

## Book Reviews

*Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, by David Thompson.  
Edited by Victor G. Hopwood. Toronto: Macmillan, 1971. Pp. vii,  
342. \$10.95.

David Thompson is a significant figure in Canada's story. The Hudson's Bay Company, to whom he was apprenticed, brought him to North America in 1784 and first trained and then employed him as a surveyor and cartographer. He continued his surveys for the North-West Company which he joined after leaving the Hudson's Bay Company in 1797. When he retired from the fur trade in 1812 he had mapped an amount of virgin territory which may justify J. B. Tyrrell's description of him as "the greatest practical land geographer who ever lived." His employers permitted London cartographers, like the firm of Arrowsmith, to publish his discoveries — an act which Professor Hopwood describes as "pirating." This term is hardly correct, for Thompson's maps were the property of the employers who had paid him to make them. The result was nevertheless unfortunate. It caused the world that used Thompson's splendid maps to be denied almost all knowledge of their author.

But this ignorance of the man ended dramatically in 1916. Then Tyrrell published, with the Champlain Society, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America (1784-1812)*, a book which Thompson in his old age had compiled out of the journals he kept in his youth. That volume made Thompson famous, but, like the edition prepared for the Champlain Society in 1962 by this reviewer, it had only a small circulation, limited to members of the society. Now Professor Victor G. Hopwood, of the Department of English in the University of British Columbia, offers the general public this well chosen selection of Thompson's writing.

Professor Hopwood has made his choice from both the *Narrative* published by Champlain Society and Thompson's journals and papers preserved in the Ontario Provincial Archives and other repositories. He begins with excerpts from Thompson's account in the *Narrative* of life beside Hudson Bay in 1784-86. Next comes the whole of Thompson's long lost

chapter on "The Saskatchewan and the Bow, 1786-1790," which Professor Hopwood himself discovered in the Ontario Archives in 1957; and the text given here is to be preferred to that printed in 1962 in my edition of the *Narrative* which was taken from a too hastily made transcript. There follow, also from the *Narrative*, but with some excisions, chapters on "Life with the Nahathaways," on "Explorations in Athabasca," on Thompson's work as "Astronomer to the North West Company" and on "Plains and Foothill Indians." The next, that is the seventh, chapter, "Probing the Passes of the Rockies" contains new material taken from Thompson's journals and blended with parts of a report preserved in the Public Library of Vancouver. Chapter VIII, on "Exploring the Upper Columbia" is also from Thompson's journals and includes what may be an attempt at fiction; this is a description of the battle between the Piegans and the Salishes, in which Finan McDonald took part, written as if Thompson himself had been there, which he was not. Chapter IX gives "an early version" of Thompson's "Journey to the Pacific in 1810-11"; and the last chapter, called "Final Explorations in the West" is drawn from the three closing chapters of the *Narrative*. All told, it is a varied and interesting selection.

One of the things which roused Professor Hopwood's interest in Thompson was admiration for his prose style; and Thompson was indeed among the most literary of explorers. His love of books began in his charity school in Westminster where *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* were among his favourites. Common literary interests are perhaps more likely than the greater distaste for other Hudson's Bay Company men postulated by Professor Hopwood to explain why Thompson describes Joseph Colen, the chief at York Factory, as "enlightened." For Colen had a really remarkable library of some 1400 volumes. We may be sure that Thompson enjoyed this library during his visits to York, since Colen, who lent Thompson money, would hardly refuse to lend him books. As Alice Johnson has reported, Thompson's numerous purchases included *Paradise Lost* and *Johnson's Rambler*; and it is good to have a professor of English pay attention to this facet of Thompson the fur-trader and explorer.

But Thompson was also a man who played a part in events of historic importance; and Professor Hopwood is less at home in history than in literary criticism. Thus he can write

In 1846, the British government, betraying Canada, completely yielded to the United States under the pressure of the slogan "fifty-four-forty or fight" Canada's historic claims to Oregon by accepting the 49th parallel as the British Columbia boundary.

