, until unscrupulous businesspeople seized its lands. In 1915, the Russian Ukrainian journalist Anton Sherbak accepted Maloff as a printer's apprentice at a Russian-language journal in San Francisco. Maloff's time working for Sherbak inspired him to become a writer. The experience also brought Maloff into contact with California's Russian community, including intellectuals, journalists, Doukhobors, and fellow "spiritual Christians" the Molokans (54). Maloff deepened his beliefs through conversations and meetings with like-minded people. From 1917 on, the United States' decision to enter the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the postwar peace movement, accompanied by a growing interest in alternative systems of belief and ways of living, also deeply affected Maloff. In the early 1920s, the Maloff family settled in Thrums, an area that included both Independent and Sons of Freedom Doukhobors. Pete and his wife, Lusha Hoodicoff, raised their family on a small farm where they grew produce for sale in local markets.

Maloff's memoirs detail a young man's growing commitment to the Doukhobor ideals of pacifism and to a simple life of vegetarianism and work on the land. Maloff travelled, experimented with communal living, and learned about the ideas and experiences of his Sons of Freedom and Community Doukhobor neighbours. As an independent thinker, Maloff rejected the rigid beliefs and tactics of the Sons of Freedom and the restrictions on life in the communal villages under the leadership of Peter Vasilievich Verigin, known as "Gospodnyi, Lordly" (162). Nonetheless, Maloff offers a sympathetic description of

Bozhiya Dolina (God's Valley), a Sons of Freedom village near Grand Forks, where he fell "under the spell" of the peoples' singing in the early 1920s (130). He also came to respect Verigin for his lifelong commitment to "his beloved creation," the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (184). Maloff's empathy for the struggles of the diverse community reflected, along with his peace activism, a desire to become a missionary for the Doukhobors and their beliefs.

We are indebted to Vera Maloff for the publication of her grandfather's memoirs, which offer a rare glimpse into the first generation of Doukhobor experience in Canada and beyond. Pete Maloff's many conversations with others about how to live an ethical and spiritual life also reflected a world struggling with the effects of war, revolution, and economic dislocation during and after the First World War. Maloff wrote about his own experiences, and his conversations are primarily with other men. It's also well worth reading Vera Maloff's *Our Backs Warmed by the Sun* for the experiences of Pete Maloff's wife, Lusha, and their six children. Together these works provide a valuable portrait of Doukhobor experiences and struggles over more than a century.

***Alternative Schools in
British Columbia 1960–1975:
A Social and Cultural History***

Harley Rothstein

Friesen Press, 2024. 660 pp.
\$41.99 paper.

NANCY JANOVICEK
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Alternative Schools in British Columbia 1960–1975 is a comprehensive history of a series of experiments in alternative education in British Columbia that began in the 1960s. Harley Rothstein's argument is that this decade was "a unique period of idealism, experimentation, and activism" (3) that fostered a movement to promote child-centred education. This was a parent-led movement opposed to rigid curriculum that, in the 1950s, emphasized scientific subjects to promote technocratic solutions to problems over holistic humanistic education. Rothstein admires the gumption of the parents who gave time and resources to create and sustain these schools, but he also provides a critical analysis of the limitations of idealistic experiments that were not based in educational theory.

The book is based on his doctoral dissertation, completed over twenty years ago. Since then, he has conducted more interviews with teachers, parents, and students (350 in total), which offered him time for reflection on the strengths and limitations of alternative forms of education. Although these schools followed the countercultural values of the 1960s, they were also inspired by John Dewey's early twentieth-century progressive education philosophy and the Summerhill School founded in Suffolk, England, in 1927. They were

local initiatives that reflected the values of the parents who founded them, but they were not isolated experiments. *This Magazine Is About Schools*, published from 1966 to 1976, was a forum where advocates of alternative schools could exchange ideas, debate pedagogical practices, and build a movement to encourage broader educational reform in Canada and the United States. This movement advocating for child-centred education had an impact on mainstream education, which is one of the reasons for the decline in popularity of alternative schools in the mid-1970s.

