

collectors who require the biographical details of *Camera Workers* will be grateful for Mattison's diligence and willingness to share his findings. However, the value of this directory is limited. Those who seek an insight into the history of photography or photographers in British Columbia will have to wait for further study of these and other shreds of evidence and a critical analysis of the wealth of extant photographs produced by the province's "camera workers."

Donald J. Bourdon

Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

Sometimes a Great Nation: A Photo Album of Canada, 1850-1925. EDWARD CAVELL. Banff: Altitude Publishing Ltd., 1984. 207 p. ISBN 0-919381-13-8 \$49.95.

Our perception of the world around us has, since the nineteenth century, been confined to a visual straitjacket. One might paraphrase Kipling in asking the question, "What should they know of photographs who know them only as printed black-and-white reproductions?" Very few people other than photographers and curators have had the opportunity to appreciate the full tonal range of vintage monochrome photographs: the browns, grays, blacks, golds, yellows, blues. Photo editor Bruce Bernard has written, "I had seen no original nineteenth-century prints of high quality, and because all photographs were reproduced either in black and white or a uniform 'sepia', I could not tell what I was missing."

Bernard's *Photodiscovery: Masterworks of Photography, 1840-1940* can already be seen as an influential work which set high standards of reproduction. Collector Sam Wagstaff predicted, "It is doubtful that the lover of photographs will ever be satisfied with less again." Published in 1980 and reviewed in *Archivaria* 11 by Andrew Birrell, *Photodiscovery* has inspired such books as *Masterworks of American Photography: The Amon Carter Collection* (1982), *The Golden Age of British Photography* (1984), and *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839-1940* (1984). *Photodiscovery* was, in Ed Cavell's opinion, the first book to treat photographs with respect, as intrinsically beautiful objects. Realizing that there existed enough material for a Canadian counterpart, he began to examine what he has called "the labyrinth of Canadian photography collections" at twenty-four institutions in nine provinces in Canada.

"A subjective exercise, the selection is occasionally logical; quite often it's emotional," writes Cavell. He recalls, "Reduction from 2000 to 1000 images was a simple matter; reduction from 1000 to 600 images was problematic; the reduction from 600 to 200 images was a desperate affair." He is happiest about "the sense of joy of photographs" conveyed by the images he selected for publication.

The book has avoided what Sam Wagstaff describes as "all those professional tricks of how to catch our conscience with low-status subjects, vernacular excitement, and useless but fascinating information." Cavell admits, however, that "the whimsical and the sensational have had a definite influence."

Exaggerated, self-deprecating postcards such as "The Way We Harvest Wheat" (p. 147) may tell us a great deal about our national psyche. Indeed, many of the book's

images highlight the separation between stance and reality by celebrating superlatives in what Cavell nevertheless describes as a nation whose “imperfect multi-culturalism has failed to produce a self-realization of greatness.”

Ironically, one of the ways in which Canada is *not* a great nation is the current national inability to publish, at a reasonable price, books containing high-quality reproductions of photographs. The state-of-the-art colour separations and printing by the firm of Dai Nippon of Tokyo are a noteworthy feature of *Sometimes a Great Nation*. Had the book been printed in Canada, production costs would have increased by 30 per cent, according to the calculations of Cavell’s publisher, Altitude Press.

Recognition by one’s peers speaks volumes. The Canadian Museums Association in May 1985 presented Ed Cavell with an Award of Merit whose citation reads, “For dedication to the preservation, exhibition and publication of Canadian historical and contemporary photography; for seeing, and encouraging others to see, beyond the photograph as document to the photograph as art; and for setting standards for emulation in the design and reproduction of the photographic image in publications.” Enough said!

Peter Robertson
National Photography Collection
Public Archives of Canada

W.J. Oliver: Life Through a Master’s Lens. SHEILAGH S. JAMESON. Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1984. 147 p., illus. ISBN 0-919224-39-3 \$19.95.

Sheilagh Jameson’s interest in W.J. Oliver dates back to the 1930s. Living in the Millerville area of southern Alberta, near Oliver’s ranch, she was intimately acquainted with the story of this energetic and prolific photographer. Jameson writes, “Even then I was aware that here was a fascinating saga which should be recorded.” In 1981, shortly after retiring as Chief Archivist at the Glenbow Museum, Jameson set out to research Oliver’s life and work. That research culminated in 1984 with the opening of a major exhibition of Oliver’s photography and the simultaneous release of *W.J. Oliver: Life Through a Master’s Lens*.

W.J. Oliver is both a biographical account and a visual presentation of Oliver’s photography. The opening chapter cleverly captures the reader’s attention by introducing the photographer at an important point in his career in 1936. This leads into a more standard, but particularly detailed account of Oliver’s life from his birth in 1887 until his death in 1954. Chapters dealing with his early life as a news photographer, National Parks and other outdoor photography, cinematography, and ranching and African safaris investigate the multi-faceted career of a man who was one of Canada’s best-known and most productive photographers of the 1920s and 1930s.

Except for the confusing positioning of the index part way through the book, the general design and layout of *W.J. Oliver* are both pleasing and practical. The writing is generally proficient and enjoyable, although there are a number of awkward sentences and excessively long paragraphs. The greatest shortcoming of the book’s appearance is the poor quality of photographic reproduction, an especially unfortunate problem in a book concerned with excellence in photography.