

Twenty-Five Years of *BC Studies*

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BC STUDIES originated in two developments of the 1960s in Canada. The first was the enormous expansion of the Canadian university system and a dramatic increase in the number of academic positions across the country. In response, the major Canadian universities, at long last, began to take graduate education seriously, and there was a rapid growth in graduate programmes in a variety of disciplines. At the same time, Canada was experiencing a growth of regionalism in the formulation of economic and social policies, and in politics, that had a marked impact on approaches to the study of our society. It was a decade of intellectual excitement over the discovery of “limited identities.”

Against that background, *BC Studies* was born in discussions between Walter Young of the UBC Department of Political Science and the present writer, then a member of the Department of History at UBC. We believed that an increasing volume of scholarly work relating to this province done by our colleagues and their graduate students in history and the social sciences was worthy of publication. Regrettably, national and international journals tended to take the view that “local” subjects were necessarily parochial subjects, and therefore did not warrant publication. We were also influenced by the fact that the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, established in 1937, had not appeared since 1958. Uncertain whether its demise was permanent or not, we concluded that even if it were revived (as it has not been) there would still be a place for an interdisciplinary journal. Walter and I were good friends, with a number of interests in common, and we thought we would enjoy working together on a quarterly devoted to the understanding of British Columbia. As a native son and a student of its politics, Walter had a better grasp of the characteristics and ways of the province than I, a prairie- and Ontario-educated historian. Thus far my academic interests had been focused on Ontario history, but after a decade on the west coast in the flamboyant age of W. A. C. Bennett and Phil Gaglardi I was increasingly interested in what made the society and politics of British Columbia so distinctive from the rest of the country.

How were we to get the enterprise started? Who would finance the journal? Which came first, the editor(s) or an editorial board? If the latter, who would appoint it? Assured by academic colleagues whom we consulted that a periodical could only be established through the initiative of one or two people, Walter and I "appointed" ourselves co-editors. Later we organized an editorial board representing seven disciplines from the three British Columbia universities. UBC provided office space and a part-time secretary and business manager in the university's Publications Centre, which later became the UBC Press. At the beginning, subscriptions and other business matters were handled by Jean Wrinch, former secretary of the UBC Faculty Association, while our editorial assistant was Diane Nelles, who had had considerable experience with publications of the Economic Council of Canada. The first issue appeared in the winter of 1968-69.

The founding editors' financial appeals fell on friendly ears, and the journal was launched with "seed money" from the UBC Alumni Association and the Koerner Foundation, and with funds provided by Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia. It was our hope that eventually we would secure support from the Canada Council, but we had to survive for two years before we would be eligible to apply. We rejoiced when our application to the Canada Council was approved, for the journal had met not only the test of survival, but also the test of quality applied by the Council's assessors. Henceforth, the journal's funds came from the Council and the three British Columbia universities, after the University of Victoria added its financial support in 1971. For five years in the seventies the British Columbia Cultural Fund also contributed. In the late seventies when the federal government reorganized its support of academic and cultural activities, the publications programme was placed under the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which has continued to support the journal until the present time.

From the outset the editors were pleased with the quality of the manuscripts submitted to the journal and with the willingness of well-established scholars to contribute articles and to act as referees. At first the volume of manuscripts was smaller than we would have wished, and on two occasions we wondered whether or when the next issue could be produced. Then it was necessary to do some prodding among our academic colleagues, and the problem was solved satisfactorily. The editors never departed from the principle that this was a refereed journal and that no article should be published unless it had passed the scrutiny of readers whose competence to judge it was clear. Obviously this was essential in the establishment of

the academic credibility that would ensure the quality of the journal. In the early years many more articles were submitted by historians than by social scientists, and it was sometimes difficult to maintain a balance among the disciplines. Gradually this problem took care of itself as the journal became better known and as the pool of scholars working on subjects relating to British Columbia expanded.

