Margaret Ormsby

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No major historian in English-speaking Canada has been more identified with the personality and history of a province than has Margaret Ormsby with that of British Columbia. Her birth and upbringing and the personal flavour of her interpretations have all helped to establish her as the most authoritative and representative of the province's historians. For just as her writings have been characterized by a judicious weaving together of personality and history, so too have these elements been blended in the making of the historian.

Her early upbringing in the Okanagan Valley is perhaps the most significant factor of all. From it she was to acquire a sense of the impact of civilization upon nature in rural Canada, perhaps best described in her poetic presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1966:

> Of all men the Westerner is the man who knows that he is both on the edge of civilization and on the verge of something new. Estranged by distance from his own kind, separated by a time lag from the culture of his former society, he permits the landscape to intrude itself into the very pith of his subconscious being. The symbol of his aspiration, the badge of his despair, the landscape assumes romantic proportions to compensate him for his solitude.[1]

This theme of civilization in the wilderness is the most pervasive in her writings.

Canadians who are brought up in the Interior of British Columbia have a special perspective of Canada. They are in the Pacific province, but not of it. Except for the accident of the Rocky Mountains they are geographically, climatically and, in many respects, socially, a part of continental North America and not of the Pacific Coast. The round of their seasons is not the narrow, gentle one of the oceanic coastline, but the harshly, dramatically differentiated one of the continent. They live as continentals, though their metropolis is "down on the Coast." The ambiguity of this existence runs through all their lives and can be seen at work in Margaret Ormsby's writings. Throughout there is a constant balancing between the claims of the nation and the province, between those of the immigrants from the sea and those from the continent, between those of the inhabitants of the Coast and those of the Interior.

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[1] "A Horizontal View," *The Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (Ottawa, 1966), p. 2.

The region would also give her an insight into man's relationship with it in the exploitive circumstances of Western Canada. Margaret was to write:

> . . . both Canadian painting and architecture, themselves the product of an "intelligence that does not love" nature, reflect the cruel assaults made by the Westerner on his natural surroundings. In part his ruthless exploitation of nature is related to the tempo of life being quickened by the abrupt rhythm of the northern seasons, and to the sharpened contrast between summer abundance and winter need. In a sense the early fur traders were "people of plenty," but they were people who found that they could survive in the remote wilderness and make a profit from their enterprise only by destroying the very source of their support.[2]

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Upon the foundation of the land is overlaid the historic influence of ancestry. Margaret Ormsby's parentage represented two of the most important historic influences in the development of the society of British Columbia: the Anglo-Irish and the Canadian. The two elements were to have constant, distinctive and often alternating influences on her historical writings.

The Anglo-Irish who came to British Columbia were doubly colonists: they were the scions of the English (largely Anglican) gentry minority — the "ascendancy" in Ireland, which for more than three centuries had ruled predominantly Catholic Ireland. By the time they came to British Columbia their economic circumstances had been weakened by the decay of Irish agriculture after the Famine, and by the overcrowding of the Irish civil list. The surplus sons of the gentry, they migrated to England and overseas in seach of competences that could keep them in respectability. Their status as colonists and leaders in Ireland and their customary reliance on the patronage of Dublin Castle drew them into the service of the public in British Columbia — in government office and as leaders of their neighbourhoods. Their ultimate ambition, as Margaret Ormsby has pointed out, was to own a "landed estate."[3] Its realization meant an enormous outlay of desperately hard work over a long period of time — to clear land, recruit herds, plant crops and, by the turn of the century, to plant orchards in the Okanagan Valley — in a part of the world where labour was always in short supply. The combination of expected, if often modest and even penurious, privilege, and a present of unremitting labour and anxiety produced an interesting race of pioneers. Their origins as double colonists and as younger sons pushed out to fend for themselves made them adventurous and unconventional, but upholders of British ascendancy in the old world and the new, taking seriously the duty to maintain the standards of public and private behaviour they had inherited. If the Canada of which they became a part in 1871 was remote and somewhat foreign, and likely to remain so, this was no new experience to them: England had always been pretty distant. But the community interest demanded allegiance all the same; and above all there were the flag, the empire and the throne. Like the other British on the Pacific slope, they consulted their self-interest and their anti-Americanism, allowing, if they did not encourage, Confederation and gradually accepting, if they did not fully understand, the new nation, Canada.[4]

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[3] "Some Irish Figures in Colonial Days," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* (1950), 14:61-82, *passim.*

Not that they were mere dull patriotic zealots, for they also represented in full measure the traditionally Hibernian qualities of romanticism, humour and gregariousness.