On this one can only comment, first, that a Britain which pushed American claims back from  $54^{\circ} 40'$  to the 49th parallel had not "completely yielded to the United States;" second, in 1846 no nation of "Canada" existed for Britain to betray; but, third, the inhabitants of the colonies of New Brunswick, Canada East and Canada West might fairly have complained of betrayal if Britain had exposed their homes to invasion by electing to fight the U.S.A. over a claim so remote from their interests as the ownership of part of the Pacific coast.

This matter of imperial diplomacy may be rather far on the perimeter of Professor Hopwood's subject; but he is also weak on some matters much more central to Thompson's career. He indeed declares that Thompson's statements, as "an original historical source," must be "tested against other evidence." There he is dead right; but then, after stating the principle, he too often ignores the other evidence.

An example is the way he treats Thompson's departure from the Hudson's Bay Company. Thompson's story on this is, first, that he left because Colen wrote him a letter saying "he could not sanction any further surveys"; and, second, that he left when his "time was up," implying that his obligations to his employers were fulfilled. Professor Hopwood repeats this story. Unfortunately it would appear to be false. I have questioned whether Colen's famous letter, which so many have mentioned but none have quoted, was ever written. If Professor Hopwood has found it, he would put us all in his debt by publishing it. But, even if it was really written and delivered, this letter did not cause Thompson's departure. The only possible date for it is the one Professor Hopwood gives, 1796; and Alice Johnson has published evidence that Thompson had agreed to join the Nor'Westers as early as 1795. In the event, the death of his North-West contact and namesake, Robert Thompson, caused his switch of employers to be deferred till 1797 when his contract ended; but even so Professor Hopwood is mistaken when he credits Thompson with having "completely fulfilled" his obligations. "All contracts made by the Hudson's Bay Company with its employees," writes Miss Johnson required a man to give a "year's notice of his intention" to resign. Thompson had done nothing of the kind.

This is not the only place where Professor Hopwood has been misled by an excessively trusting faith in Thompson, but the point perhaps need not be laboured any further. Enough has been said to show how wisely the late Arthur Morton wrote when he declared: "It is not safe to rely on the evidence of the man Thompson himself, all the more so," he added of the

Columbian enterprise, "because there is a strange, perhaps a determined, silence in his journals at this point."

We hope, then, that when Professor Hopwood writes the biography of Thompson which we are promised, he will indeed carry out his own prescription of testing Thompson's assertions against all the available evidence. Meanwhile we have to thank him for making much of Thompson's best writing accessible to the general reader for the first time.

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RICHARD GLOVER

*Gastown's Gassy Jack*, by Raymond Hull and Olga Ruskin. Gordon Soules Economic Research, Vancouver, 1971, 48 pp.

John Deighton, the man who won the wets, by building the saloon around which coagulated the town that would become the city of Vancouver, was a man of several parts. All of them well lubricated. In his time he was a sailor, a steamboat pilot, a prospector and a publican. Yet only recently has Gassy Jack — as he was called because he was highly gifted with the gab — become of interest to residents of the city he sired with some help from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. For at least the first half-century of Vancouver's development John Deighton was something considerably less than a household word, and it is not unfair to suspect that much of the attention he is receiving belatedly derives from the renaissance of Gastown as the liveliest quarter of the city.

As Raymond Hull and Olga Ruskin have described in their little book on Vancouver's first citizen (in the broader sense), Deighton was a colourful figure. But a noble figure he was not. The colours are those of an ill-assorted collage: red-white-and-blue overlaid with venous purple and a very off-white. Now that we know more about him than we knew before, we are still not charmed by him. His statue, centring Gastown, remains as a monument to the skid row whose tone he set rather than to the evocation of a pioneer cast in the heroic mould.

One reason for our resistance to being beguiled by the master of Deighton House is that his history is only sketched by the facts, his character never fully fleshed, even by anecdote. The cause of his death is itself the subject for conjecture, posthumously, in a rumbling appendix of the Hull-Ruskin biography.

The authors may therefore be almost forgiven their lapses into School-girl Style, with its use of the terminal shriek (!), to try to add verve to

their material. They are necessarily limited, as they deal with "the life and times of John Deighton," to the times more than to the life. They do a good job of dressing the stage. We learn new things about his family background, with its inconclusive evidence that he was born to the bar sinister as well as to the tavern variety. We follow him to sea, to the goldfields of the Forty-niners in California, to the helm of the Fraser River stern-wheeler portaging the panhandlers to sandbars where wealth glinted delusively, and at last to the Deighton saloon in New Westminster and the celebrated hegira to Burrard Inlet with his Indian woman, his cur, his barrel of whisky and his indestructible loquacity.

