

The Forest and the Trees:

A Review Article

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In the formative years of our history provincial governments tended to be extremely flexible in making arrangements in an effort to get a forest industry established as a permanent economic resource. Once that was *Crown charges for early timber rights*. British Columbia Royal Commission on Forest Resources. First report of the task force on Crown timber disposal. Victoria: B.C. Forest Service, February 1974. 67 pp.

Timber appraisal. British Columbia Royal Commission on Forest Resources. Second report of the task force on Crown timber disposal. Victoria: B.C. Forest Service, July 1974. 185 pp.

Logging: British Columbia's logging industry, by Ed Gould. Saanichton, B.C.: Hancock House, 1975. 224 pp., \$14.95.

Timber: history of the forest industry in B.C., by G. W. Taylor. Vancouver: J. J. Douglas Ltd., 1975. 209 pp., \$10.95.

First growth: the story of British Columbia Forest Products Limited, edited by Sue Bapte. Vancouver: B.C. Forest Products Ltd., 1975. 286 pp., paper \$8.95, cloth \$14.50.

Mills and markets: a history of the Pacific Coast lumber industry to 1900, by Thomas R. Cox. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974. 332 pp., \$17.50.

British Columbia's forest policy was, from the very beginning, very British and contrasted markedly with the widespread alienation of forest lands from the public domain in the American West. With only a few exceptions forest lands in British Columbia remained the property of the Crown while only temporary rights to exploit them were granted to private parties. The question which has agitated British Columbians ever since the landmark Land Ordinance of 1865 spelled that out is the nature of the arrangement between the Crown, which owns the forests, and the operators who tend and harvest the crop.

achieved (1907) a gradual tightening up began. Several royal commissions (1910, 1945, 1956) have attempted to find some just formula which would, in the words of Premier John Oliver, "protect the people of the province and at the same time render you [lumbermen] a fair measure of justice and security for your investments." The Pearse Commission, appointed by Resources Minister Bob Williams of the NDP government, is the latest group to be involved in that continuing search.

In the first and second reports of his task force, Dr. Pearse discusses two important questions: the problem of determining a just method of taxing harvesting rights on old tenures (granted before the tightening up of 1907) and the problem of determining a fair and effective method of appraising the value of timber and other forest lands chiefly in order to ensure a reasonable return to the public treasury but also in an effort to restore and maintain the economic health of British Columbia's most important industry. The 6.3 million acres of old tenures, which are the sole concern of the first report, are significant out of all proportion to their numerical size because they were selected by private purchasers before 1907, when the available choices were wide indeed. Located chiefly along the southern coastal region of the province, they were from the beginning the most productive and profitable tracts and have remained so. Although they constitute only 5 per cent of the province's forest area, they produce 16 per cent of its timber.

Pearse recommends in the first task report that for the sake of efficiency in the forest industry and in order to protect the public interest the schedule of royalties on these old tenures be abolished in favour of that applied to other Crown timber; that the forest land tax be abolished; and that the special tax on logging profits be eliminated by several specific means. The report demonstrates that the burden of taxation carried by the forest companies working the tenures would be eased and provincial revenues would increase, albeit at the expense of the federal government.

The second report recommends basically the retention of the present method of evaluating Crown timber for tax purposes but suggests it be made more flexible in order to reflect changes in forest and economic conditions.

Commissioner Pearse felt strongly that his commission had to fulfil an educational function and communicate to a much wider audience than those of previous commissions. His first two reports do offer such an education. Written in simple, clear English with a minimum of technical terms, they should serve admirably to give the average intelligent unin-

tiated a working background of forest industry matters from which he can proceed to the larger issue of who should run our forests.

The question of whether the forest lands of the Crown — and that means nearly all the forests of the province — should be run by private industry under some kind of lease arrangement similar to the present forest policy or by provincial foresters under the direction of the government seems to have emerged as the major issue. It is, of course, not dealt with in the first two reports.

Throughout the hearings that recurring theme was the heart of the more important briefs submitted by private industry, local governments, conservationists and political parties. The Pacific Logging Company, a CPR subsidiary, pleaded for the percentage of privately held land to be increased from 5 per cent of the total to 10 per cent. Pacific Logging had its eye on 130,000 acres in the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway belt, much of which it already owns outright. More forest in private hands, according to its brief, would mean increased provincial revenues because of the more intensive utilization methods of private operators.

The Communist Party of Canada, on the other hand, urged that all forest lands, including old tenures such as those of Pacific Logging, be brought under public ownership and managed by an enlarged public Forest Service. Timber would be sold at maturity to private interests by public auction. That solution to our forest question would warm the hearts of those two old-time Communists, Gifford Pinchot and Teddy Roosevelt, the architects of the United States forest policy still successfully followed in the administering of the National Forests of the republic.

Mr. Gould's training as a journalist serves him well in writing such a popular history of the logging industry as *Logging*. His penchant for colourful characters and a practised eye for selecting some really fresh illustrations from the bottom drawers of the Provincial Archives have combined to produce a breezy and entertaining piece of work.

