

## Book Reviews

*Almost Out of the World: Scenes from Washington Territory: The Strait of Juan de Fuca 1859-61.* By James G. Swan. Edited with notes and introduction by William A. Katz. Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1971. xxiii, 126 pp. Illus., map. \$7.50.

This important book describes the shores of the Straits of Juan de Fuca and lower Puget Sound during the first decade of white settlement. The author was a most unusual frontier personality. A cultured, sensitive person, he adjusted well to the harsh realities of the wilderness, to the crudities and fetid aspects of pioneer life and to the so-called primitive native Indians. Obviously an intellectual, he was well informed though not necessarily erudite in fields other than natural history. His keen and accurate powers of observation were not matched by critical analysis or subtle interpretation. An innate integrity may have deterred him from appearing pretentious. There is no doubt that he enjoyed the confidence of other scientists, particularly the staff of the Smithsonian Institute. Professedly a publicist, he was devoid of the exaggeration and boasting characteristic of many of the region's boosters. He liked people and said that he loved children. This makes it difficult to explain his long absence from his wife and his two children, whom he never did mention in this book.

The region fared well in his colourful, reasonable and accurate appraisal, both with respect to attractiveness as well as its economic potential. As the title which the editor gave the book suggests, Swan was aware of the importance of the region's geographical position, and, although he used the term manifest destiny, the concepts of the advent of the Pacific era and of a gateway to the Orient, do not come through so clearly as in his other writings. Also, there is little doubt that he was aware of the impact of relations with our Anglo-Saxon neighbours, but this stands out only in discussion of the problem of the Northern Indians. The reader is left unaware that during certain years covered in the book there occurred a "Pig War" and a boundary survey.

Communications and improvements in facilities in that regard were ever on his mind. Coast-wise traffic was largely by schooners and Indian canoes. Treacherous currents and tides, and huge swells and breakers made such travel hazardous. Swan was ever on the alert as to prospects of good harbours, dockage and wharfage. To his mind few regions in the world seemed so inviting to a thriving ship-building industry. As regards maritime resources, he stressed whaling and halibut and cod fisheries, but seldom mentioned salmon, except as an item on the menu. He deplored the lack of interest in kelp from which the Indians made rope and floats, but in which he saw the possibilities for use as fertilizer and as fibre in paper manufacture.

Although the exploitative period of the fur trade seemed long passed, the author felt that the supply could be restored to a profitable basis. Though fur seal hunting was not far in the offing, Swan, curiously, did not mention it. It seemed to irk him that coal potential in the area had to date attracted so little outside attention.

Much of the book is in the nature of a travelogue with vivid descriptions of places and people. Port Townsend, less than a decade old, had already sown its wild oats by the time Swan arrived. It had wharves, warehouses, good business structures, an excellent hotel and a two story brick custom house. The town's three hundred inhabitants had responded to the leadership of their patriarch Alfred A. Plummer. Capable jurists and noted territorial attorneys accounted for dignity and dispatch in court procedures. Due largely to the intelligent administration of the local Indian agent supported by the citizenry and the able leadership of the Duke of York, chief of the neighbouring Clallams, these Indians were peaceful and orderly. Swan seemed critical of the local Protestant clergy, but was impressed by the culture of Catholic priests.

Among his companions and hosts on the numerous and extensive trips to lumber camps, trading posts, government stations of various kinds, and to Indian villages were sea captains, light-house keepers, soldiers, Indian agents, mill-operators, traders, homesteaders, and native chiefs. Many of these were persons of substance, and most of them enjoyed a good standard of living in terms of food, shelter and the basic amenities of life.

Over half of the book is devoted to Indians, but there is a relatively greater emphasis on Indian-white relations than in most of his other writing about them. Swan's excellent rapport with the natives could be attributed to his genuine humanity, his respect for them as persons, his integrity and courage, and his ability to eat Indian food. He used the term "savage," even when violence was not at issue, but he also realized

that grooming and sanitation were not indispensable to personality and dignity.

Whereas he was appreciative of the creativeness of the Indians in their arts and crafts and respectful of their religion, he provides little insight into their philosophy of life. His discussion of their language stresses the meaning of words and accuracy of pronunciation but not grammar. He correctly maintained that most white men had difficulty detecting certain sounds in the native language. Unfortunately, he had not been formally trained in modern methods of identifying and recording particular sounds.

Few pioneers of his day understood so well that offences by particular Indians should have been understood as such and that they should not have been made the subject of reprisals against entire groups or even communities. Also, he insisted that respect for law was gained by its justice and effectiveness. It is not clear that at the time the Makahs resorted to self-help in redressing the murder of their chief by the neighbouring Elwhas, Swan was fully aware of the implications of the blood feud. He was fair in his judgment of the Northern Indians, the policing of whom he would have assigned to the navy.

The text of the book consists of virtual verbatim transcripts of communications to the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*, the Olympia *Pioneer and Democrat*, the *Washington Standard* and the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* during the years 1859-1861. The editor's Introduction and a chronology of Swan's life provide a good epitome of the man's life and career. There is a list of his publications but neither bibliography nor index. A topical guide including these items and a calendar to all Swan materials, both published and unpublished, would be a real service to students of Pacific Northwest history.