The story is fully told and well researched, yet requires only 48 pages. We learn more about Jack's character from his photo than we do from his correspondence, which falls well short of Voltaire's. His grave in New Westminster is unmarked, we are told, and we know only too well why: we have not learned to care about John Deighton. He is a distant ancestor who died less than a century ago.

Plainly what our burly, black-bearded anti-hero needs is not so much a history as a legend. Nothing less can save him. Now that we have a framework of facts of his life, we wait for the hand of fiction to weave the apprehensible image, something we can grasp as we do King Alfred's clinkered cakes and Paul Revere's midnight gallop.

The substance is there in sufficient amount, as Raymond Hull and Olga Ruskin have taken laudable pains to show. Jack's fate now lies with the Muse.

ERIC NICOL

*John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator*, by F. Henry Johnson. Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1971. Pp. 181. \$6.50.

This biography of British Columbia's first provincial superintendent of education is the culmination of Henry Johnson's efforts to trace the history of schooling in the Pacific province. It follows numerous articles and an earlier monograph, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*. Why a biography of the relatively unknown John Jessop? Johnson suggests a number of reasons that "compelled" him to bring to life "one of the ghosts of history." There was the desire to place on record Jessop's brief (1872-1878) tenure as superintendent and to assess his impact on subsequent educational developments. Secondly, Johnson sought to establish Jessop's major role in the earlier decade of the 1860's "in establishing the

free, non-sectarian school system of British Columbia." In addition, Johnson felt impelled "to clothe those spectral bones with flesh," to paint a complete picture of Jessop," like so many of our early pioneers . . . a man of several dimensions." Finally, Professor Johnson hoped that an account of the shaping of the school system would provide "a contribution to the social history of the province and of the country." This work must be evaluated on the extent to which it fulfills these stated purposes.

The reader is left in no doubt as to Jessop's substantial influence on British Columbia schools during his years as provincial superintendent. We are given a detailed picture of Jessop designing legislation, administering a growing system almost single-handedly, planning the curriculum, providing schools and teachers for the scattered communities of the province, and visiting and inspecting those early schools by paddle-steamer, canoe, and on horseback. Jessop's problems and concerns were similar in many respects to those of his counterparts in other provinces — inadequate financing, poorly qualified teachers, and irregular pupil attendance. British Columbia differences from other provinces are also revealed — the lack of publicly supported Roman Catholic separate schools, the desire to segregate high school pupils by sex, and the absence of local school taxes.

Throughout Jessop's career runs the influence of Egerton Ryerson, superintendent of education in Upper Canada and Ontario from 1844 to 1876. This is a favourite theme of Johnson's, first detailed in an earlier issue of this journal. ("The Ryersonian Influence on the Public School System of British Columbia," *BC Studies*, No. 10, Summer 1971, pp. 26-34.) The Jessop-Ryerson links are carefully traced, through Jessop's attendance at the Toronto Normal School and his teaching career in Ontario in the 1850's, and through his correspondence with Ryerson in the 1860's and 1870's. Professor Johnson's research in Ontario libraries and archives, in this regard, has complimented his earlier research in British Columbia repositories. The Ryerson influence is shown in such areas as a strong central authority, use of Ontario textbooks, rigid academic screening for high school entrance and provision of public libraries. Unfortunately, Johnson provides little evaluation of whether Ontario approaches were relevant for nineteenth-century British Columbia.

Johnson's attempt to portray Jessop as the "father" of British Columbia's free, non-sectarian public school system in the 1860's, is less convincing than his portrait of Jessop the administrator in the 1870's. Granted, Jessop was the most important schoolmaster in colonial Victoria during the decade, and he did participate in the educational debates. But

how could an individual possessing relatively little social and political influence possibly play the most crucial role in determining the province's single most important educational decision? Johnson overlooks the importance of other more important individuals — newspaper editors like Amor De Cosmos and John Robson and political figures like Governor Seymour. He also overlooks the social factors that contributed to a non-sectarian approach — the absence of a sizable Roman Catholic community, and the relative weakness of the other churches.

