Book Reviews

A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison, edited by Margaret A. Ormsby. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1976. Pp. li, 210, *illus.*, $18.95, $7.95 paper.

A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia presents the fascinating story of a remarkable woman, Susan Moir Allison. Although her recollections, written when she was in her eighties, lack the immediacy of a daily journal, they provide an important record of the development of the southern interior of British Columbia in the latter half of the nineteenth century and make a significant contribution to the regrettably limited writings of Canadian pioneer women. The original manuscript is much enhanced by Margaret Ormsby's thorough annotation and extensively researched introduction which sets the story of the Allison family in a wider context.

Of Scottish-Dutch ancestry, Susan Moir was born in 1845 in Ceylon, where her father owned a plantation. When Susan was four, the sudden death of her father resulted in the family's return to Britain. The widowed Mrs. Moir and her three children found sympathy and support from well-to-do relatives; Susan received a good education in London, becoming proficient in French, Latin and Greek. Eventually, Mrs. Moir remarried a charming but spendthrift Scot, Thomas Glennie. Having inherited a legacy, Glennie was attracted to the gold colony by the prospect of cheap land which would enable him to play the country squire. With his wife and two step-daughters, he travelled to British Columbia via the Panama Canal in 1860. On the advice of Governor Douglas, he took up a homestead near the scenic, bustling town of Fort Hope, then the head of navigation on the Fraser River.

Like those gentlewomen who immigrated to Upper Canada several decades earlier, Mrs. Glennie found herself ill-equipped for her new life — ignorant of basic domestic skills such as making bread and washing. Her troubles were compounded when Glennie, having run through his

money, deserted the family in 1864. Daughter Susan took in sewing and embroidery to help make ends meet and then helped her mother establish a school in Hope.

Although perhaps an unintended comment, the experience of Mrs. Glennie and her two daughters underlines how completely a woman's destiny was shaped by her marriage. Susan's elder sister, Jane, married Edgar Dewdney in 1864. Her lifestyle reflected her husband's financial and political success; in the 1890s she became chatelaine of Cary Castle during Dewdney's term as lieutenant-governor.

How different Susan's life! In 1868, she married a man twenty years her senior, John Fall Allison, a rancher and miner who did much to open up the Similkameen district. Shortly after the wedding, the young bride rode over the Hope Mountains to her new log home near the present site of Princeton. For many years she was practically the only European woman in the area. It was not an easy life. Cattle drives frequently took her husband from home, and he suffered several financial reverses.

Yet Susan Allison became genuinely attached to her "wild and free" life, especially during the seventies when the family lived at Sunnyside, the first European home on the west side of the Okanagan Lake. Her youth, common sense and lively curiosity enabled her to make a successful adjustment to pioneer life. Mrs. Allison's genuine interest in the Similkameen Indians, many of whom provided her with help and companionship, puts to shame the disdainful treatment often accorded the Indians by the European wives of earlier fur traders and missionaries. While she mastered native skills such as drying venison and making moccasins and straw sun hats, she also maintained the niceties of civilized living. She was not about to abandon her habit of dressing for dinner, in spite of the ridicule of her husband's crude partner, and she treasured her small library of books. Even when times were hard, the Allisons subscribed to English and Scottish journals.

Mrs. Allison tends to play down her own courage and fortitude. With the help of only the neighbouring Indian women and her husband, she gave birth to fourteen children, all of whom lived to maturity. In addition to her domestic duties, she dutifully ran her husband's trading store and post office and kept the accounts. She faced disaster and near-disaster. In one of her earliest adventures, she made it through a raging forest fire with her month-old baby while accompanying her husband to Hope. The true test of her mettle came in 1883 when the house burned down during one of her husband's absences. She managed to rescue all the children and showed great resourcefulness in fitting out temporary living quarters in an

old cabin. Of this experience she observed philosophically: "I learned the real value of things by it." Further calamity struck in 1894, when flood waters devastated the Allisons' by-now substantial property, carrying away their home and thirteen outbuildings. John Allison died in 1897; his wife, who became known as "The Mother of the Similkameen," survived him by forty years, dying at the age of ninety-two.

