

EDITORIAL

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE invite our attention in this issue of *BC Studies*. The journal is “dedicated to the exploration of British Columbia’s cultural, economic, and political life; past and present,” and here we address that mandate within a single set of covers. To begin, former editor Robert McDonald offers a detailed and revealing assessment of British Columbia’s halting progress towards the development of a modern (i.e., efficient, rational, and politically neutral) civil service between 1870 and 1940. This is, most basically, a history of public administration in the province, but it is much more. Tracing for the first time the important story of the transition from government-by-patronage to the technocratic and rationalistic management of provincial affairs, this article reveals much about economic and social circumstances in British Columbia before the Second World War. It also makes the point that old ways continued into the 1940s because they served the needs of a geographically fractured province that included many intensely local communities. And who among us is not charmed (and, in 2009, chastened) by McDonald’s account of the government office of the 1920s, in which papers and books were “piled into one heterogeneous mass”?

Emily Jane Davis’ article on the rise and demise of the Long Beach Model Forest (LBMF) is also about politics and administration, but it is in a more contemporary register and has a strong social dimension. Located in the Clayoquot Sound region, the LBMF experiment was terminated in 2002, less than a decade after its inception, by the federal government. Rather than counting this outcome a “failure,” as some bureaucrats did, Davis adopts a form of “thick description” to reflect upon the contexts in which the LBMF operated. Her story is a tale of complex interactions between federal and provincial priorities, and between multiple local visions of what Clayoquot was and what it should become. The crux of her interpretation lies in the realization that Forestry Canada’s technocratic and rationalistic plans to “model” sustainable forestry were refracted locally by the LBMF in ways that confounded the very goals of the Model Forest Program. Her account offers a timely reminder that “the local” remains important, and it suggests that sustainable forestry is not likely to be achieved through the power of science and technology alone but, rather, that intricate and inherently social processes are an integral part of natural resource management.

In their article, Mike Evans and Jean Barman begin with the past but move quickly to consider present-day interpretations of its significance. Their primary concern is “less the history of Métis in British Columbia than the contemporary significance of historical processes of *métissage* for peoples living in British Columbia.” Evans and Barman make it quite clear that the complexities associated with being, and becoming, Métis in British Columbia run back into the eighteenth century, but they also leave no doubt that these are matters of pressing current concern. In the end, they carry readers on an interesting journey that circles through legal and constitutional debates, historical events, and individual and public perceptions to raise important – and unexpectedly challenging – questions about the definition of groups, rights, citizenship, and the shape of the future for Métis peoples in British Columbia.

The forum – a series of thoughtful, short, and entirely pertinent commentaries brought together by Matthew Evenden – which forms the fourth part of this issue, invites readers to consider the future. It focuses upon the BC Hydro proposal to build a dam at Site C on the Peace River. Seven essays espouse a wide range of positions on the proposal and warrant the attention of all British Columbians because they reveal many of the issues that need to be considered in deciding the course of development. There is no clear resolution in these essays. They are intended to inform and encourage engagement with the questions rather than to offer a definitive solution to the conundrum of whether or not the Peace River should be kept or dammed. Indeed, information, perspective, and engagement are essential because any resolution of the Site C debate is bound to be contentious. On the day this editorial is being written (23 March 2009), a *Vancouver Sun* headline announces that “‘Green’ Energy Threatens BC Rivers.” Plans for Bute Inlet are the villain of the *Sun* story: run-of-the-river projects there will involve “a record 17 stream diversions, 445 kilometres of transmission lines, 314 kilometres of roads, 142 bridges, 16 powerhouses, and a substation.” But Bute Inlet ranks eighth on the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia’s list of threatened rivers. The Peace River, “threatened by BC Hydro’s power dam proposal for Site C,” ranks sixth. One is tempted to think of the impossibility of making an omelette without breaking eggs. But the question is not simply “whose eggs?” Some would ask, to stretch the metaphor to its limits, whether we need to eat and whether there are other ways of dealing with our craving? Other articles in this issue demonstrate full well that political, technocratic, scientific, social, local, global, and other factors will shape our collective answers to these

questions. And we would do well to bear in mind, as we struggle with such concerns, the lesson revealed in Sean Kheraj's reflections on "The Unnatural History of Stanley Park" exhibit at the Vancouver Museum: that public attitudes and public memory hold an important place in shaping perceptions of the past and present and, thus, form a powerful influence on our attitudes towards, and actions in, the future.

At present, past and future are also very much on the minds of the editorial team of *BC Studies*. The journal has been an important medium for the dissemination of new research on and ideas about British Columbia, and it has undoubtedly helped to shape collective understanding of the province through the forty years of its existence. In many respects, however, the organizational arrangements for the production of *BC Studies* have persisted (rather like the patronage model of governance in McDonald's article) as the world changed around them. They served well for many years, but the digital revolution and changing financial circumstances have placed them under increasing pressure. Just as the Second World War wrenched the administration of British Columbia into modern form, so *BC Studies* must adjust. We have already begun the process. Recent months have seen us implement a "digital infrastructure" for the journal. We now use OJS, an open-access software developed by the Public Knowledge Project, to handle all manuscripts: we encourage submissions online, allow referees online access to manuscripts, and are able to edit digital copies of submissions. All of this promises both to speed our handling of manuscripts and to reduce costs. Contributors are also now able to track the progress of their submissions through the editorial process by logging in to the journal website.

Yet, this is not enough to ensure a robust future. Financial support from SSHRC – on which this journal and most of its Canadian counterparts depend – is moving to encourage not only such changes as we have introduced but also web-based, "open-access" dissemination of knowledge. This brave new world is one in which it will become increasingly difficult to sustain the regular printing of journals in "hard-copy."

These circumstances are compounded by the simple but increasingly challenging economics of publishing. Consider this: We have just over five hundred subscribers to *BC Studies* at \$40 per annum for individuals (\$25 for students) and \$55 for institutions. These rates have not increased since the winter issue of 2004. Today, this means that the costs of physically producing and mailing each issue of *BC Studies* exceed the returns received by over \$1,000, or approximately 25 percent of revenue.

This is clearly unsustainable. In response to these circumstances, we are raising subscriptions, effective immediately, to \$60, \$40, and \$90. In increasingly tight fiscal times, however, this is likely no more than a short-term fix. The situation is compounded by the real costs of office space and the time and costs – often buried – incurred by the editors, managing editor, and part-time support staff. To date, these have been covered in substantial part by financial support from SSHRC and UBC, and to rather a lesser extent from Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria. In the next months we will be looking closely at the pros and cons of converting *BC Studies* to an online open-access journal. This could significantly increase readership. *BC Studies* would be available anywhere at any time to anyone with web access. But the almost certain corollary would be a substantial decline in subscriptions and, thus, escalating costs for print versions of each issue. The likely inevitable end-point of this path would then be the elimination of regularly produced hard-copy issues of the journal (although print-on-demand versions might be possible). All of this would mean a future very different from the past. We know the world of publishing is changing fast, but we have a small window, at present, in which to receive your opinions on these matters. Please write us – now – at: info@bcstudies.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

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