In his portrayal of the "several dimensions" of Jessop's character and life, the author is in the happy position of being able to draw on some rich first-person narratives. Indeed, Johnson's skilful use of Jessop's accounts of his trans-Canada overland trip in 1859, his gold prospecting trips into the Cariboo country in 1860, his unsuccessful political career in 1867, and his tours as school inspector in the 1870's are among the most rewarding sections of the book. Unfortunately, similar accounts are not available for other aspects of Jessop's life. It proved impossible, therefore, for Johnson to paint a full picture of Jessop's activities as an immigration officer and a prominent Methodist layman; nor are we offered much of a glimpse of Jessop's family life.

In dealing with Johnson's attempt to add to the social history of British Columbia, it is necessary to refer to an exaggerated conclusion that is, unfortunately, unsubstantiated. "Few men have had more influence on the thinking, the culture, the attitudes and mores of generations of our young people than those who have designed and established the public school systems." (p. 107) Nowhere does the author assess this influence; nowhere does he deal with the lasting influence of Jessop's contributions to public schooling on the most important individuals — the children. And while we are given a plethora of details on textbooks and departmental examinations, we are given little information on what Jessop and the young provincial society had to say about the fundamental aims of schooling. There is a certain failure, therefore, to relate educational developments to the broader social and cultural developments of the period.

There is reason to be disappointed, then, in Professor Johnson's assessment of Jessop as the founder of British Columbia's non-sectarian approach to public schooling, and in his discussion of Jessop's influence on "generations of our young people." But as a descriptive account of the problems of teaching in Victoria in the 1860's, and of administering a provincial system in the 1870's, this study merits wide readership.

*m.e. A portrayal of Emily Carr*, by Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher. Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1969; pp. 123, \$4.95.

*Emily Carr*, by Doris Shadbolt. Vancouver Art Gallery (to accompany the retrospective exhibition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth), 1971, pp. 96, illus. \$5.00.

Two books have recently been published to add to the growing list of Carriana. They are important contributions and the most important outside the writings of Emily Carr herself. This remarkable person grows in stature as time reveals her presence. So many things are stirred up by the artist herself and by those who try to write about her. It is likely that the first great monograph on a Canadian artist will be on Emily Carr. The time has not yet come.

The first of these books, *m.e.* by Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, is a very personal experience and a revealing one. It is charming, easy to read, well-written. The author has avoided the usual pitfall of intruding her own personality to the detriment of her subject. There is very little in the book about the author apart from her direct association with the artist — only enough to provide continuity. However, the author has intruded her personality in her reporting. Emily Carr was much more sharp-tongued than would appear in this book. Her journals (*Hundreds and Thousands*) were very strictly edited, omitting important material. Perhaps now time has softened recollection. Emily's personal reactions to people are vividly expressed in her letters and many of them yet to be published. Some of these would throw a different light on the events described by Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher. Nevertheless the book is a genuine appreciation of a friendship that extended over a decade.

The inclusion of twenty letters "from Emily to Edythe" are of particular interest. No matter what reminiscences are recorded and what recollections are written (more are still to be written) the unique character and quality of the subject is revealed best in what she says informally to her friends. It is disappointing therefore that the letters have been carefully edited. Admittedly Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher qualifies this by a statement that Emily's style is filled with spelling errors and a disregard for punctuation. In their original form the letters are most revealing of a personality pungent with wit and humour, with warmth, compassion and honest scorn, a disregard for conformity. They form some of the most vigorous and entertaining correspondence in Canadian letters.

Even the free spelling is genuinely naive and logical — altogether intriguingly vital.

Unfortunately the letters have been diluted and therefore misrepresent Emily as she was. The reader suspects that the editing is somewhat biased. It is hoped that someday the numerous letters of Emily may be collected and published as she originally wrote them.

The numerous remarks (even though obviously modified in the book) about her contemporaries give valuable insight to her own problems and loyalties. She was constantly loyal to a few friends — most notably Lawren Harris and Ira Dilworth.

One of the difficulties of a book of recollections dependent on memories of forty years past, is that the dates and sequence of events may be vague. The author frequently avoids this by omitting dates. This is forgivable and commendable since the book is primarily about the character of Emily Carr not a biography or critique of her work.