In her later life, Mrs. Allison fortunately found time to record much of the history which she helped to make. Future generations are particularly indebted to her for preserving some of the legends and history of the Similkameen Indians. In 1899, using the family name Stratton Moir, she published a long narrative poem called *In-Cow-Mas-Ket*, an account of the Similkameen Indians from the 1860s to the 1880s when they "were still a people." She also wrote a companion piece about the great bear hunter Quinisco, and recorded the stories told her by the old wise man Tam-tu-sa-list, who was well over a hundred when she met him. One wishes that more of these writings might have been included in the appendix, which does contain her account of the Similkameen Indians published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1891 and two of the legends. One is about the Big Men (presumably the Susquatch), with whose story, along with that of the famed lake monster Ogopogo, the European woman was fascinated.

Sympathetic glimpses of the Indians are provided in the narrative. Among the most memorable are that of the faithful mail carrier Poo-la-lee, whose frozen feet were doctored by an Indian companian on the Allison kitchen table by the application of hot coals, and the stately Okanagan chief Penentitza, whom Mrs. Allison entertained at lunch. The book is also a veritable who's who of early British Columbia. In Hope and New Westminster in the early 1860s, Susan Allison made the acquaintance of such figures as Governor Douglas, Colonel Moody, the Trutch brothers and Peter O'Reilly. Their part in the history of British Columbia is succinctly elaborated in Professor Ormsby's footnotes. An interesting vignette is also given of the notorious McLean gang which terrorized the Okanagan valley in 1879. Several notables such as the geologist George M. Dawson visited the Allison ranch, but the most unexpected was undoubtedly the American general W. T. Sherman in 1883. The sword which Sherman presented to young Jack Allison is shown in one of the twenty-three well-chosen photographs which complement the text.

The University of British Columbia Press is to be commended for undertaking a series which will make such reminiscences of B.C. pioneers available in an attractive and useful form. In this second volume of the

series, however, the system of designating the footnotes by page and line instead of by number was found most irritating, especially when it breaks down, as it does on p. xxxvi.

The problem of ensuring that this expensive volume ($18.95) enjoys the wide circulation it deserves is partially resolved by the publication of a paperback edition ($7.95) which abridges the annotations but retains the full text of the memoirs.

University of Toronto SYLVIA VAN KIRK

Imperial Russia in Frontier America; the Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867, by James R. Gibson. New York, Oxford University Press, 1976. Pp. x, 257; *illus.*; $6.00 (Pap. text ed.), $10.00 (Cloth text ed.).

Russian America, which played an important part in the formation of British Columbia's boundary with Alaska, has been a subject of renewed interest in recent years on the part of both North American and Soviet investigators. This study in human historical geography represents a natural extension of and sequel to Professor Gibson's earlier book, *Feeding the Russian Fur Trade: Provisionment of the Okhotsk Seaboard and the Kamchatka Peninsula, 1639-1856* (Milwaukee, Madison, and London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). In *Imperial Russia in Frontier America*, the author continues his thorough treatment of supply problems, extending the discussion to Alaska, Hawaii and Russian California.

As in the Far East, the development of agriculture and cattle raising was made extremely difficult by a whole catalogue of geographical impediments, starting with harsh climate, poor soil and difficult terrain. At the same time, alternative means of supply from Russia proved unreliable and very costly, while co-operation with (and consequent dependence on) more bountiful foreign sources placed the Russian colony at the mercy of its rivals — the trading ships from Boston and the Hudson's Bay Company.