The chapter headings reveal the approach: Tin pants and whistle punks; Men and other beasts of burden; From bullcook to bull of the woods. Unfortunately, obsession with such popular topics can lead a writer to neglect some more important ones. Only seven pages, for example, are devoted to a discussion of unionism in the woods and half of them are accounted for by photographs. As this reviewer remembers the camps of the 1930s, one's living often depended on one's view of unionism and union activity was often the last and only hope in the lives of many alienated and hard-working men. The union was their religion and their family and, most important perhaps, proof to themselves that

they were men who could influence the directions of their lives. They were not merely replaceable cogs in a brutal machine operating for the benefit of the owners. Unionism in the woods was a colourful chapter in the logging story; it is both unwise and unfair to give it the short shrift it gets here.

I would wager too that a page or so devoted to A. D. McRae, logging operator extraordinary of Canadian Western Lumber Co. of Fraser Mills, would prove him to be as colourful as Pork Chop Wilson and infinitely more important in the economic, social and political life of the province; and a discussion of M. Allerdale Grainger, sometimes novelist, logger, and the architect of this province's first spelled-out forest policy, might reveal truths about the relationship of the industry and the provincial government far more colourful than any utterance of Seattle Red.

Despite these criticisms *Logging* is an excellent study and it deserves a place in all school and public libraries. It is also a beautiful physical production of which Hancock House should be proud.

G. W. Taylor, another journalist with a broad background in forest matters, has attempted the nearly impossible task of writing a history of the forest industry despite his stated recognition that source material for such an ambitious study is hardly available. Even so, Taylor has succeeded in producing a useful pioneer study of the whole industry.

The chapter on early export mills contains some fascinating fresh material about the social and economic life of Burrard Inlet sawmill communities in the 1870s and 1880s. There is little doubt about its authenticity — Mr. Taylor is careful about his facts — but the absence of documentation here and throughout the book is frustrating to the serious reader who wants to pursue some matters further. The scarcity of substantial source material dogs Taylor especially in the later chapters, which tend to read like company reports rather than history.

Public depositories in this province have little to offer students like Mr. Taylor. And it isn't for want of trying. Special Collections at UBC, for example, made a celebrated public appeal aimed at the forest industry in particular at its opening a dozen or so years ago. Empty boxes on bare shelves still await the response of the industry these many years later. To date they have received eight groups of records, only one of which, the Orchard Papers, could be termed substantial. They consist of tape-recorded interviews with persons involved in the B.C. forest industry in one way or another. Valuable though they are, they contain little in the way of company records or head-office material.

These meagre forest holdings contrast strangely with the large body of

records from the B.C. Electric (predecessor of B.C. Hydro) and the British Columbia Insurers' Advisory Organization — to mention only two important donations from other local industries.

It is difficult to explain the reluctance of the forest industry. Special Collections offer total security for records twenty-four hours a day and arrangements can be made to restrict the use of sensitive materials to bona fide persons. Conditions for proper preservation are also ideal and can hardly be duplicated outside a professional depository. One can only conclude that the industry is still smarting from attacks made upon it in years past and is determined to minimize them in future by pursuing a policy of secrecy.

Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from the experience of B.C. Forest Products, which lost its archives in a disastrous fire. Sue Bapte, the one-time company archivist, attempted to reconstruct its story in a series of well-selected oral history tapes. While *First growth*, the edited result, is a useful addition to forest history libraries, it is not, of course, a substitute for company records. Bapte was seriously handicapped without their support, especially since BCFP's predecessor companies go back beyond living memory.

Students of forest history on the American side of the border face no such scarcity of forest history materials. In completing his admirable *Mills and markets*, Thomas Cox of the University of Washington used government documents and other conventional sources and, most pertinent to this argument, in American Pacific Coast archives he found ten groups of personal papers, twelve sets of company papers and seven diaries and memoirs — all of them relating in one way or another to the growth of the lumber trade of the Pacific Coast. None was pertinent to the lumber trade of British Columbia (and for Cox's purpose British Columbia was part of the Pacific Coast). For the B.C. part of his work the author was forced to rely on several UBC Master's theses and some even more general titles. Little wonder that a work which purports to be a history of the Pacific Coast lumber trade can offer no real treatment of the B.C. part and indeed offers little more than scattered references on fourteen pages out of 296.

It is interesting to note that the reluctance of the B.C. industry to share its records had a counterpart at one time on the American side. The *Northwest lumberman* complained in 1882 that the industry at that time was in the "hands of powerful monopolists who had the notion that a dark policy is the better one for them". Consequently, Cox complains,

there are great gaps in the statistical records of the early American industry.

But fortunately for Cox and his friends, the American industry outlived the coyness of its early years and apparently concluded that Americans have accepted its right to a permanent place in the American scheme of things despite its buccaneering past. Our industry has not reached the same degree of maturity.

In the introduction of his book Mr. Taylor chided the industry for "being tardy in recording its exciting history". This reviewer sincerely hopes that the industry continues to be shy about doing the job for itself, and instead turns the records over to a public depository where they can be made available to the Taylors and the Coxes. The public would be better served, and perhaps the forest industry too.