

Book Reviews

Vancouver (The Romance of Canadian Cities Series), by Eric Nicol. 1970. Revised edition. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, Ltd., 1978. Pp. xv, 265; *illus.*; \$11.95.

One of the more important developments in the field of historical writing in recent years has been the rapid growth of interest in the study of cities and the process of urbanization. Books, articles and theses have been written in a steady stream and it is no longer possible to decry the lack of scholarly attention to Canada's urban past. Vancouver has received its share of scholarly scrutiny, as any up-to-date bibliography will indicate. Works by such scholars as E. M. W. Gibson, W. G. Hardwick, D. W. Holdsworth, Norbert MacDonald, R. A. J. McDonald and P. E. Roy are especially noteworthy. It is against this background that Nicol's re-issued "romance" of Vancouver must be judged.

When published in 1970, *Vancouver* at least had the distinction of being one of the first (it was preceded by A. Morley's *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis*, published in 1961) book length accounts of Vancouver's development. At the time, almost any volume on the city's history was welcome, since it suggested that local history (it was rarely called "urban" history at the time) was worthy of attention. In other words, whatever its weaknesses in 1970, Nicol could be dealt with amiably by scholars since he was a pioneer working in an area that professional historians had chosen to ignore.* The situation has changed dramatically since 1970, but Nicol's 1978 edition does not reflect or even acknowledge the changes. Indeed, it can only be assumed that Nicol and his publisher were out to make a quick profit, for although the dust jacket proclaims that the new volume "is an updated version," there are no more than six pages of new material. The bibliography, inadequate even in 1970, has not had one item added to it. Nicol did not even take the trouble to make

*See the review in *BC Studies*, no. 10 (Summer 1971), pp. 56-65.

easy and obvious revisions — Pat McGeer, for example, is still referred to as the leader of the provincial Liberal party (p. 218).

At best, Nicol's study is a history of Vancouver by a Vancouver man written for Vancouver people. There will be many in the city who will derive some pleasure from this romantic, episodic account. As was noted in the 1971 review of the volume, it is highly readable, often entertaining and, at times, humorous. *Vancouver* is notably better than many other local histories since Nicol can at least write. The academic reader, however, will be disappointed and frustrated since the author has lost the forest in the trees, producing an often trite study. The chronicling of events that occurred in Vancouver, and the capsule biographies of colourful mayors and other personalities that make up most of the volume, offer no pattern, viewpoint or critical assessment of the city building process. Nicol, like many local historians, simply never asks any of the important questions, content instead to devote ten pages to the Janet Smith murder case. Without frames of reference and a sense of the larger process, such a presentation of dates and opinions is close to meaningless.

Vancouver has other problems. Nicol, like many other local historians, chose not to include footnotes. To be valid and useful to others, local history, no less than any other kind of history, must be properly documented so that readers may at least be assured that the study is based on the best sources available, rigorously tested and treated by standard research criteria. There is little evidence of such an approach in this volume. Indeed, there are numerous occasions not only when Nicol's facts are in error, but where he displays a political and racial bias that indicates he has done anything but solid research. Two examples can be cited, although there are others in the book. The provincial election of 1933, which resulted in the CCF displacing the Conservatives as the official opposition, is discussed as follows: "Three seats, won by Ernest E. Winch . . . Harold Winch, and Mrs. Dorothy Steeves, were Vancouver ridings that accounted for an appreciable proportion of the 31 percent of the total votes that had gone pink. Politically, the East End of the city was now closer to Moscow than Point Grey" (p. 172). Not only does this passage contain irresponsible hyperbole, it contains several errors. Ernest E. Winch was elected in Burnaby, not Vancouver. Dorothy Steeves ran in Point Grey in the provincial election of November 1933. She lost. She did not win a seat until July 1934 when, following the death of North Vancouver member H. C. E. Anderson, she was elected in a by-election. Referring to the Japanese evacuation of 1942, Nicol states that the Japanese "accepted their lot with good grace" (p. 193), an opinion that begs

the question and simplifies a very complex issue. It is true that as a group the Japanese did not make any concerted effort to resist, but a lack of resistance does not imply acceptance. The fact was that there were divisions within the Japanese community about how to react to the evacuation, a complicating factor Nicol chose to ignore. These kinds of superficial statements are common in *Vancouver* and must make any reader wary of virtually all the author's assertions.

It is one thing to write humour, something Eric Nicol does well. It is quite another to attempt to disguise humour as history. *Vancouver* is a parochial and rambling book. It is not history, even of the rudimentary sort. There are no themes, no connecting threads, no analyses, no grappling with complex questions. Instead there is one anecdote after another, some in good taste, several in poor taste. If you read the book in 1970, don't look for this edition. If you didn't read it then don't bother now. There are many superior studies available that deserve attention.

