

researchers. Its message about traditional collecting policies should not be missed. Regrettably, once again acquisitions must trail historiographical trends, and once again our failure to make our holdings known and appreciated, at a reasonable cost to the public, has forced historians to tackle the task.

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**Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History.** Edited by DAPHNE MARLATT. Victoria: Aural History, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1975. Pp. 104. illus. \$6.95.

Oral history is nothing new. The spoken sagas of antiquity long predate written records of the past. In fact, virtually all human cultures have handed their histories down from one generation to the next by means of oral traditions. Over the past decade, however, the term oral history (or aural history as some devotees would have it) has taken on added meaning in North America. With the rise of protest and dissent during the later 1960s came a democratic impulse which emphasized the innate worth of the history of the common man. In Europe such concerns were far from new to social historians. But in Canada, as well as in the United States, historians have traditionally taken as their subject the governors, not the governed. It is this elitist approach to the past that progressives and radicals have largely rejected. For them the urgent task has been to rewrite history "from the bottom up".

Yet, once accepted, this challenge raised an extremely awkward problem. The common man is by and large mute, at least as far as historians are concerned, for most men leave few records behind them and records are the very stuff of written history. This silence greatly complicates the task of writing the new peoples' history. Oral history offers a solution to this problem, one which a growing number of historians have recently seized. Moreover, oral history has its own special appeal, for the anti-elitism of recent North American protest has lent an air of integrity and authenticity to the tales of men who recount their own experiences. Those who speak from the grassroots, it seems, really "tell it like it was". Thus, according to the school of Terkel and Broadfoot, memory is the only archive, every man his own historian.

*Steveston Recollected* is a little book very much in this tradition. Organized topically, it contains transcripts of interviews with ten Steveston residents, all of them reminiscing about the history of their district. Interpolated among these accounts are descriptions of several of the interviews, written by the book's editor, presumably intended to convey

some impression of the interviewee and the life he now lives. The community recollected was distinctive in two respects: it was the centre of the salmon canning industry on the Fraser River, and it was the largest Japanese-Canadian settlement in British Columbia outside Vancouver. Thus the Steveston recollected is the west coast Japanese-Canadian fishing community. Through the memories of those interviewed we catch glimpses of their lives as immigrants, fishermen, bachelors, husbands and wives, neighbours, trade unionists, objects of racialism, evacuees, and so on.

The problems raised by this book are basically those of its genre, for oral history of this sort is based upon assumptions which most historians cannot accept. Every man has a history—there is no doubt of that—but not every man is an historian. Judged as “an attempt to understand the role of the Japanese-Canadians in this community,” *Steveston Recollected* is a failure. If this book is any indication, few men have a clear sense of the larger patterns to which their lives conform. On the contrary, those whose memories are recorded here had only a partial, subjective sense of their own community. The reader who must rely upon these brief recollections is left with what is at best a highly impressionistic sense of this Japanese-Canadian community. The fundamental error in all this lies, not in the use of oral history, but rather its abuse. “Aural history expands the limits of historical documentation”, the Introduction explains, but with the zeal of the newly converted, oral historians have not so much augmented traditional documentation as they have abandoned it. *Steveston Recollected* is no exception. No trips to collections of documents for these historians; their only archive is the human mind.

If oral history offers us only a truncated past, of what value is it? Leaving aside its attractive freshness and intimacy, it provides a reservoir of fact—as long as due regard is paid to the frailties of the human memory. More important than that, it provides us with revealing glimpses of present states of mind. The true worth of *Steveston Recollected* lies not in its account of the town's early history but rather in what it reveals about how Japanese Canadians presently view their past. In that sense, particularly, ethnic historians may some day find the book of value.

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**The Protection of Cultural Property: Handbook of National Legislations.** Compiled by BONNIE BURNHAM. Paris: International Council of Museums, 1974. Pp. 206.

Because this book lacks an index the reader has to plod through 185 pages before coming to a definition of “cultural property” tucked in the text of a