> Most of them [as Margaret Ormsby reminds us] dearly loved social life and were punctilious in observing the niceties of the rules that prevailed at home. . . . Away from the capital, riding the long trails to the mining camps and living in their isolated posts, they suffered from loneliness. With Indians and miners they were unusually successful in establishing friendly relations, and most of them were respected for their sense of fair play, their sensitivity, and their displays of generosity.[5]

By 1914 all walks of life in the province — public service, the professions and business, as well as farming, ranching and fruit growing — were liberally endowed with Anglo-Irish gentry and they had set their mark on the province. Margaret Ormsby's identification with this element in her ancestry — with their charm, humour, toughness, combativeness and public spirit — has always been close and enthusiastic.

The Canadian-born element in British Columbia was altogether less dramatic, less defined, more — as Margaret might have said — delitescent. Their role in British Columbia has been that of the voice of sanity; it has fallen to them, in the public life of British Columbia, to argue for the sensible courses leading to the strengthening of the national tie with the rest of Canada, rather than merely an exotic presence on the Pacific slope. They were the group who provided much of the commercial talent in the early history of the province. To them, too, has fallen the sometimes unenviable task of explaining to a frequently sceptical rest of Canada that British Columbians are not just a lot of Anglophile loonies living in lotus land.

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[4] "Horizontal View," p. 7; *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), p. 329.

[5] "Some Irish Figures . . . ," p. 62.

Margaret has always been strongly conscious of this pragmatic role of Canadianism in British Columbia. In a paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association in 1948, on "Canada and the New British Columbia," she wrote:

> In a society where economic monopoly and government paternalism were being replaced by the competitive acquisition of wealth and by anarchial tendencies, Canadians upheld morality and respect for authority. They became permanent residents in the colonies ... they supplied the professional and other services required in a pioneer community. And they led the way in political reform; for, from an old colonial environment, they had transferred to a new, deep resentment of political disqualification and its off-shoots, economic discrimination and social slighting.[6]

As Margaret noted, they were also motivated by an antipathy to Britons, born of a sense of social inferiority.

> ... Canadians who emigrated to British Columbia were of the first generation born in Canada, and many of them had come from Ontario where they had been raised on farms or in country parsonages or in the small-town homes of merchants and professional men. They lacked sophistication, and even the journalists, doctors and lawyers among their number who took an active part in political life were not always admitted to the closed social circle the Englishmen had created.... Those who turned to farming usually had little education, and they knew only the social life of rural areas. Disinclination as well as the exigencies of the frontier life, with its lack of interchange of ideas, prevented their intellectual development.

Whereas:

> To a certain extent, the British element constituted an aristocracy of wealth and talents. In addition to economic security, arising from sound investment in land or guaranteed income from office, it had a feeling of cultural superiority. Many of the British settlers cultivated a taste for the arts and for letters, and carried on scientific investigations. They still read the *Times* and ignored

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[6] "Canada and the New British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1948), pp. 74-75.

the colonial newspapers; and they published their literary works in England. Furthermore, on the fringe of the forest and against the encroachment of the backwoodsmen, they maintained the standards of polite society in Victorian England.[7]

Throughout her historical works Margaret Ormsby has portrayed the evolution of the cultural life of British Columbia as an alternation between these influences: the generality of a Canadian nationality, based on the continent-wide influence of North American mores, which is devoted, paradoxically, to resisting absorption into the principal American identity; and the particularity of a British community whose provincialism is rooted in the large cosmopolitan civilization of a world-wide empire.