University of Victoria

ALAN F. J. ARTIBISE

Victoria, Then and Now, by Roland Morgan and Emily Disher. Vancouver, B.C.: Bodiman Publications, 1977. Pp. 127; *illus.*

Old Wooden Buildings, by Donovan Clemson. Saanichton, B.C.: Hancock House, 1978. Pp. 96; *illus.*

The present interest in Canadian studies and in local history has seen a veritable spate of books in the last half dozen years. The majority are designed for the general public and make no pretence to being works of scholarship. This is not to say that these books are incompetent but rather they do not place undue emphasis on the trappings so beloved of academia. Popular history serves a useful function — too little of it has been done in Canada previously — and, while it may not necessarily confront the substantive questions posed by historians, it does present aspects of the cultural ethos that otherwise get neglected in the tons of literature imported from elsewhere.

Victoria, Then and Now is a pictorial history of the provincial capital from late in the nineteenth century until the present day. For each scene illustrating life in the past its modern counterpart is given for comparison. The photographs showing Victoria in earlier decades are well selected.

It is interesting to observe the changes — or in some instances the lack of them. “Douglas Street Looking North East C. 1925” and the same view today are remarkably similar; on the other hand the views of the Crystal Gardens in its heyday and the present ruinous — but soon, it is announced, to be restored — condition of the building cannot but make me feel sad. The outlying and semirural areas are the most altered. The two photographs showing the “Panorama North East from Mount Tolmie” — the one pre-1914 and the other in 1977 — are slightly unnerving; the pastoral image is gone, to be replaced by urban sprawl. Victoria may be more populous, it may be more “swinging” but it is not necessarily improved. However, Koko had a special list of offenders, among whom were those who “praised all centuries but this,” and one should accept change. Even so, it is nice to be reminded of a more leisurely age.

Donovan Clemson’s book, *Old Wooden Buildings*, has both text and photographs. The general format is based on a series of tours through various parts of the interior of British Columbia. Each separate tour provides the material for his narrative and the accompanying illustrative materials. He does not present his travels in an excessively detailed manner but rather manages to evoke a sense of time and place. It was not his intention to write a *catalogue raisonnée* for the tourist bureau or a guide-book per se but to provide such information as would enable one to comprehend the general scene more adequately. By concentrating on the wooden buildings he had a focal point upon which to base his comments and his narrative. Moreover, the wooden edifices are in a state of decay; many have already vanished, and others will not long survive. Therefore a very real part of the history of British Columbia will soon be gone and without photographic evidence it will be very much as if these buildings had never existed.

A number of the surviving early wooden structures are essentially public buildings such as hotels, stores and churches. The last have been more fortunate than the old farmhouses and barns — indeed, there is no greater contrast between the Maritimes and British Columbia, because in the former domestic architecture is everywhere in evidence and in excellent state of preservation while such, alas, is not the situation in the latter. The history of western Canada is in part the history of people on the move, with the result that whole communities become abandoned when they cease to have an economically viable existence.

The ingenuity of those who erected the towns and villages, the skills of the carpenters who erected the numerous buildings and the optimism of those who came to British Columbia to create a new and better life are all

virtues admirably illustrated in the excellent photographs. History is more than past politics and the surviving architectural remains serve to emphasize this point. Donovan Clemson is to be complimented on his skilful combination of pictures and text.

Both of these volumes serve as visual reminders that even before "the now" there was a real world. An older generation perusing this book will inevitably feel a sense of nostalgia not so much for the past — much of it was harsh — but for their youth. Those who are not old will find them agreeably informative about the so-called "good old days." To want to live in the past is unwise but not to know about it is dangerous. Popular history provides the route for most people to be able to understand more clearly their country, their society, their culture and perhaps even themselves.

S. W. JACKMAN

History of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Railroads of America), by W. Kaye Lamb. New York: Macmillan, 1977. Pp. xv, 491. \$17.95.

McCulloch's Wonder — The Story of the Kettle Valley Railway, by Barrie Sanford. Vancouver: Whitecap Books Ltd., 1977. Pp. 260. \$12.95.

Canadian Pacific and *McCulloch's Wonder* are both books about railways by British Columbians, but there the similarity between the two ends. Lamb tells the story of the country's most important transcontinental transportation system; Sanford concerns himself with a branch line of the Canadian Pacific. Lamb's approach is transcontinental and international in scope; Sanford's regional and parochial. Lamb has based his study on extensive research in company and other archival resources; Sanford relies almost entirely on newspaper accounts and recollections of old-timers. The comparisons could continue, but it must suffice here to say that these are two very different books.

Many books have already been written about the construction and early history of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Dr. Lamb has provided us with a very competent account of that phase of the company's history although he has not provided much surprising new information or startling new insights about the early history of the company.

Dr. Lamb provides important new information on two major aspects of CPR history. He tells us a good deal about Canadian Pacific's varied subsidiary ventures, ranging from luxury passenger liners to real estate and to Saskatchewan potash mines. This diversification has given Canadian Pacific a financial strength unequalled by any other North American railroad.