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*Politics in Paradise* by Pat McGeer. Toronto: Peter Martin, 1972, 237 pp., \$7.95.

As a general rule Canadian politicians ought to write memoirs because as a general rule, they do not. The British practice, which probably stems from a classical education or, at the very least, from a pervasive literary tradition, has never taken root in Canada. Federal politicians are given to

publishing no more than collections of their speeches — even those they didn't write — while their provincial counterparts seem to prefer disappearing into the darkness from whence they came, leaving no published or publishable trace of their exploits beyond the columns of the daily newspapers. We are left with second-hand accounts of great men in high places and that is far from satisfactory.

The publication of Dr. Pat McGeer's book, *Politics in Paradise*, soon after he relinquished the leadership of the provincial Liberal party, seemed to be a departure from the dismal tradition. The blurb on the dust jacket lent credence to this view for it trumpeted that the book was an "authoritative, no-holds-barred inside account of the use and abuse of political power in British Columbia today!" The reader is bound to be disappointed for the book is simply a recapitulation of some of the major events in the recent past with some of its author's proposals for reform tucked in. There is little that is autobiographical and little that could be classified as "inside" information. Indeed, the author is more direct than the blurb writer for he states in his introduction that the book is "a series of chapters, each dealing with an area of government concern," each one a fairly straightforward accounting of events with no attempt to hide the author's own political position. Each chapter stands on its own as a separate essay.

In that context the book is interesting, if only because it serves as a reminder of the triumphs and scandals of the Social Credit era in British Columbia. It is interesting as well for, in part, it is a chronicle of political naivete and insensitivity.

The book opens with a chapter making a case for more government-backed research and more secondary industry. This is followed by a chronicle of the development of post-secondary education in British Columbia which, in large measure, consists of a hymn of praise to John B. Macdonald, former president of the University of British Columbia. Macdonald, a man of monumental political ineptitude and insensitivity, is credited by Dr. McGeer with providing the leadership under which "three new universities" were established in British Columbia. In fact, only one can be so attributed: Simon Fraser. Notre Dame in Nelson was established privately and the University of Victoria was well on the road to incorporation before J. B. Macdonald appeared on the scene.

Macdonald arrived in B.C. in the autumn of 1962 and immediately set about preparing a report entitled *Higher Education in British Columbia*. The report was completed in three months largely through the efforts of an able group of faculty and the fact that significant aspects of it were

simply borrowed from American experience in post secondary education. Macdonald could not understand why the provincial government did not welcome this latter day Plato, come to Syracuse to set things right. He was even astonished that they got him to release the report on "Opposition Day" thus scooping the leaders of the opposition parties. Did the good president really think he was dealing with a Dean of Graduate Studies and not the premier of a province and a professional politician? Dr. McGeer's support of John Macdonald, while it has an aura of nobility, does bespeak a certain political naivete on his part as well.

The same conclusion can be drawn from events described by Dr. McGeer that relate to his predecessor Ray Perrault and to Bill Rathie — a veritable John B. Macdonald in civic politics. McGeer describes how Perrault asked Eric Martin in August of 1963 if there would be a provincial election and when Martin assured him there wouldn't be, Perrault went off on his honeymoon. There was, of course, an election. It may have escaped Mr. Perrault that the premier traditionally called elections in late summer after three years of office, as it may have escaped him that cabinet ministers cannot be relied upon to give members of the opposition parties inside information. It is surprising as well that Mr. Perrault appears to have been unaware of the fact that election dates were always a matter that W. A. C. Bennett determined by himself.

The career of William Rathie as Mayor of Vancouver and an erstwhile Liberal candidate while mayor is another testament of political ineptitude. Dr. McGeer persistently describes Rathie as a man with a desire to build the Vancouver dream. It is the tragedy of that particular individual that he was unable to communicate his dream to anyone beyond his immediate circle. Like many, Rathie ignored the fact that Social Credit was stronger in the urban areas than the distribution of seats indicated. He learned too late that in dealing with Victoria he was dealing with a consummate practitioner of the political arts.

There is in this book more than a little evidence of what can best be described as the great Canadian Liberal myth. And that myth is that to be a Liberal is enough of an indication that one is fit and able to rule, that the label alone is sufficient evidence of competence and rectitude to satisfy all circumstances. The trouble was that W. A. C. Bennett didn't believe in the myth — and neither, it would appear, did too many of the voters. Messrs. Rathie, Perrault and, to some extent, McGeer, emerge from this book as slightly bemused by the phenomenon of Social Credit. Like many they were baffled by the apparently unstoppable juggernaut, a juggernaut

that could move from victory to victory despite the many acts of the government that Dr. McGeer enumerates that were crass, base, and sordid.

If there is a message in this chronicle of those years it would have to be that nice guys finish last. Having said that, it is to be earnestly hoped that Dr. McGeer will now take the time to write his political memoirs.

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