These more analytical aspects are the foundations of the more recent book, *Emily Carr* published by the Vancouver Art Gallery, to accompany the retrospective exhibition in 1971. This is partly a catalogue and partly an illustrated survey of her life and work. The whole concept of this book is a commendable one.

The six photographs, though poor in quality and poorer in reproduction (no good photographs have come to light) give a necessary insight to the person, her character, and the way she lived — dependent on wit and will and the loyalty of her pets. This is a useful supplement to the other books about Emily. One photograph is most important — the portrait of the artist in her studio holding a canvas. The whole photograph shows a vigorous dynamic and well composed study.

The 25 colour plates also suffer in the process of printing. They do not satisfactorily reveal the vitality or subtlety in colour of the original. However, they are a valuable contribution to the knowledge of an artist whose work has seldom been reproduced.

The essential style is seen with less distraction in the seven black and white reproductions of her drawings. Even here the quality could be improved.

The critical analysis which occupies most of the text is the finest assessment yet written. It reveals an effective and perceptive review of the topic and a respect for the subject. It stands as one of the best pieces of historical art criticism to be published in Canada.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is the catalogue of 122 paintings in the exhibition, each item accompanied by a small black and white reproduction which will be a permanent reference to the artist's work and will greatly enhance the record and also encourage further study.

The exhibition and catalogue provide a detailed year-by-year description of the artist's output from 1895 to 1942. Its chronological arrangement is revealing in itself with its postage-stamp reproductions.

Of less value is the last part — six pages of chronology, exhibitions and bibliography. It is of less value because of small inaccuracies and larger omissions so that it cannot be used as authoritative. In the chronology on page 89 it states that Emily Carr was in England from 1889 to 1904. But she was in San Francisco from 1889 to 1894 and didn't go to England until 1899. This is confirmed on page 9. Her bibliography omits such important references as Harper, *Painting in Canada; Journals of E.C. Hundreds and Thousands*; Duval, *Canadian Water-colour Painting*; Mellen, *The Group of Seven*; and the National Gallery of Canada, the Mr. and Mrs. Jules Loeb Collection.

The problem of dating appears in the self-portrait which adorns the cover. On page 83 it is dated "1934-1935," on page 51 it is dated "about 1938," while Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher refers to her interest in portrait painting in 1932. Other references by the artist herself (including letters) would support the earliest date while comparisons with photographs would seem to rule out the latest date.

The book itself is a commendable one but it suffers slightly from the appearance of a team production.

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IAN McNAIRN

*Joe Plaskett and His Paris. In Search of Time Past*, Vancouver and Ottawa, Fine Arts Gallery, The University of British Columbia and the National Gallery of Canada, 1971; pp. 35, illus. \$2.00.

This attractive book is intended as accompaniment to an otherwise uncataloguable exhibition. Its novelty and imagination are its most striking features. It seems to capture the essence of the subject to the point where one wonders if the book is the "real" Joe Plaskett (if he is real) or a colourful romantic vision of the author. It is from beginning to end a character study. As such it is revealing and intriguing. We see a man who paints like a mystical poet, enjoys poetry like an epicure, wines and dines like a painter, lives like an impoverished prince.

Plaskett reveals that there is still a dream in many of us to live an unfettered sophisticated life such only Paris can provide — a dream that many thought was destroyed by the first world war.

But in review we are concerned principally with the book. It is remarkably successful in achieving its aim — creating an image of a man with the greatest economy of words, supported by many quotations (not all of them relevant), a kaleidoscope of photographs and some well-reproduced paintings.

The designing is not so successful or imaginative. Somehow the format isn't the same homage to Plaskett as the content is. The distinguishing feature of the book is the centre fold — a reproduction of a six-panel painting of the artist's studio. This indeed shows ingenuity and reflects the image of artist and author. The rest of the book seems to depend on this — particularly in its proportions. The cover, with its startling magenta colour is not Plaskett. Somehow the long list of the Honourary Committee seems inappropriate for the book even though many of them are his patrons. The type-face and layout don't seem to reflect this reflective artist and his inner and outer spirit. The format drags it down.

The question arises, is this novelty justified or even significant?

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