

Book Reviews

Barkerville days, by Fred W. Ludditt. Vancouver, Mitchell Press, 1969. 182 pp.

The Surrey story, by G. Fern Treleaven. Surrey, Surrey Museum and Historical Society, 1969. 72 pp.

Local history helps compound its own dilemma. And partly because they play in a larger field, professional historians usually ignore local history, and leave it to the enthusiastic amateurs who have no training in research, no sense of “Big” history as George Bernard Shaw called it, no sense of form or of writing style or of focus, and they leave it to these people to write and for themselves to criticize. Ironically, without the local historians who press governments for archives and museums, professionals would not have the resources for their “more rewarding” studies. Without resources “Big” history will become “Little Arthur” history — another Shaw term — unless the professionally trained historians give leadership and backing to the local amateurs.

Because the professional or “name” historians back away from local history, local historians seldom become known outside their own localities. And sometimes they fail even there because they are so ineptly written that they do not even satisfy an untrained reader. As a result, the reputation of local history becomes so bad that city newspapers even refuse to review good ones and local TV stations blandly ignore the writers of local history no matter how desperate the station for Canadian content. With no free publicity, book sales become restricted and limited, and the enthusiastic writer and the enthusiastic publisher — usually an impoverished society — is stuck with a pile of copies which can only be remaindered, or bronzed and sold as doorstops. This pile of remainders discourages both the publisher and the author from making any further effort. But before long another foolhardy but intrepid bastard son of Clío tries again. At

that moment the professionals should be rising to their feet and shouting "bravo." For without these less legitimate sons of Clio, despite their lack of the blessing of Apollo, the constitution of the Muse would be in an even worse condition than it is.

Unfortunately with the appearance of another offspring to be sacrificed another would-be publisher will go to another group of people who will think at the moment that exactly what it needs is a local history, that the idea is absolutely stupendous and why didn't someone think of it before, and that the group will guarantee to buy so many hundred copies. The guarantee is usually just enough to ensure that the publisher can almost break even if he can then sell just exactly that many more. Then on the day of publication, after the publisher has been persuaded to print two thousand more copies than he had planned to print or than he could afford to print, all those people will find that the book is too liberal, too conservative, too radical; too political, too social, too religious, too economic. It has too few pages, pictures, or maps. It is "too" something or other. Then no publicity, then no sales, and then another pile to be remaindered or bronzed.

Though knowing all that, the professionals do little to help change the picture. Instead, they continue to complain that an amateur compiles a warehouse of fact which is only of interest to people who can overlook the flaws, or to people who must overlook the flaws, or to the families who are noted, one by one. Or to tourists. Many works are easy to complain about. So are such works as those by G. Fern Treleaven, whose *The Surrey story* the Surrey Museum and Historical Society published, and Fred W. Ludditt, whose *Barkerville days* Mitchell press has published. But at least these local histories by the non-professionals are in print, and while both are of value, both have obvious flaws which detract from them as artistic wholes and which might have been avoided with some professional guidance.

The Surrey story has no unity, but to impose a unity on Surrey would be almost an impossibility anyway. The first in a series, this book is in four sections or chapters, each concerned with ten years in the development of the area, the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties. These "ten year" chapters are further divided into smaller topics more easily handled; Section II, 1870-1879, breaks into such sections as Change, More Pre-emptions, The Woodward and John Oliver, Surrey Centre, and Provincial Money for Roads. The result is that the history of British Columbia's largest municipality, fragmented and scattered anyway, is shattered into even more pieces. And the sense of fragmentation is furthered still by the

plethora of single-sentence paragraphs which insult and exasperate good readers. The book is, in fact, loaded with information, with detail collected but not digested. The roads, the settlers, the major buildings, all are recorded, all appear, but in isolation and never as part of a larger connected unit. Each ten-year section ends with a summary which, inconsistent in format, rather than summarizing or pulling everything together, only adds more material, only adds more detail which is given no historical significance.

In addition, the manuscript should have been more carefully proofread before publication. Besides being packed with information, each section has disconcerting errors: the preface has a spelling error, page two an error in logic, page five an error in fact. Furthermore, interesting but irrelevant scraps of knowledge add to the story in no way; for instance, the information that friction matches were invented in England the same year as the Hudson's Bay Company built Fort Langley does not appear to be a force in the story of Surrey. Such criticism may seem to be quibbling, but these niggling flaws help destroy the effect created by the six excellent maps and the many fine photographs. At the very end of the book is a list of early pre-emptors and settlers, but no bibliography or index.