In the belief that it would be a service to teachers and students, and perhaps give the journal a higher profile among specific groups of scholars and readers, the editors decided to produce from time to time a "Special Issue" devoted to a particular discipline or theme. The first of these was *Archaeology in British Columbia* (nos. 6-7, 1970), edited by Roy L. Carlson of SFU, a member of the journal's editorial board. Exactly a decade later Knut R. Fladmark, also from SFU, was guest editor for a second special issue on archaeology which dealt with studies in that field in the 1970s, *Fragments of the Past* (no. 48, Winter 1980-81). In the meantime, A. D. Scott had edited an issue entitled *National Economic Issues: The View from the West Coast* (no. 13, 1972), composed of articles written by his colleagues in the Department of Economics at UBC. There had also been an issue on *Indians in British Columbia* (no. 19, 1973), but this was by no means the first time we had published articles on that subject and we continued to do so in regular issues. However, it was fourteen years before there was another special issue in this area, this time double the size of the first and edited by a specialist, Paul Tennant of UBC's Department of Political Science. With the growth of native self-consciousness, and given the interests of the guest editor, *British Columbia: A Place for Aboriginal Peoples?* (no. 57, Spring 1983), was more political and contemporary in focus than the earlier issue. The belief that there was a lively interest in the work published in these theme issues appeared to be justified when they went out of print fairly quickly, and when reprinted continued to enjoy steady sales over an extended period of time.

A special issue whose contents were of a more general character was *Personality & History in British Columbia: Essays in Honour of Margaret Ormsby* (no. 32, Winter 1976-77), edited by John M. Norris and Margaret Prang. This tribute from former students and colleagues celebrated the achievements of the doyenne of historical studies of the province on her retirement from UBC. That history is not always recorded in the written page was highly visible in *The Past in Focus: Photography and British Columbia, 1858-1914* (no. 52, Winter 1981-82) with guest editor Joan M. Schwartz of the Public Archives of Canada.

The usual format for *BC Studies* was three articles, three or four book reviews, and the bibliography. On one notable occasion the editors departed from this format and published an issue consisting of one long article (62 pages) and a review article on a group of books on local history. "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," by Eleanor Bartlett, was based on her Master's thesis in history at UBC. The more than usual number of referees whose assessments were sought by the editors assured us that this specialized study made an original contribution to a current historiographical discussion. "The standard of living debate," begun among British historians, had also evoked interest in North America, and some Canadian scholars had recently addressed the issue in relation to Montreal and Toronto, but no western Canadian city had been examined in this context. Although we knew that many of our readers might find the article too technical for their taste (the editors didn't find the piece easy going!) we decided to publish it. The discussion that it provoked and the frequency with which the article has been cited by other scholars has fully justified the decision. The editors' dilemma about publication is an example of the difficulties encountered in trying to create a journal that advances knowledge and serves a scholarly community, while also appealing to a wider public. In the first fifteen years *BC Studies* never had as many as the one thousand subscribers we set as an objective. Does that mean that the journal was too academic, or only that the problem is insoluble?

As editors, Walter Young and I did not deliberately set out to organize controversy in the pages of the journal, but we were not unhappy when it developed. The first was provoked by Mark Sproule-Jones' article, "Social Credit and the British Columbia Electorate" (no. 11, Fall 1971), which challenged interpretations of the significance of "class" in B.C. politics in recently published work by Edwin Black and Martin Robin. The publication of comments from both Black and Robin brought a reply from Sproule-Jones (all in no. 12, Winter 1971-72), and altogether this was a useful discussion. A more heated exchange was precipitated when Robert D. Levine and Peter L. McNair reviewed George Woodcock's *Peoples of the Coast*. The reviewers' contention that by neglecting much recent scholarship Woodcock had placed the authenticity of his book in question brought a counterblast from Woodcock (both in no. 40, Winter 1978-79) and a defence by the reviewers (no. 41, Spring 1979).