Rothstein identifies four types of experimental schools: (1) progressive schools that supported child-centred education; (2) romantic or free schools that emphasized student-led exploration; (3) therapeutic schools developed for teenagers at risk of dropping out of school; and (4) public alternative schools and programs initiated by a 1967 British Columbia Teachers Federation report that introduced new philosophies on individualized humanistic education into the public school system. The book includes eleven in-depth case studies of alternative schools in both urban and rural communities. The back-to-the-land movement in British Columbia accounts for the popularity of alternative schools in rural areas. He examines school philosophies, governance, and curriculum, and the often intense disagreements among school founders about how to best educate children. Indeed, parental disagreement is one of the reasons for the closure of many of these schools. Conflicts about governance and curriculum were exacerbated by financial instability because of low tuition fees that reflected the value of making education accessible to all. Financial precarity also made it difficult to secure adequate resources to support children with disabilities. In many schools, parents

volunteered to teach. Wages for teachers were low because of inadequate funding, but also because parents expected paid staff to buy into their values and provide their labour to the movement at reduced wages. Without a cohesive vision, and guided by loose governance structures designed to flatten hierarchical power structures, most of these schools could not work through disputes.

Debates about education have always reflected the politics of the time. *Alternative Schools* examines parental activism for education that encouraged self-expression and critical engagement with the world. I'm writing this book review in a province where the government has passed legislation to advance parental rights initiatives that seek to suppress the right of queer and trans youth to be their authentic selves. Reading this book is a good reminder of why students must be at the centre of educational reform.

*New Rivers of the
North Revisited*

David W. Leonard and
Brock Silversides

Peace Heritage Press, 2024.
80 pp. \$29.95 paper.

MATTHEW EVENDEN
University of British Columbia

This attractive, slim volume reproduces the photographs taken by Hulbert Footner and his companion, Auville Eager, as well as a section of text from Footner's original book, *New Rivers of the North: The Yarn of Two Amateur Explorers of the Head-Waters of the Fraser, The Peace River, The Hay River, Alexandra Falls*, published in 1912 by McClelland & Stewart. Footner was a writer and journalist,

born in Hamilton in 1879 and raised in New York City. He worked in Alberta as a journalist in 1906 but spent most of his career in the United States writing western and detective dime novels. Footner's book recounts his journey with Eager in 1911 from the upper Fraser northeastward to the Peace and Hay Rivers, as well as Alexandra Falls. While Footner and Eager photographed their journey (who took which photo is unclear, as is the type of camera used), not all of their images appeared in the book. A scrapbook of the unpublished photographs survives and is held at the University of Alberta Archives. Part of the purpose of this volume is to share these photographs with a wider audience.

New Rivers of the North Revisited comprises an introduction and commentary by David W. Leonard and Brock Silversides and a selection of text from the original, interspersed with black-and-white photographs from the scrapbook as well as eight photographs drawn from other sources. Brief descriptions accompany the photographs. Both Leonard and Silversides bring considerable knowledge of Alberta archives to the project. Leonard, recently passed, will also be well known to readers of *BC Studies* as the author of several volumes of regional history on the Peace River Country. In addition, Joanne Gontar, a director of the Western Cree Tribal Council, contributed the section "A Cree Perspective" and Beverly Whelan, president of the Monkman Homestead Preservation Society, contributed "A Métis Perspective." Both offer thanks for the photographs that are preserved as well as the light they shed on the lives of previous generations. Whelan appreciates that some of the worst racist language in the original book is left out of the new volume. Several maps,

some historical, run through the book providing orientation.

Leonard and Silversides argue that the real value in reproducing this work is in the photographs, many of them published here for the first time. They suggest that the original volume contains dated language, that Footner described Indigenous peoples in derogatory terms, and that some of the historical and geographical description "adds nothing to what is already known" (xxi). If this is so (and in reviewing the original, it is difficult to argue), then why republish the work? Leonard and Silversides propose that "the images disclose aspects of life in the Northwest that few visitors to the region prior to their visit were able to capture" (xxv). Photographs in the volume include landscapes of river scenes, portraits (mainly Indigenous individuals, families and groups), as well as street and settlement scenes, primarily focused on buildings. These everyday snapshots offer useful evidence about places, peoples, and the period, but additional commentary would have been useful. Silversides has published previously on the staging of ethnographic photographs, but there is little discussion in this volume on the selections of the original photographers. Why and how did Footner and Eager photograph the people and places they did? What scenes did they possibly avoid or at least fail to photograph? A few passages reveal the awkward interactions between Footner, Eager, and Indigenous subjects. In addition to Gontar and Whelan's comments, it would have been interesting to know whether the editors worked with communities to try to identify any of the unnamed Indigenous subjects. Perhaps this was not feasible, but additional context on the editors' own decisions in selecting images would have been instructive.