Fred Ludditt's *Barkerville days* has most of the faults of *The Surrey story*, but is a much more ambitious production. It has an index that does not always work, maps as end papers only, and no bibliography. The book begins with a chapter on Ludditt's going to Wells, and ends with two chapters on how the restoration of Barkerville came about and how it is progressing. The fourteen other chapters tell the story of gold in the area from 1858 to 1939 and later. The whole is a racy reworking of the familiar, but with more of the personal and social approach than is usual, and with new information about the early days and about the gold rush of the 1930's. He quotes sparingly and gives the whole a sense of being reminiscences; of course it cannot be reminiscences because Mr. Ludditt did not arrive in the area until 1930, but his long association with the community may be what makes this seem to be a "personal" book.

Like *The Surrey story*, *Barkerville days* has no real focus, no real theme, though it too is packed with information, especially those chapters directly on the historical gold rush. But the book is difficult to read, partly because it has no direction, partly because the writing is choppy, and partly because of the organization within chapters. Ludditt will begin telling about something, shift to something else, and then perhaps come back to his original point. And, like the author of *The Surrey story*, he cannot tell a

story on paper. Quite often he attempts to give local colour through anecdote, but he cannot inject that knee-slapping laughter that comes from and goes with a good story teller. And he cannot reproduce dialogue. Such efforts at stories are better left to people who can tell them, who know the techniques of telling a story on paper. This province sorely misses such men as R. M. Campbell and B. A. McKelvie in that field.

It is a shame that this work too was not edited more carefully in manuscript. A good editor would have excised much of the first chapter and the last two which leave an uneasiness in a reader who worries about why the book was published. These last two chapters are based on very shaky ground. They make some exceedingly good points about restoration and reconstruction but assume far too much. Mr. Ludditt forgets or did not know that some people in Victoria had quietly been working for years to save old Barkerville. A civil engineer by the name of Potter was one, and though also unsung he too knew Lottie Bowron, who was born in Barkerville, and Ralph Chetwynd, the Minister of Trade and Industry, and he too knew Willard Ireland and others on the Centennial Committee. What really prods one to question these chapters, however, is a comment about the members of the Cariboo Historical Society stealing the headboard from the Chartres Brew grave in the old Barkerville cemetery. Mr. Ludditt says that they stole it to draw attention to themselves. Mr. Ludditt is dead wrong. The three people who planned the theft and stole the headboard would not have dared tell anyone what they were going to do because they knew that they could be charged with desecrating a grave. And they stole the headboard to attract province-wide attention to the shocking and neglected condition of that old town. When more than a month had passed and no one had yet noticed the disappearance of the headboard, no one from Barkerville or Wells or Quesnel, no one from the Provincial Government, the "thieves" then tipped off the authorities that the headboard was missing. Anonymously, of course. The hue and cry following was exactly what the "thieves" wanted, especially when the board was reported as having been seen in a car crossing the U.S. border, as having been seen in Regina, Toronto, and Calgary. Their plan was working. In the fall, when tipped off in turn that an arrest was soon to be made — again anonymously tipped off — the three immediately informed the authorities that the board was safely hidden in Quesnel. The Provincial Archivist "discovered" it, had his picture taken with it, and wisely said nothing. As a result of their foolhardiness, the still unnamed three might have been as effective as any other group or person in drawing attention to the need for making Barkerville an historic site. Mr. Lud-

ditt would have had difficulty in learning the truth about that theft because the desecrators had been very quiet about the escapade themselves, but of Mr. Potter, Mr. Ludditt should have been aware. And should have been content to bring out the history, and keep away from current events and editorial comment.

In spite of this carping though, and because of the problems of writing and producing local history, these books would be worthwhile and interesting if only for having been done — *The Surrey story*, the first about Surrey; and *Barkerville days*, refining and expanding earlier work. But again, such efforts need leadership from the professionals. Leadership and encouragement. And from both local and provincial governments. Subsidies, perhaps?

Simon Fraser University

GORDON R. ELLIOTT

S.S. Beaver: The ship that saved the West, by Derek Pethick. Mitchell Press Ltd., Vancouver. Ill. index. 160 pp. \$9.75.