The Canadian identity for Margaret, as for many of her contemporaries, takes shape first of all in resistance to British and American power; then as a stretching out of Canadian power across the continent. Finally, beyond resistance to Anglo-Saxon tutelage and beyond continentalism, Canadianism was a positive belief in a nation that had been molded in the fires and dedicated in the sacrifices of a world war — the *Great* War. Margaret grew up in what was the golden age of English-Canadian patriotism, before depression, American domination and separatism came to sour it. The Great War, in which her father served at the cost of physical disability, brought about a coalescing of English-speaking Canada the like of which was not seen before or since. As Margaret wrote of British Columbians: "It satisfied their pride and their sense of history, sometimes to play the role of 'hyphenated' Canadians, but in time of crisis and in time of war their performance revealed their identity with the nation."[8]

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Margaret's upbringing in the Okanagan also gave her a particular impression of the world that was at once more far-ranging and more provincial than that of most Canadians. These were the years when in the Okanagan, as she was later to record,

> ... almost anywhere ... one could still come across families who spoke with cultured English accents and read the latest English periodicals.... In these families one could hear discussions of the war debt and reparations issue, of the merits and defects of the Locarno treaties, and of the aims of the Russian five-year plan, as intelligent as any heard in the classrooms of the University or in the lounges of the men's clubs in Vancouver and Victoria. The truth

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79; cf. *British Columbia: A History*, pp. 177-78, 230.

[8] *British Columbia: A History*, p. 494; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

was that the hinterland of British Columbia was often far less provincial in interest and outlook than either Vancouver or Victoria.[9]

In part this analysis was inspired by the impression given at that time by British immigrants of relative sophistication, and by the fact that their efforts to maintain their links with Britain meant that they were generally better informed about *European* events than were the native Canadians in the 1920s. The dominant element in the society of the North Okanagan at this time was a "cultured" group, gentle and genteel; not especially intellectual in any technical sense, but educated in a privileged and mannerly way. For several generations, since the days when the first ranchers had established themselves in the 1860s and Mrs. Allison, in the isolation of the remote Similkameen Valley, had subscribed to English and Scottish journals and maintained a regular correspondence that reached around the British Empire,[10] they had worked at maintaining their culture.

In part, the impression of knowledgeability and interest also stemmed from the very particularism of the Valley in these years. The valleys of British Columbia, as Margaret has commented,[11] have been forcing grounds of special development: their physical constraints have had the effect of concentrating effort and attention. The Okanagan in the 1920s was a community like that of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland — not parochial, but provincial. It saw itself as a province of a much bigger entity than British Columbia or even Canada — namely the British civilization throughout the world. It was, no doubt, Margaret's fond recollection of this intimate community and its values which was to inspire her evocation of the ideal of British Columbia as a people, rather than a land or region: "a small confined society . . . in which it is possible for individuals to be well known to one another, and where the pleasant custom of seeing and knowing one another produced love for the citizens rather than a love of the soil."[12]

The intimacy of the Valley's society undoubtedly was the origin of Margaret's sensitivity to personality and its variations. Here the socially assured eccentrics were more visible and made a greater impression than in larger groups. The value of individualism was impressed on her and left a memory of colourful variety.

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 440; cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 494.

[10] *A Pioneer Gentlewoman: The Recollections of Susan Allison* (Vancouver, 1976), p. xxxv.

[11] "Horizontal View," p. 11.

[12] *Ibid.*

> It was hard to find in the Interior any specific pattern of behaviour and thought: the lawyers, doctors and mining-men who worked in the substantial stone-faced business blocks of the Kootenay cities were as different from the quiet-spoken, well-read fruit-ranchers of the Okanagan Valley as they were from the vigorous out-of-doors men who spent their lives on the cattle-ranches of Cariboo and on the farms in Skeena, Omineca and Peace River. Sealed off in their own communities by mountain ramparts, the settlers in these valleys retained distinctive characteristics.[13]

That intimacy and isolation also helped to reinforce the sense of hinterland, a sense that Margaret Ormsby fully appreciated. The fruit grower of the Okanagan was hardly a typical pioneer and farmer on the North American pattern: he needed more skill and more capital, and these together usually meant more education than that of the generality of farmers. But like all farmers he was vulnerable to climatic disaster, plant diseases and crop predators; and like all farmers in the hinterlands of North America, he was heavily dependent upon remote and volatile markets and, hence, upon cheap and reliable transportation. These two themes — marketing and shipping — dominated the fruit industry during Margaret Ormsby's youth and inspired her first publications.[14] She identified strongly with the vicissitudes of farming life, as in the misfortunes of the Allisons,[15] in the disasters which overtook the unwary, inexperienced and unskilful on poor and inadequately irrigated land,[16] and in the desperate struggle to secure a fair return for the efforts of the fruit grower in the markets of the world.