The CPR certainly needed the strength gained through diversification to deal with the problems it faced after the Canadian government nationalized its two transcontinental competitors, the Grand Trunk and Canadian Northern Railway Systems, to form the Canadian National Railways. Dr. Lamb discusses in an effective and informed way the Canadian Pacific Railway's difficult response to competition from government-owned and deficit-prone Canadian National Railways.

Dr. Lamb, like many other CPR historians, is impressed with the success of the Canadian Pacific Railway. He attributes that success to government aid in the early years, and to a corporate management which is described as shrewd, cautious and conservative. The initial transcontinental project was a monumental political, financial and technological gamble largely underwritten by the federal government. Once the contract was signed, however, the company's officers adopted very cautious developmental policies. This was good corporate policy, but it also led to serious criticism, particularly in those parts of the country where ambitious developmental policies were regarded as being far more important than the payment of annual dividends. These criticisms are mentioned in the book, but Dr. Lamb is generally sympathetic to the policies of senior Canadian Pacific officials. Even the Canadian Pacific Railway's diversification program and its cautious railway modernization programs, which have left CP Rail as one of Canadian Pacific's weaker corporate interests, receive general praise.

Dr. Lamb clearly has an interest in and indeed a love for equipment and rolling stock. Railway buffs will appreciate the pictures and descriptions of the company's more famous locomotives and steamships. These complement a well designed and edited volume.

McCulloch's Wonder, named after the construction engineer and later superintendent of the Kettle Valley Railway, focuses on the struggle to build a rail link from the Kootenay District of British Columbia to the Pacific coast. The location of the mainline of the Canadian Pacific Railway through Kicking Horse Pass left southern British Columbia without rail service. The discovery of rich silver, nickel and other mineral resources

in the Kootenay district led to a long struggle between Canadian and American railway interests for control of the traffic to the region.

Much of *McCulloch's Wonder* is in fact the story of the struggle for control of the Kootenay traffic between J. J. Hill of the Great Northern Railroad and a succession of Canadian interests. The newspapers of the day made much of the frequently colourful incidents when rival railway survey or construction crews came to blows over survey, location and construction rights. The impression given in the newspapers and carefully repeated by Sanford is that the affair was a very bitter fight between J. J. Hill and Thomas Shaughnessy of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

It is misleading to view transcontinental railway rivalries exclusively from the perspective of newspaper writers from the backwoods. Yet this is what Sanford does. He has not read the papers of J. J. Hill and Thomas Shaughnessy; nor has he examined the records of the Northern Pacific, Great Northern and Canadian Pacific Railways; and he has not concerned himself with the various other projects undertaken by Hill and Shaughnessy. Other works, notably Heather Gilbert's biography of Lord Mount Stephen, make it very clear that Hill's relations with senior Canadian Pacific officials were far more complicated than is suggested in *McCulloch's Wonder*.

Sanford's explanation of the reason for Hill's withdrawal from the Kootenays is, at best, incomplete. Sanford suggests Canadian government support for the Canadian Pacific Railway discouraged Hill. That support, however, was no greater at the time when Hill withdrew than it was when Hill undertook most of his major construction projects in the Kootenays. In his later years Hill apparently became equally discouraged about his American railroad ventures. He apparently foresaw, long before most of his contemporaries, that the populist demand for increased government regulation would drive the railroads to ruin, and began to divert his assets from the Great Northern to other ventures. The mineral resources of the Kootenays, moreover, were being depleted, and this probably influenced Hill far more than anything the Canadian government did.

Sanford is best when describing the construction and operating difficulties of the Kettle Valley Railway and of its predecessor companies. The railway was built through very rough country. Heavy grades, snow, rain, rock slides and accidents bedevilled the railway's operations from the beginning.

It would be interesting to know, however, whether the operations of the Kettle Valley Railway ever really turned a profit. The detailed financial reports all railway companies were required to file with the Board of

Railway Commissioners of Canada were apparently not consulted by Barrie Sanford, nor does he provide any reliable statistics about the volume of traffic carried, the rates charged, and operating costs and fixed charges incurred. An examination of these returns might well lead to the conclusion that the railway, while successful in keeping the Kootenay district economically tied to Canada, was a financial failure. Shaughnessy, not Hill, may have been the real loser in the Kootenays. Only a detailed analysis of the Kettle Valley Railway's operating statistics can provide an accurate assessment of the railway's fiscal viability, but such an assessment is needed if the significance of the fight between Hill and Shaughnessy is to be understood.

Thomas Shaughnessy and other Canadian Pacific officials approached the Kettle Valley project with great caution. They were always very careful to limit their commitments to and hence their possible losses on the project. It is perhaps significant that in the index of Dr. Lamb's history of the Canadian Pacific Railway there are only two references to the Kettle Valley Railway. Reading these two books together is like trying to look at railways through opposite ends of a British Columbia telescope. Yet when viewing both the larger and the smaller project from the perspective of the 1970s remarkable similarities in the rise and decline of both railways can be discerned.

University of Saskatchewan

T. D. REGEHR