The career of the Hudson's Bay Company's S.S. *Beaver*, the first steam vessel in the North Pacific, covers the years 1836 to 1888, a period that spans the transition from wilderness to civilization, the discovery of gold, the birth of the colony of British Columbia, the establishment of responsible government and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. She played a part in every major development of the era, and thus a history of the *Beaver* must in itself comprise a history of the men and women who brought this province into being.

Derek Pethick has written a scholarly and detailed account of the faithful little steamer from her launch on the Thames in 1835 to her death on the rocks of Stanley Park 53 years later. He has consulted all available log books, (many are unfortunately missing), her fur books in the Provincial Archives, the invaluable correspondence of Simpson, McLoughlin, Eden Colville and other Hudson's Bay officials, and the files of contemporary newspapers during her later years. He gives an interesting account of recent salvage work on the *Beaver's* wreck, and devotes a chapter to the authenticity or otherwise of the surviving *Beaver* relics. The number of these must be as numerous as those of the true cross, and some are equally spurious.

The exhaustive footnotes show the extent of Mr. Pethick's research,

particularly into the lives and pedigrees of the various masters of the *Beaver*. The numerous illustrations include practically every known drawing or photograph of the *Beaver* extant, as well as a facsimile page of her "skin book" and pictures of many of the known relics.

One can question the choice of a sub-title for the book, "The ship that saved the West." The *Beaver* was certainly an important factor in preserving the west coast fur domain for the Hudson's Bay Company, but it is an over-simplification to suggest that she saved the West from anything, except perhaps from the Americans.

The author, after some apparent soul-searching, decided to use the impersonal pronoun "it" when referring to the *Beaver*, instead of the traditional "she." It is a pity, for the effect is a lack of warm feeling for the subject, as if he was writing of just an ordinary piece of machinery. His excuse is: "The *Beaver* had many virtues, but charm was not one of them, and it had neither ancestors nor descendents." She may not have had charm, but she had plenty of character, and every steam vessel ever to operate on the coast can claim to be a descendent.

The writer's research is meticulous, although there are a few minor errors of omission or commission which it seems captious to mention. On page 9 he says that Governor George Simpson attempted in 1838 to reach the coast by canoe. Simpson did in fact reach Fort Langley via the Fraser conyon in a memorable canoe voyage. On page 19 he refers to the vice-president of the London Board of Trade. This should of course be President of the Board of Trade, a cabinet post. In a footnote on page 49 Captain J. A. Scarborough is called Herbert George Scarborough, an obvious misprint. His description of the seizure of the *Beaver* by the Americans in 1851 omits to give the amusing detail of how Captain Charles Stuart fled to British waters in a canoe to avoid arrest and thus lost his command. On page 73, Captain Stewart should be spelled Stuart, and on page 78 Whitby's Island should be Whidbey Island. In a footnote on page 86 Mr. Pethick says he can find no authority to support a story that the *Beaver* was borrowed by the American authorities to transport soldiers during the Indian Wars of 1856. He should have dug a little deeper for the account of how the ship was loaned in January 1856 by Chief Factor W. F. Tolmie at Nisqually is well documented in histories of Washington Territory. In a footnote on page 106, Mr. Pethick questions whether Captain William Mitchell ever commanded the *Beaver*. He was in fact the watchman in charge when she was laid up as a powder magazine. And on page 98, the reference to the *Beaver* on the Stikine

River is in fact to another vessel of the same name, an American stern-wheeler.

These are minor matters in a book that is a valuable addition to the library of British Columbianana. The volume is handsomely produced with good paper and wide margins, and is a credit to the designer, John Houghton, and to the publishers, Mitchell Press.

Vancouver

NORMAN HACKING

Alexander Mackenzie and the North West, by Roy Daniells. London: Faber and Faber, 1969. 219 pp., maps and photographs. \$6.00.

Canadians have been reluctant to endow their historical figures with the qualities of legend, or to accord them symbolic lustre. With few exceptions, our history is peopled with men and women who are strictly life-size, if not a bit prosaic. Such is not the case with Alexander Mackenzie as portrayed by Roy Daniells. In this brief, popular account the author has emphasized both the symbolic and legendary aspects of the Mackenzie character and accomplishment. In doing so, he has produced a book of considerable interest.