More generally, as an historian she acquired the perspective of the hinterland as a result of experiencing at first hand the "trials of Okanagan." This perspective is one which begins by seeing the exploitation of the resources of a region as a most desirable phenomenon. Indeed, it is this exploitation which usually has attracted those who have this view to the region in the first place. In much of her writing, notably in *British Columbia: A History*, Margaret has lauded the developers of the province,[17] in the spirit of the hinterlanders: development is good because it brings comfort, leisure, education and civilization. The hinterlanders, aware of their isolation, demand that communication and transportation to the outside world be provided as soon as possible. Margaret has written:

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[13] *British Columbia: A History*, pp. 439-40.

[14] "Trials of Okanagan," *Saturday Night* (15 June 1935), pp. 5, 10; "Fruit Marketing in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia," *Agricultural History* (1935), 9:80-97.

[15] *A Pioneer Gentlewoman*, p. xxxvi.

[16] "Agricultural Development in British Columbia," *Agricultural History* (January 1945), 19:16.

[17] E.g. *British Columbia: A History*, p. 484.

> It would seem quite impossible to write the history of any single party in British Columbia without relating its programme to the public demand for road and railway links that, it was hoped, could obliterate the physical problems created by an obstinate topography. In large part our political history is also the history of transportation in this Province.[18]

Once the transportation links are forged and crops are taken to market, however, the hinterlanders are forced to take a different view of the desirability of some types of development. While they remain advocates of primary exploitation of resources in various regions, they are much less eager to see secondary exploitation — that is, of themselves. They discover that the profit of development of their region goes not to them, but to the builders of the railway or the road, to the broker, the commission agent and the urban financier — in sum, to those who live in the distant metropolis. The natural conservatism of the rural hinterlanders is modified by intermittent radicalism attacking the profit-taking of the metropolis. They band together from time to time to resist it in marketing co-operatives, farmers' lobbies and, as in the 1920s, even in farmers' political parties.[19] Margaret has echoed this resentment of the metropolis inspired in her home region. Of Vancouver, she was to write:

> Not content with drawing the wealth of the Province, and even of the Prairies, toward itself, Vancouver came close, through its press and radio, to imposing its political views on all of British Columbia. The Vancouver newspaper editors were powerful men: they could make and unmake provincial governments; they could aid or almost smash a provincial political machine; and at the drop of a hat they could stir up agitation for "provincial rights." But they could never completely dominate the thinking of the people of the province, for the residents of the hinterland were strong individualists who had arrived at their own set of values.[20]

She would draw the contrast in historical Briitsh Columbia between those who merely made money and those who wished to build the community:

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[18] "Neglected Aspects of British Columbia's History," *British Columbia Library Quarterly* (April 1960), 23:11; cf. "Prime Minister Mackenzie, the Liberal Party and the Bargain with British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review* (June 1945), 25:150-51.

[19] "The United Farmers of British Columbia — An Abortive Third Party Movement," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* (January-April 1953), 17:53-73.

[20] *British Columbia: A History*, p. 439.

> Speculators in lands and mines were more concerned with making quick profits than in combining efforts for the building of a stable society. Only those who had a real stake in the country, the farmers, the merchants, the traders, and the wage-earners who hoped to improve their condition, were seriously concerned about a more equitable distribution of political power.[21]

Her admiration of Duff Pattullo as a political leader and her description of him as a "new deal" reformer in the 1930s were undoubtedly strongly influenced by his identification with, and support for, the hinterland against Vancouver at a time when the troubles of the hinterland seemed at their greatest and the domination of the metropolis most oppressive.[22]

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In 1925 Margaret enrolled at the University of British Columbia where she secured her B.A. degree in 1929 and her M.A. in 1931. Attractive, observant, warm and friendly, with a delightful sense of fun and a capacity to encourage others, she came well prepared to take advantage of what the institution had to offer. The fact that she came from a well-educated, though not wealthy, family in a small community in the up-country gave an element of challenge to the experience. In 1925, the fact that she was a female student added another.