For readers interested in the history and geography of the upper Fraser and the

Peace River Country, this book provides important source material. Leonard and Silversides have shared a little-known collection that may well inform other studies of this region as well as provoke community interest and reflection.

*Calm Harbour, Turbulent Seas:
A History of Ucluelet*

Shirley Martin

Harbour Publishing, 2025.
448 pp. \$39.95 hardcover.

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RECENT YEARS have brought a spate of works about local history by BC authors. In that spirit, Shirley Martin presents *Calm Harbour, Turbulent Seas* – a historical portrait of her hometown of Ucluelet. Her account opens with a lovely vignette of a kayak excursion that connects local places to the history she is about to tell. “Close to the head of the harbour,” she writes, “I float and gaze at what was once the site of the logging camp where I spent my early childhood” (xi). “I loved it all,” she continues, “but never reflected on what forged the landscape of this place I call home” (1). It is an evocative opening to a book that doesn’t deliver the critical and cohesive history it seems to promise.

The main problem with *Calm Harbour, Turbulent Seas* lies in its organization. Martin structures her book thematically, which undermines its narrative flow. After an extremely short chapter on the natural history of Ucluelet, and another on its Indigenous history (the latter less than three and a half pages), she devotes the remaining pages to the period following European contact. Compelled by her organizational

choices, she shoehorns events from late eighteenth-century contact to the forced assimilation and revitalization of the twentieth century into the following chapter, “Arrival of the Uninvited.” In the process, she offers the obligatory critiques of European newcomers, asserting, for example, that “the new arrivals came with a history of depleting the environment” (12). Of course, such an observation would be equally true of human societies everywhere, including the First Nations. Likewise, in a quick discussion of dispossession, she declares that “colonialism was rampant, with settlers taking land under the umbrella of the Canadian government” – though she never defines “colonialism” (12). Another chapter, “Of Whales and Whaling,” takes the reader from precontact Indigenous whaling cultures through to twenty-first-century whale watching. In addition to telescoping diverse and disconnected historical events into one chapter, Martin seems unfamiliar with the key historical works on the topic, including Charlotte Coté’s *Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors* (2010) and Joshua Reid’s *The Sea Is My Country* (2015).

Thematic organization is tempting for writers trying to assemble a vast amount of material, but it rarely works for local history. In the case of *Calm Harbour, Turbulent Seas*, the result is not only chronological whiplash but a failure to connect historical developments over time. It makes little sense, for example, to offer a discussion of residential schools prior to a chapter entitled “Spreading the Gospel.” As a result, rather than a work of history, the book resembles a walking tour, peppered with personal vignettes and biographical sketches.

At the heart of it all lies an unexplored tension inherent in much local BC historical writing. On the one hand, authors express a generalized criticism and even guilt toward the history of

conquest and colonialism that shaped the region. On the other hand, they offer nostalgic portraits of the communities that such processes made possible. In this spirit, one can almost feel Martin trying to reconcile the injustice of colonialism with her affection for her community and the people who made it. In her chapter “More Settlers Arrive,” for example, she lovingly narrates the stories of several families who made homes in Ucluelet, in the process making no effort to connect colonial dispossession to the settler opportunities it made possible. The book likewise makes no attempt to untangle the questions surrounding Japanese Canadians as both settlers benefiting

from colonialism and as victims of the racist actions of the Canadian state.

Such observations intend no specific criticism of Martin: very few writers have explored such tension. But it underscores that, in contrast to Coll Thrush’s *Wrecked* (2025), for example, *Calm Harbour, Turbulent Seas* is not a book aiming to reframe historical understanding. It is, rather, a kind and personal portrait of a little town on the edge of the world’s great ocean. Martin may not approach her material as a professional historian, but she is a thoughtful guide to a place she knows and loves. Although not suitable for classroom use, her book will appeal to locals as well as tourists interested in the history of the outer coast.