Once the sea otter and fur seal, the major sources of income from Russia's North American holdings, had become depleted, the problem of food supplies became a major consideration in the Russian government's eventual decision to divest itself of its American colonies. Professor Gibson devotes his attention to this fundamental task of provisionment, and how Russian attempts to solve the problem "generated human settlement, resource development, and regional interchange" (p. ix).

The book is divided into four parts. The first, "Occupancy," deals with settlement, exploitation of resources, and supply and provisionment problems. Part II, "Overseas Transport," discusses transport by way of Siberia and round the world by sea. Part III, "Local Agriculture," describes attempts to establish viable farming activity in Alaska, California and Hawaii. Finally, Part IV, "Foreign Trade," gives an account of local trade with Boston ships, the Spaniards, the English and the aborigines. In addition to a selective, but still lengthy, bibliography of primary and secondary sources at the end, the author supplies a list of recommended English-language readings after each chapter for readers who wish to pursue topics in greater detail. Six clearly designed maps and some interesting historical prints enhance the presentation.

The result is a comprehensive and lucid general survey that does not lead to any startling conclusions. Basically, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America* is an elaboration of the geographical reasons for Russia's failure to retain its North American colonies. The author does not ignore other reasons, however, and places geographical factors within the context of Russian weakness in the North Pacific stemming from St. Petersburg's "preoccupation with European affairs and the continental character of tsarist colonial policy" (p. 29). Professor Gibson demonstrates an impressive grasp of factual material from a wide variety of English- and Russian-language sources, many of them previously unpublished, untranslated, or printed in relatively obscure publications.

Regrettably, the book bears signs of undue haste in editing and in the transcription of data from the author's sources, and there may be a stone or two left unturned in his quest to present a comprehensive summary of available concrete information on the economics of provisionment in Russian America.

Let us dispose first of some minor criticisms. In contrast to Professor Gibson's writing as a whole, excerpts translated from Russian sources at times lack lucidity and polish, and have been incorporated with insufficient care. For example, the same passage by Shelikhov appears in the quotation introducing chapter 6 (p. 93) and in the text on page 99 in two variants, neither well rendered. A misspelling of *peredovshchik* (p. 8) survived, uncorrected, from a previous article. The geographical terms "Transbaikalia" and "Preamuria" (p. 71) appear without explanation, although only the former can be readily found in most gazetteers. "Fyodorova" appears also as "Fedorova." The use of anglicized forenames — Basil for Vasily, Nicholas for Nickolay, Lawrence for Lavrenty, and so on (but why not John for Ivan?), while somewhat jarring to this reviewer,

may reflect the policy of the publisher. Be that as it may, it is surely going too far to anglicize Leonty Hagemeister (a Baltic German) to "Leon Hagemeister," when in this instance "Leonty" is itself a Russified form of "Ludwig"!

Of greater concern are a number of inaccuracies in the one data tabulation I have been able to check, Table 9 (pp. 169-71), "Company Trade with Foreign Ships at New Archangel, 1801-41," which is based in part on Kirill Khlebnikov's *Zapiski o Koloniyakh Rossiisko-Amerikanskoy Kompanii*, Archive of the Geographical Society of the USSR, raz. 99, op. 1, no. 112. Five figures representing cargo sales have been mistranscribed and six visits by foreign vessels omitted entirely. Moreover, in relation to the same tabulation, somewhat fuller information for the period 1831-1837 is available in the *Records of the Russian-American Company, 1802-1867* (File microcopies of records in the National Archives, no. 11, Washington, 1942).

All in all, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America* is a useful and welcome contribution which requires revision before it can be regarded as authoritative.

University of British Columbia JOHN D. MCINTOSH

First Approaches to the Northwest Coast, by Derek Pethick. Vancouver, J. J. Douglas Ltd., 1976. Pp. xxi, 232, *illus.*, $12.50.