A debate that was helpful to students of the province emerged following publication of Peter Ward's article, "Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939" (no. 45, Spring 1980), which argued

that race had been far more significant than class in the structuring of B.C. society. In opposition, Rennie Warburton asserted that Ward's "idealist" approach to history blinded him to the reality of class as the operative category in the society, and that Ward greatly oversimplified the relationship between race and class (no. 49, Spring 1981). Ward stood his ground in reply (no. 50, Summer 1981). Very shortly this exchange was required reading for students of B.C. history and politics, and more generally for students of Canadian social history.

Looking back, I am struck by the long service given to the journal by a number of people. From the beginning, a highly praised and well-used feature of *BC Studies* was the bibliography of books, articles, and government publications relating to British Columbia. Frances Woodward, reference librarian in the UBC library, must hold some kind of record for bibliographical longevity, since she prepared the bibliography for issues nos. 1-50, from 1968 to 1982. As well, she was responsible for two cumulative indexes during that period and a third which covered all fifty issues. For the next five years the bibliography was in the hands of Eve Szabo, social sciences librarian at SFU. Since 1988 the bibliographer has been Melva Dwyer, librarian emerita of UBC, who is currently at work on a cumulative index that will cover the one hundred issues of the first twenty-five years. Better than any other yardstick, the steady increase in the size of the bibliography reflects the enormous growth of publications relating to the province and places students and general readers ever more in debt to the bibliographers for a unique resource.

After the first few issues, the journal was printed by Morriss Printing Company of Victoria, with whom it was always a pleasure to work, thanks to the firm's strong sense of craftsmanship and genuine interest in the accuracy and appearance of its work. Charlie Morriss, and then his son, Dick, always made the editors feel that they had a personal stake in the journal that was not defined simply as a business transaction. Apparently this involvement extended to others in the company: Walter and I were surprised and gratified when Charlie Morriss reported to us that the Linotype operators and proofreader enjoyed working on *BC Studies* (as they still do).

For nearly twenty years the journal has profited from the work of David Greer as copy editor. Since 1974 through a career with British Columbia's *Hansard*, as chief of the office of the Alberta *Hansard*, and after admission to the B.C. bar, in his work with the B.C. Ombudsman's office and the Commission on Resources and Environment, he has prepared every copy of *BC Studies* for the printer. The modest honorarium offered would never

have enticed a skilled person to take on this spare-time job or stay with it so long, but interest has done so, and the journal has been very well served.

Devotion to the journal over an extended period of time has also been characteristic of its business managers. In more than twenty years there have been only three — Bernie Chisholm, Mary Ellickson, and Henny Winterton — all of whom have taken a very personal interest in promoting the periodical. Even the important but routine task of keeping the subscription list up to date may have a humorous side: recently Mary Ellickson recalled her communication with a subscriber who told her that now that he had reached the age of ninety-four he thought he would opt for the one-year subscription instead of the more economical three-year offer!

An aspect of *BC Studies* which has changed only once is its cover. At the beginning we invited Bruce Watson, a graduate student in anthropology at UBC who had an interest in graphics, to design a cover. The result was the totem pole along the left-hand side of the cover which appeared on the first issue and continued until issue no. 58, Summer 1983. A different colour was used for each of the four seasons in the hope that this would make individual issues easy to identify. Appropriately, with the appointment of a new editor in 1983, a new cover design was introduced featuring drawings by the well-known B.C. artist, John Koerner.

The founding editors often thought that perhaps we were continuing for too long. Initially we had no set term in mind, but I doubt that we thought it would be much longer than five years. From time to time we made an effort to find a new editor or editors, but the truth is that our desire to see a change was rather lukewarm because we genuinely enjoyed editing the journal. Further, our rather loosely organized editorial board showed no disposition to replace us. Our task became a little more complicated when Walter Young, after completing a term as head of the Department of Political Science at UBC, left Vancouver to become head of the department in the University of Victoria. While phone and postage bills increased, we soon got used to making editorial decisions across the Strait of Georgia. Walter was a sailor, always glad of an excuse to get into his boat, and there were numerous editorial consultations at my retreat on Galiano Island, conveniently located near the dock in Montague Harbour.