There were other, positive, stimuli. In 1925, the university had just moved to its new site on Point Grey, and in the surroundings of new buildings and a still unlandscaped campus, there was a sense of accomplishment and exciting destiny. Much more important for Margaret Ormsby, there was also a flourishing intellectual tradition among both students and faculty. Isolated from the intellectual centres of the rest of Canada, let alone those of other countries, the university had to provide its own stimulus. In this boot-straps operation, there was much that was naive and unsophisticated, but the result was to provide young people who were interested with a forceful awakening to the world of scholarship. In a way — a cosy, intimate, innocent way — UBC was a "place of intellect" to a greater degree than it was to be later.

Margaret's main field of study was history — particularly the still relatively unfledged history of her own country; but she also read English and French literatures. This was to be important for the future, since it probably helped to give her a view of history as an art — a study involving insight and literary description. Though her attitudes to her discipline have been generous ones, and she has always been prepared to encourage all forms of history, she has also remained devoted in her own work to the idea that the historian is above all a creative artist, not merely replicating the past, but creating a distinctive impression of it, whose validity depends very much on the imaginative exploitation of documents, impressions and, above all, personalities.

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[21] "Canada and the New British Columbia," p. 76.

[22] *British Columbia: A History,* p. 441; "T. Dufferin Pattullo and the Little New Deal," *Canadian Historical Review* (December 1962), 43/4:280-81, 285.

Though she was naturally interested in the history of her own district and region, under the influence of Walter Sage, F. H. Soward and, above all, D. C. Harvey, she came to see it in the wide context of British Columbia, Canada and the Western world.

Much of this was in the later part of Margaret's time at UBC. It was apparent, even in 1929, that a B.A. degree was no working ticket. She must have a profession, and the obvious one at that time was teaching. A year of teacher training followed. If it did not result in her becoming a high-school teacher, except for a brief period, it left her with a sense of the importance of teaching in the work of the university professor, from which generations of students have benefited since.

In 1930 she was awarded a scholarship in local history offered by the Canadian Pioneer Problems Committee and took an M.A. degree, taking as her thesis topic a study of her native valley. D. C. Harvey had introduced graduate work in the Department of History at UBC, and Margaret's was one of the first graduate degrees awarded. The work brought her firmly into the field of local history, from which she has never departed.

Even though these were depression years Margaret managed to continue her graduate career. In 1931 she was awarded a Bryn Mawr Fellowship in History, followed by a Scholarship in History at the same institution in the following year. The years at Bryn Mawr (she returned to complete her Ph.D. degree in 1936-37) extended Margaret's view of history by providing her with intensive instruction in a variety of fields of history, notably medieval and American. Bryn Mawr was strong in medieval history and Margaret was especially interested in this field, which teaches the historian to think in terms of civilizations and cultures rather than nations, regions, politics or economics. Perhaps it was also significant for Margaret that it taught that civilization has a beginning in each community, and that in its beginning, like any infant, it is under constant threat of extinction. Though Margaret's later involvement with medieval history was to be that of a teacher rather than research scholar, the influence of this training on her writings has been obvious: the constant recurrence of the theme of civilization in the wilderness and references to its fragility; the emphasis on the importance of order and method as the foundation stones of progress; and, above all, the concern to link the microcosm of British Columbian society to the larger world and remote periods of history.[23]

Margaret's involvement with American history was to have a more direct and identifiable influence. In these years of the Depression and the New Deal she became conscious of the similarity of responses to economic and social problems in the United States and Canada: historically, in the agrarian populist movements of the two countries — the Canadian following and imitating those of the United States; and contemporaneously in the "new deals" of Canada and British Columbia imitating that of the United States. This enlargement of her horizons was to find expression not only in her articles on agrarian organization and radicalism in British Columbia, but also, and perhaps more influentially, in her teaching of American history, in which she demonstrated the continuity on this continent of agrarian, populist, progressive and New Deal reform movements.