In less than a decade Derek Pethick, Victoria-born farmer and historian, has written a number of books on the British Columbia experience, including a study of early Victoria, a biography of Sir James Douglas, a story of the career of the steamship *Beaver*, and an interesting collection of personal profiles entitled *Men of British Columbia*. Pethick's audience is popular and general, and his work deserves to be judged as such.

First Approaches to the Northwest Coast, his latest volume, chronicles the interest of Russia, France, Spain, Great Britain and the United States in what Edmund Burke called the "distant dominion." Pethick describes in successive chapters the background to white coastal exploration. In turn he deals with Bering's voyages from Kamchatka, Spain's penetrations from California, and Britain's long approaches from the Atlantic (by Cook) and from Asia (by Hanna, Meares and others). He concludes his book with the Nootka crisis, when British and Spanish ambitions for trade and dominion came into conflict but did not end in war. The author

surveys these developments with ease and in brief compass. By concluding with 1790 he does not give us an appreciation of Vancouver's exploratory expedition, Bodega y Quadra's diplomacy, and Anglo-Spanish relations at Nootka and in London. The ending seems regrettably anticlimactic, but a sequel is promised. To his credit Pethick has included a chronology, bibliography, index, twenty-one photographs and one map — ample illustrative and documentary data for a book of this kind.

If this book is intended for the popular market, this reviewer quarrels with the dustjacket's claim that this is a pioneering effort. *First Approaches* is indeed a new look at old evidence, but Pethick is not the first writer to show how contact developed between the Northwest Coast and the wider world. This book is, in fact, a worthy successor to the historical tradition established so many years ago by Bancroft and Begg. Pethick seldom goes to hitherto unused manuscript sources except where otherwise printed. A major weakness is that in the rush to get into print the author has left an overabundance of indigestible block quotes that often carry the narrative rather than providing useful and illustrative detail (see in particular pages 80-95). He does not describe the ill-fated *Gorgon-Discovery* expedition planned by the British before the Nootka crisis. The interests of Canadian and American colonials in the future of the Northwest Coast are not considered. The obstacles of environment and distance receive scant attention. On the other hand, the detail Pethick provides appears unfailingly accurate and can be relied on. For this reason his book is important in bringing to the reading public details of the early history of British Columbia. But if this book is intended as a popular work for the public, its numerous and extended footnotes only drive up the costs to consumer and tend to defeat the intended purpose of this kind of work.

Nanoose Bay BARRY GOUGH

Packhorses to the Pacific, by Cliff Kopas. Sidney, Gray's Publishing, 1976. Pp. 132, *illus.*, $5.95.

Spatsizi, by T. A. (Tommy) Walker. Nunaga, 1976. Pp. 272, *illus.*, $11.95.

There is now, in British Columbia, a fairly substantial body of what might be called "wilderness-adventure literature" going back all the way to the work of the transcontinental tourists, Milton and Cheadle. How-

ever, it is also true that these authors are not native-born British Columbians. For example, Eric Collier (*Three Against the Wilderness*), Norman Lee (*Klondike Cattle Drive*), R. M. Patterson (*Dangerous River, Finlay's River*) and Martin Allerdale Grainger (*Woodsmen of the West*) were all born in England, while Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher (*Driftwood Valley*) was an American. Considering British Columbia's history of immigration, it is not surprising that some of our wilderness-adventure books are written by immigrants, but it is curious that I cannot, offhand, think of any book-length work of this type by a native-born British Columbian other than Dr. Pat McGeer's *Politics in Paradise.*

This point was brought home to me by the recent appearance of two new additions to British Columbia wilderness-adventure literature, Cliff Kopas' *Packhorses to the Pacific* and T. A. Walker's *Spatsizi.* While both authors are long-time residents of British Columbia, both were born elsewhere — Kopas in Alberta and Walker in England.

