

indication as to which page numbers refer to a passing reference in the body of a description, which refer to a collection, and which to the one collection entry containing an historical note on the person, parish, or association. This is especially important since collections bearing the same title are scattered throughout the text; the five page references to Louis Riel contain descriptions of ten separate collections bearing his name, and only in the first, in an entry which is not obviously different from the simple descriptions of collections, is there a biographical note. For less well known individuals, the significance of the collection is difficult to judge in the absence of these historical notes.

There is some evidence of inconsistency in the naming of collections. A guide published by the *Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française* bears the title of the institution, as does a copy of one of its photograph collections. Yet a microfilm copy of one of its manuscript collections (Adrien-Gabriel Morice) contains no reference to its source — a fairly general problem with citation of microfilm material in this guide. The importance of the photograph collection is lost by entering it under the institution's name without describing its creator, the *agronome* Georges Michaud who travelled to all the francophone communities in Saskatchewan between 1925 and 1927. However, every archives is plagued by anomalies such as these, and the exercise of producing a guide provides an excellent opportunity to discover and correct them.

*Exploring Family History in Saskatchewan* is a general guide for the genealogist which describes the holdings of the Archives as only one of many sources of information. The contents are similar to the contents of other guides of this kind including those produced by the Public Archives of Canada, the City of Ottawa Archives, and the Manitoba Genealogical Society. The list of addresses for research outside Saskatchewan is particularly helpful. Perhaps I am revealing my own bias in suggesting that the Hudson's Bay Company Archives deserves a separate listing. Still, since so many descendants of early Company employees could trace their ancestors' careers and parishes of origin in these voluminous records, it is perhaps worth signalling their presence at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

The Saskatchewan Archives Board will publish two more titles in this series: No. 3 *Historical Directory of Saskatchewan* (a revised edition of a 1980 publication) and No. 4 *Historical Directory of Saskatchewan Newspapers, 1878-1983*, compiled by Christine MacDonald. Publications such as these add new solutions to the archival conundrum — how to make archives accessible.

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**Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember.** LYNNE BOWEN. Lantzville, British Columbia: Oolichan Books, 1982, xx, 280 p. ISBN 0-88982-041-4 \$12.95 pa.

*Boss Whistle* reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of oral history. The book deals with the history of coal miners on Vancouver Island and its title

refers to the whistle at the mines which controlled day-to-day life in those mining communities.

The presence of coal in Vancouver Island was widely known by the mid-nineteenth century when the Hudson's Bay Company established a coal mining settlement at present-day Nanaimo. In 1869, coal was discovered just to the north of Nanaimo by Dunsmuir, Diggle and Company. Robert Dunsmuir was a lowland Scot who had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and who, with government aid, established a coal empire based first at Wellington and later expanded by his own and his sons' efforts to such places as Bevan, Union Bay, and Cumberland. The Dunsmuirs became an influential family; one of Dunsmuir's sons, James, was Premier and later Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. The family's wealth and power peaked between 1880 and 1910, after which, due to the lack of male heirs, their coal interests were sold to Canadian Collieries. The family's power coincided with the period when unbridled capitalism reigned in Canada's coal mines. The desire for profit was paramount and the operations were strict to the point of tyranny. Hence the name "Dunsmuir" became synonymous with the tyranny of the boss:

The boss gives the orders; the boss owned the mine; the boss hired lesser bosses who in turn watched the men. There were fire bosses, pit bosses, shift bosses, boss bosses. There were some good bosses and a lot of bad bosses. The most tyrannical of all bosses was the boss whistle. (p. 23)

The development of the Dunsmuir empire coincided with the great influx of European and Asian immigrants into the country during the early years of the twentieth century. British, Italian, Greek, Eastern European, Chinese, and Japanese settlers, often ignorant of the working conditions in the mines, were induced to move to the mining areas. They were joined by eastern Canadians, particularly Nova Scotians, who had considerable experience in mining. This book traces the reactions of these people and their children to the Dunsmuir and the other coal mining interests, as well as the natural catastrophes that are inseparable from mining. It is precisely on these sorts of subjects that oral history is most valuable. A few examples graphically demonstrate this point. Nothing can better indicate how workers fitted into the Dunsmuir scheme of things than this miner's statement:

Extension wasn't much on safety. And usually if a man got killed or that, there weren't much said about it. There weren't compensation like we got now. Once they had to start paying people that got hurt or killed, they became a little more safety conscious. But at the same time, if a horse or mule got killed down there, somebody got fired for it. They were more important than the men because they cost more. They could get men for nothing. (p. 40)

Starting from this low point, the book traces the often heartbreaking evolution of workers' attempts to organize and gain rights.

Race relations between Whites and Orientals is brought out more sharply than in a page of conventional narrative history by these statements:

They (the Chinese) were the most friendliest people you ever wished to meet. When we were children going to school, the vicar once came to us and said, 'Oh, you shouldn't play with them. They will be mean to you.' I said, 'No way, they were so friendly.'

We were scared, I'm telling you, in case we got too involved with them (the Chinese). In our own family we were not allowed to use the word 'Chink' in referring to the Chinese. We must say 'China-man' or 'Chinese'. That sort of phraseology was not acceptable. But lots of people used it. (p. 76)

In hearing of the difficult lives of these miners, the reader comes away with the impression that he has truly experienced their deep suffering and trying social adjustments on Vancouver Island.

One difficulty with a book based mainly on oral history sources is to convey to the reader a context for the various events about which the speakers are talking. In *Boss Whistle*, unless he is familiar with British Columbia history in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the reader cannot place the events of the mining areas in context. What were labour relations like elsewhere in British Columbia at the time? What were the people's attitudes towards the miners' lot? How typical were the Dunsmuirs in their mode of operation?

This latter question is particularly relevant because the Dunsmuirs come off as the villains of the book. They are dead, however, and cannot give interviews. All the recorded observations are made by miners, whose only knowledge is what they saw in their daily work at the mines. We have no idea as to the difficulties, if any, the Dunsmuirs faced in getting and shipping coal. The reader goes away with a one-sided view of the mining experience. This is a problem facing all oral historians dealing with labour history; businessmen and managers, even if they are available, are generally loath to give interviews, fearing the critical use of their words will hurt their reputations. The individual labourer has no such fear and speaks with relative anonymity.

*Boss Whistle* poses the problem of how much background information and how balanced an interpretation a book based primarily on oral sources can provide. Without sufficient background from textual sources, taped quotes become unsubstantiated opinions and observations. It is the responsibility of an historian to provide sufficient evidence to permit a balanced view of an event or issue. With only one side of an argument the reader is left with only half the story.

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**Loot: The Heritage of Plunder.** RUSSELL CHAMBERLIN. New York: Facts on File, 1983. 248 p. ISBN 931-828-29-5 \$19.95.

Russell Chamberlin recites a long list of archives, galleries, libraries, and museums, as well as a good number of estates of the more affluent segments