The Depression, too, was to have a variety of influences upon her development as an historian. In the circumstances of the crisis the whole constitutional relationship of the federal whole of Canada with the provincial parts came to be called in question. During her time at UBC as an Assistant from 1934 to 1936 (itself the result of the Depression), like most young people of her generation she became increasingly impatient with the failure of various levels of government to deal with the problems of the Depression — especially unemployment and the loss of markets for the primary products of Canada. Her first two articles, published in 1935, were concerned with the problems of marketing the Okanagan fruit crop, in particular the control of marketing to secure fair shares of the market for all producers and a fair price.[24] At that time and for some years to come her particular orientation, like that of many of her contemporaries, was toward strengthening provincial jurisdictions in the liberal belief that that government which was most localized was most likely to be effective in the defence of the interests of the primary producer. Proposals to strengthen federal powers of taxation and legislation in the fields of property rights were resisted, not only because they were put forward by an unpopular Conservative government, but also because of a genuine belief that the problems of the Depression could only be solved by the effective exercise of control over property rights, which was rightly and constitutionally a provincial responsibility. For her part, Margaret was to see in the "little new deal" of Premier T. D. Pattullo, both then and much later, the best possibility of rescuing the province from the worst effects of the economic collapse. Only with the coming of the Second World War and the necessary and forceful exercise of strong federal powers would Margaret and her fellow liberals become converted to the idea of a strong federalism, as expressed by her in "Canada and the New British Columbia."[25]

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[23] "Neglected Aspects," p. 10.

[24] "Trials of Okanagan," *Saturday Night* (15 June 1935), pp. 5, 10; "Fruit Marketing in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia," *Agricultural History* (1935), 9:80-97.

The years of depression were to have more immediate personal influences as well. Margaret had had to interrupt her graduate education to work as an assistant in the Department of History at UBC; and, in the absence of university employment, she taught for several years in a private secondary school in San Francisco. Significant for the future was the fact that she belonged to a "small generation" of Ph.D.s. In the years to come she was to feel very much the dearth of contemporaries in university life, both as an active faculty member and as an administrator.

But perhaps the most affecting of all was the memory of what the Depression did to the Okanagan Valley. Margaret Ormsby's description of the impact of the Depression on the Interior communities of British Columbia comes directly from bitter personal observation and experience. It is the description of the near-death of her community.

> The summer of 1931 was the first of a series of long, hot, dry seasons. As the supply of water in the Okanagan Valley became exhausted, the irrigation flumes dried out and cracked, and in the orchards the leaves hung limply on the trees. Every day now — and for the next three or four summers — the sun, as if reflecting the flames of the forest conflagrations, rose and set as a mammoth ball of fire. But still the apples grew, and in such quantity that the disposal of the crop, particularly after the Produce Marketing Act was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1931, became an acute problem. The whole of this highly specialized industry seemed threatened with destruction.[26]

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In 1940 Margaret became a Lecturer in History at McMaster University, where she stayed for three years, finally returning to UBC in 1943. She continued there permanently, becoming Professor of History in 1955, Acting Head of the Department in 1963 and Head in 1964. She continued in that post until her retirement in 1974.

Throughout these years her career as an historian developed and changed. In the 1940s, as we have seen, the wartime cohesion of Canada and the new sense of purpose after the divisive years of the Depression profoundly influenced Margaret and her contemporaries. She was fortunate to return to Canada just as this change was manifesting itself, and to live in Ontario where the sense of national unity was so much greater than at the perphery. By 1945 — as her article on Alexander Mackenzie and the terms for British Columbia makes evident — she had developed a strong sense of a national Canada and of the importance of maintaining it. In "Canada and the New British Columbia" (1948) the theme of strong federalism was even more vigorously expressed. In the meanwhile she was also deepening her understanding of local history, as articles on the Anglo-Irish in British Columbia and on the United Farmers of British Columbia evidenced.

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[25] *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1948), pp. 74-86.

[26] *British Columbia: A History*, pp. 444-45; cf. "Trials of Okanagan," pp. 5, 10.