The author's approach is, perhaps, partially explained by the fact that he is not an historian in the professional sense. Instead, he is a poet and literary scholar who was, for many years, head of the English department at the University of British Columbia. It is not surprising, then, that his book is rich in allusions to classical literature and freer in terms of speculation and conjecture than most historical accounts. In giving his imagination a wider freedom than many historians would allow, Professor Daniells is often thought-provoking and sometimes unconvincing. It is fascinating to think of Mackenzie's voyages in relation to Homer's *Odyssey* and to compare his leadership with that of Caesar. It may also be fruitful to consider his arduous and, in terms of his goal, unsuccessful trip to the Arctic as, "a parable through which to interpret Canadian history." However, there are times when the author proceeds from the specific to the general with unsettling facility. For example, in writing of Mackenzie's easy relations with Athapascan-speaking Indians, Daniells concludes that, "He was temperamentally averse to violence and had, in any case, no means of making more than a token show of force. To this day, Canadian diplomacy, even in the international field, is marked by deliberate

caution, by a consistent desire for adjustment and compromise." It is all too simplistic. One might begin countering by suggesting that there was nothing particularly unusual about Mackenzie's dealings with the Indians. Trained as a fur trader, he shared the attitude of commercial self-interest which had long conditioned the Canadian fur trade to undertake peaceful dealings with the essential suppliers of raw materials. One might also argue that Canada's "desire" for adjustment and compromise in international affairs stems from the fact that we have little choice. As Gérard Bergeron has put it, "We are among the manipulated rather than the manipulators."

The author is more persuasive when he confines himself to Mackenzie's activities and character. Quoting extensively from the explorer's Arctic journal and from *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793*, he writes of both voyages with a fine eye for colourful detail and significant incident. We are shown Mackenzie and his voyageurs pursuing white whales in their bark canoe amid Arctic icefields; narrowly averting disaster in the rapids of the McGregor River; coolly encountering hostile natives along the upper waters of the Fraser. We get a real sense of the danger, discomfort, and fear which were frequently encountered, and overcome by the explorers.

What is truly remarkable about Mackenzie, however, is the perspective he brings to the adventures of his voyages. The most hair-raising brush with death is regarded as a mere incident, noteworthy only to the extent that it threatens the progress and ultimate goal of the expedition. Mackenzie emerges as a man of steely resolution and impressive self-reliance. It is his "organized effort of will" which overcomes obstacles and allays the frequent fears of his men. Such heroic qualities, the author is careful to point out, have little to do with adventuring for adventuring's sake. Rather, they are inspired by pragmatic, business motives — a desire to extend the fur trade, and "concern for financial success." Nonetheless, there is something boldly imaginative about his plan to augment Britain's commercial empire by establishing her possession of the Pacific coast from the Columbia north to the Russian sphere of influence — a distance of about 1200 miles measured in a straight line. It is within this broad design, compounded of the pragmatic and the imaginative, that Mackenzie's wilderness adventures in a battered canoe are best understood.

In assessing Mackenzie's achievement, the author sometimes enters the realm of the might-have-been, an entertaining but not very instructive area. For example, he writes: "An interesting possibility appears when we

try to forecast what would have occurred if Mackenzie's recommendations had been listened to and implemented, if the three Pacific posts he envisaged had all been established. One can easily come to the conclusion that the territory which became the American states of Washington and Oregon would now be part of Canada." He is on more solid ground in contending that Sir Alexander's work helped to ensure the existence of British Columbia as a colony by drawing public and governmental attention to the area. Professor Daniells also suggests that the Arctic voyage led the way for fur trading and prospecting activity which did much to define the present border between Alaska and the Yukon Territory.

Aside from its major conclusions and theories, *Alexander Mackenzie and the North West* has much to recommend it to the general reader. It provides an interesting introductory sketch of the fur trade in Canada. There are good accounts (often quoted directly from contemporary sources) of canoe construction, voyaging, and the logistics of the trade, as well as insights into life at interior posts. Furthermore, the author writes with a fine sense of place, so that we feel the grandeur of the Bella Coola valley and the stormy reaches of Great Slave Lake — places invested with the spirit of Mackenzie.

It is Professor Daniell's fascination with this intangible presence, with the archetypal, heroic, and legendary qualities of Alexander Mackenzie which lends this well-written book its distinctive flavour.