As we entered our fourteenth year we felt that our long tenure as editors must end and we made a determined effort to see that it did. Shortly afterwards, Walter became ill with the brain tumour which caused his untimely death in the spring of 1983 at the age of fifty. His role in the development of *BC Studies* was one of the several reasons for the unusual action of the

provincial legislature in passing a resolution acknowledging the career of a distinguished citizen.

In 1983 I was happy to hand the editorship over to Allan Smith, my colleague in the Department of History at UBC. That he was a wise choice is evident in the character of the journal down to the present time. His interest and expertise in intellectual and cultural history has clearly contributed to a welcome broadening of the journal's scope to include work on literature and the fine arts. That expansion, shown also in the increasing frequency of theme issues, is a testimony to the growing quantity and quality of scholarship relating to British Columbia, as well as to the editor's imagination. Even ten years earlier it would have been impossible to put together the special Vancouver centennial issue, *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History*, edited by Robert A. J. McDonald and Jean Barman (nos. 69-70, Spring-Summer 1986). The same may be said of *The Historical Geography of British Columbia*, edited by Cole Harris (no. 94, Summer 1992) and of *Anthropology and History in the Courts*, with guest editor Bruce G. Miller (no. 95, Autumn 1992). That *BC Studies* may continue to provoke controversy is demonstrated by the response to this recent issue on anthropology and history both within the pages of the journal and outside academe in the press. That issue leaves no doubt that in *Delgamuukw v. B.C.*, a case heard in the British Columbia Supreme Court, evidence presented from these disciplines was improperly used and misunderstood during the hearings, and that Chief Justice Allan McEachern's judgement in the case rejected the testimony of anthropologists as well as that of First Nations leaders. The *BC Studies* discussion of these matters will be relevant for a long time to come, and is a fine example of how an academic journal can make an important contribution to debate on a public issue. This is a role that Walter Young, never an armchair social scientist, would have applauded, as I do, along with many other readers whose copies of no. 95 are well studied.

An earlier and related issue of the journal, *In Celebration of Our Survival: The First Nations of British Columbia* (no. 89, Spring 1991), was a landmark to be celebrated by everyone ever associated with *BC Studies*. Earlier articles and special issues concerning native peoples in the province were without exception written by non-aboriginal scholars and commentators. This special issue, edited by Doreen Jensen and Cheryl Brooks, is entirely the work of aboriginal people. In speaking for themselves they demonstrate dramatically how much has changed for the First Nations, as well as how much remains to be changed in their societies.

In the past twenty-five years there have been other changes affecting the context in which *BC Studies* has developed. The expansion of universities, colleges, and museums has included the establishment or extension of courses and programmes which allow and even encourage teachers and students to understand that the study of human communities close to home may be just as interesting and revealing as those far away. Although there are some "hold-outs," the words "local" and "parochial" are much less likely to be thought synonymous than they once were. This change of attitude is reflected in the flourishing of the biennial BC Studies Conference, established fifteen years ago, and featuring papers and discussions on an ever-expanding range of subjects. At the same time we have witnessed an explosion in the publication of books about British Columbia, which makes it increasingly difficult for the editor of *BC Studies* to select the books to be reviewed in the journal, not to mention the complications it creates for the judges of the B.C. Book Awards.

To note the changes of the past quarter of a century is not to imply that *BC Studies* is responsible for them. Clearly these developments are mutually sustaining, and the journal has been part of an expanding network of agencies that feeds an avid appetite for knowledge and understanding of the province's past and present. It is impossible to discern the journal's precise role in that network. To the degree that it has helped British Columbians, and others who may be interested in us, to answer Northrop Frye's famous question, "Where is here?", *BC Studies* has fulfilled the hopes of those who were associated with it in its early years. Long may it flourish!