In the years from 1943 to 1957 Margaret was influencing a generation of students, many of them veterans of the Second World War, not merely to take an interest in the history and public life of their country, but to become committed to the whole craft of history. She had a gift for warm and generous encouragement of the young, above all of the young with ideas. In particular, she had the ability, rare among academics, who are a self-centred lot, to listen perceptively and to be ready to suggest the most useful paths to follow through the thicket of historical interpretation. Throughout her teaching she emphasized the importance of scholarly detachment and adherence to the documents in the exploration of historical fact; and of clear, good English style in the writing of history — themes which have, unfortunately, come to seem old-fashioned in some parts of academia. She was able to convey to her students her enthusiasm for widely varying aspects of history: the civilization of the twelfth century, agrarian radicalism in nineteenth-century America, or the fiscal and social reform ideas of Duff Pattullo. Most important of all, she displayed an unusual determination to forward the careers of young scholars.

In 1957 Margaret Ormsby was commissioned to write the history of British Columbia in commemoration of the centennial of the formation of mainland British Columbia as a Crown colony, and a new chapter opened in her career. *British Columbia: A History* was a remarkable accomplishment, especially in light of the fact that no modern history of the province existed. Previous historians — Schofield, Gosnell, Bancroft, Howay and Sage — had written descriptive histories or studies of special aspects. But for many important themes there were still only shadowy outlines. Margaret gave the history of British Columbia shape and dimension in the larger history of Canada, and provided a firm basis on which future historians could build. It was a gigantic task, involving sifting through a huge mass of largely unexplored official and private papers and lengthy runs of newspapers.

The greatest merit of *British Columbia: A History* is undoubtedly its firm organization. In the early chapters Margaret vividly portrays a community built from the sea, whose values were British rather than North American; in the largest section — that on the colonial period — the narrative centres on the career of Sir James Douglas, "the most significant individual in British Columbia's history"; in the immediate post-Confederation period the theme is that of British Columbia as the "spoiled child of Confederation"; in the period of material development the focus is on the career of Sir Richard McBride; and in the 1920s and 1930s on those of John Oliver and Duff Pattullo. But throughout the narrative, the dominant themes succeed one another smoothly and without disrupting the continuity of British Columbia's unfolding story. Undoubtedly the best part of it is the section, including the study of the colony of Vancouver Island and the gold colony, encompassed by Douglas's career. Here Margaret's capacity to combine the vividness of personality with the astringency of historical analysis, her romanticism, her lively sense of the absurd, and her admiration for enterprise and initiative were at their strongest and best. But it is perhaps in her work on the post-colonial period that she made the contribution which will be of most value to future historians. Here she was a real pioneer, especially in filling in the history from 1914 to the 1950s — something that had hardly been looked at before. Though her interpretations of this period will undoubtedly be challenged, it will of necessity be by historians relying heavily on her narrative.

The value of the *History* was very quickly recognized, and more widely and fully than that of most provincial histories. For Margaret it was to bring a series of honours, beginning with election as a Freeman of the City of Vernon in 1959 and including honorary degrees from the University of Manitoba and all four universities in British Columbia, award of the Centennial Medal in 1967 and election as a Fellow the Royal Society of Canada in 1968.

The writing of the *History* changed her perspective on the province. Though in the book Margaret had held the scales pretty evenly between the claims of federalism and provincialism, and set out, as no previous history had done, the Canadian framework of the province, she had also developed a sharper appreciation of the differences separating British Columbia from the rest of Canada. From this time on there is observable in her writings a growing emphasis on the importance of the province as the true centre of cultural and social function. The Canadian union was increasingly viewed as a permissive entity, allowing variation — ideally, a loose federation permitting unity in emergencies.