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BRUCE M. LITTELJOHN

Navigations, traffiques & discoveries, 1774-1848: a guide to publications relating to the area now British Columbia, Gloria M. Strathern, comp. Victoria, Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Victoria, 1970. xv, 417 pp. \$18.50.

This, the second volume in a series of bibliographies published by the University of Victoria, covers works relating to the years 1774-1848 which have been published up to 1968. Volume I, which related to the years 1849-1899 was compiled by Mrs. Barbara Lowther, who recently received an award from the Canadian Historical Association for her compilation. Since the coverage of the present volume includes general histories of the province it must necessarily overlap somewhat with the Lowther bibliography. The area covered is described as "the area which is now the

province of British Columbia," which includes a large part of what was the Oregon Territory; consequently there is listed relevant material on the Oregon question and on the fur trade as far south as Fort Astoria and Fort Vancouver. The bibliography is intended specifically as a reference guide for research workers and for librarians, but it will also be invaluable to collectors, book-dealers and advanced students.

The bibliography includes "all published monographic works that could be identified . . . together with information on later editions in translation." Also included are the major regional historical journals, stating their scope. The compiler has omitted general collections of voyages and general histories of exploration. Captain Cook and Washington Irving are well covered elsewhere, and for this reason the compiler has been very selective in her choice of listings.

The entries are alphabetical by author, or by title if there is no author. There is an excellent index with subject headings clearly in capitals, and with titles and added name entries in lower case. There are many cross-references and the index is easy to use providing that the reader remembers that, as in the Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories, the entries in the main body of the book are not repeated in the index. The entries are clear and concise and the compiler seems to have a flair for being able to give a complete thumb-nail sketch of each work, which often tends to be quite pithy. Mrs. Strathern seems to be a stickler for detail and as a recently arrived New Zealander has acquainted herself so thoroughly with the work she has undertaken that she is able to assess objectively the particular slant of many secondary works.

Of the five appendices I would like to draw attention to two lists which might not be normally expected. One is a list of major ships to visit the northwest coast, including their captains, country of origin and purpose of the voyage. The other is a chronological index of all first editions appearing in the bibliography, which I have already found particularly useful.

It is a credit to the University of Victoria to have given Mrs. Strathern the opportunity to visit no less than sixteen major libraries in Canada and the United States, a fact which is evident in her work. Her list of principal works consulted is in itself a very useful bibliography of bibliographies.

The choice of a standard size is well made; the book is easy to handle and will fit any standard bookshelf. Morriss Printing Company Ltd. are to be congratulated for their usual good design, and the Arrowsmith map on the end papers is appropriate. Every review should have at least one

carping criticism, and the only one that I can find is in Item No. 62, entitled *Friendly Cover* by Irving Brant, which is too obvious to miss.

To sum up, there is no doubt that this bibliography fills a long felt need in its field, and that it will be regarded as a bible covering its period. It is hoped that a third shining star will soon appear, to complete the bibliographical coverage of our province.

Special Collections

University of British Columbia Library

ANNE YANDLE

The Editors, BC STUDIES:

I read with pleasure Bill Ross's balanced review of Cecily Lyons, *Salmon: Our Heritage* (BC STUDIES, No. 8, Winter, 1970-71). I have only one criticism. Mr. Ross does not attempt to assess the role of B.C. Packers in the publication of the book. Yet the company's investment must have been considerable. The writing may have been a labour of love for Miss Lyons, but she had research and editorial assistance. The book is handsomely printed and lavishly illustrated. The foreword by John Buchanan, retired chief executive of B.C. Packers, the company's role as publisher and the wide distribution of complimentary copies all indicate generous support.

It is, however, too bad that the company was not better advised in this project. Writing business history is a specialized field, the practitioner needing to combine the insights of both economist and historian. Fishing is an important British Columbia resource industry; B.C. Packers is a major firm in that industry. In the hands of a professional scholar a history of their interrelations could have been a fine contribution to the economic history of the province.

A book has nevertheless been completed, and the company may see no further need to preserve the rich documentation on which it was based. But the present work is not definitive, and the material is still vital for future researchers. Could I suggest therefore that it find a place alongside the records of Anglo-British Columbia Packing and J. H. Todd in the manuscript section of Special Collections at U.B.C.

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