Packhorses to the Pacific tells the story of a journey undertaken by Kopas and his new wife in 1933. They travelled in four months from Calgary to Bella Coola following the old trails of explorers and fur traders. *Packhorses to the Pacific* is Kopas' second book and follows his earlier study of the history of the Bella Coola Valley. The volume is very attractive and well-designed, typical of the fine work of Morriss Printers. There are eight pages of very good maps, something I am always pleased to see in a volume of history. In addition to telling the story of the Kopas' journey, the book is also an historical odyssey. Throughout the narrative, the author compares their experiences to those of the earlier travellers such as Father de Smet, Sir George Simpson, David Thompson and Alexander Mackenzie, with an emphasis on the dramatic elements of these stories. While most of the historical anecdotes in this book are worthwhile and interesting, there are some that are simply uninteresting rehashes of old chestnuts such as the stories of Cariboo Cameron and the Overlanders of 1862.

Walker's *Spatsizi* begins in the same Bella Coola Valley where the Kopases ended their journey. The book is in three parts. First comes the fascinating story of the Walkers' 1948 northward migration from Bella Coola to the Spatsizi Plateau, which is more than 150 miles north of Hazelton. The account of the journey is a very realistic rendering of the joys and tribulations of outdoor life, packing and camping. Second, Walker tells of their experiences settling into the new territory and establishing a thriving big game guiding operation. The third part of the book describes the Walkers' attempts to preserve the wilderness character of

the Spatsizi area. Walker gives a sensitive, if slightly paternalistic, description of the dreadful plight of the northern Indians with whom he had extensive contact. There are also some nice details about an important generation of British Columbia land surveyors such as Frank Swannell and G. S. Andrews.

In describing his attempts to save Spatsizi as a wilderness area, Walker is speaking as one of the recent pioneers of the wilderness-preservation movement. Because of this, the book is important for those interested in history of conservation/preservation in this province. As Walker notes, when he began trying to save Spatsizi, nearly 30 years ago, "ecology" was a word to be looked up in a dictionary.

Walker's occupation as a big-game guide brought him into contact with many wealthy clients, and some of these, notably H. R. MacMillan and Phillip Connors, tried unsuccessfully to aid Walker in his attempts to save Spatsizi. The irony of having the assistance of growth-oriented, expansionist capitalists is apparently completely lost on Walker, but the reader is left wondering just how many Spatsizis were destroyed in order that these people could be in an economic position to take advantage of Walker's exclusive trophy-hunting service.

Both volumes suffer because of the weakness of their editing. This is all the more regrettable since many of the mistakes could have so easily been corrected. In *Packhorses to the Pacific*, for example, the paragraphing is extremely erratic. Numerous descriptive paragraphs of five words or less litter the narrative, distracting the reader. In some cases, there are consecutive paragraphs of eight words or less. There also lurks the overused exclamation point, as in these two back-to-back paragraphs:

"It must be the Dean!

The dubious, dangerous, deadly Dean!" (p. 117)

The reader, who is just as pleased as the author to encounter the river, scarcely needs two exclamation marks to emphasize the point.

The editorial problems of *Spatsizi* are more profound. As a story of Walker's life (particularly during the years 1948 to 1968), the book should maintain a clear and straightforward narrative line. This narration, however, is continually muddled by the inclusion of many non-essential names of both people and places. New characters — major, minor, historic and modern — are introduced at the rate of about one per page. A quick check of the index reveals about 185 names and I noticed that even this lengthy list is not all-inclusive. In the matter of names, the book reads like a Russian novel. And why, in a book about the search for a British

Columbia wilderness, an editor would allow us to suffer Walker's gratuitous sniping at British socialism (p. 20) escapes me.

I don't wish to leave a negative impression. Despite these reservations, both *Spatsizi* and *Packhorses to the Pacific* are interesting and worthwhile books — even if they are not likely to depose the classics of the wilderness-adventure genre such as *Three Against the Wilderness*. Their appearance, both backed by British Columbia publishers, suggests that local and popular yet commercial and non-professional history in the province is in a relatively healthy state.

Victoria DEREK REIMER