This philosophy permeates one of her most important writings, the article on "T. Dufferin Pattullo and the Little New Deal."[27] It is, perhaps, the least detached of her writings, recounting in a strongly partisan way T. D. Pattullo's endeavours to introduce a modest degree of government intervention to mitigate the worst effects of the Depression in B.C. In Margaret's view, Pattullo was a representative of the hinterland, a small-town Ontario Grit turned adventurer on the frontier of British Columbia, who carried with him all the suspicion of big business and Ottawa-based federalism characteristic of small-town Ontario. Pattullo was particularly attractive to her as a man who had had his success first in the outbacks, and represented them and their interests throughout his career. This was the man who resisted the power of the metropolis on behalf of the loggers, ranchers, fruit growers and farmers of the province. But more than that, he believed in material development in the form of improved communications and expansion of the interests of the province throughout its territory and, eventually, into the Yukon as well. In both this article and in her *History*, Margaret is ostensibly discussing Pattullo's role as a crypto-Keynesian, an advocate of vigorous government intervention to mobilize credit to provide employment, plan economic expansion, provide minimum incomes and health insurance — all to alleviate the effects of the Depression. But this activity of Pattullo took the form of urging the federal government to take the major responsibility for recovery; and, even before the failure of successive federal governments to accept their role as defined by Pattullo, he had begun to provide solutions at the provincial level. Indeed, for Margaret, Pattullo's significant role was as the imaginative exemplar of pump-priming and planning at the *local* level who was able to do so much better than federal politicians of the same era, in part because he was an imaginative person, in part because he relied on the solid base of the *province* in time of emergency.

> In many ways he was a Sir Richard McBride of a later day, a flamboyant British Columbian confident, like McBride, of his province's great destiny, and dreading that "after an arduous struggle up the hill of public economy," British Columbia would be pushed down "either to the bottom or half-way, there to turn the treadmill of mediocrity in perpetuity."[28]

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[27] *Canadian Historical Review* (December 1962), 43: 277-97.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

To view him as a parochialist, however, was, according to Margaret, to misunderstand and underestimate him, as many of his contemporaries did.

> Pattullo was the first of the radical premiers of the '30's to emerge, the first significant figure in the modern Liberal party to sense the appeal of progressive Liberalism. While his thought, without doubt, was influenced by his association in the provincial Liberal party with McGeer and Ian Mackenzie — and, though he would have been the first to deny it, by some borrowing from the philosophy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and even the framers of the Regina Manifesto — it had its roots in the Grit and Laurier traditions.... Long before most Canadians, and certainly before King, Pattullo was a Keynesian in accepting the role of government to control the fluctuations of the business cycle.[29]

Once again it is provincialism stretching out to a wider, more cosmopolitan world than simply contemporary Canada; it is a sense of British Columbia as a province of a larger civilization.

Moreover this larger provincialism was, for Margaret, a fact of Canadian life, an essential limitation of Canadian nationhood. In her Presidential Address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1966 she wrote of the formation of Canada in the West:

> A feeling existed that parochialism would be replaced by community of interests, and that Canada, instead of being merely a mosaic of parochial provinces, would become a great nation.... But the fact of the matter was that in nation-building the nation would have to take much of its energy from tension. It would be desperately difficult to secure the articulation of regional economies and disparate cultural traditions.[30]

In her most recent work, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia*, Margaret has come full circle, back to the Interior valleys and the vivid personalities of the pioneer era. Susan Allison, whose "Recollections" she edited and for which she wrote an extended and perceptive introduction, was the sort of personality Margaret most admires: courageous and enterprising, but genteel, maintaining high standards of manners and conduct in the wilderness and demanding them of others. The Similkameen and Okanagan valleys in the pioneer era, as Margaret pictures them, are examples of the warm, intimate communities which provide the basic strength of a society in any era and which, in Margaret's view, society ignores only to its loss. Her account of Susan Allison's life is far more than a simple account of a pioneer career, however. It is, appropriately, a melding of personality, history and social commentary: in large part, the portrait of the life of a society; in small part, implicitly and perhaps unconsciously, vicarious autobiography.

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[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 295-97.

[30] "Horizontal View," pp. 7-8.

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The essays in this volume express not only the tribute of fellow scholars, but also, by their variety, a sense of the way in which Margaret's influence has extended the reach of the history of British Columbia and Canada. They are a fine example of the mixture of personality and history to be found in Margaret's own work, and range from the character of British Columbia's frontier to the personality conflicts in the early CCF and from John Boles Gaggin to the street lighting of Victoria. All have one purpose in common: to pay affectionate respect to Margaret Ormsby, the leading historian of British Columbia.