

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.

Over one hundred photographs are interspersed with the text or presented in a portfolio concluding the book. Individually, the photographs which have been selected for reproduction are interesting; however, as a group they fail to represent adequately Oliver's career. The selection is based almost exclusively on extant collections in southern Alberta and the content of the material presented is largely regional.

Jameson had access to a considerable amount of textual documentation, a rare situation, since most often only photographic records themselves have survived. Material utilized included diaries, letters, personal interviews, an unpublished manuscript, and photographs. Regrettably, sources for specific items of information have not been acknowledged consistently throughout the book, leaving the reader occasionally wondering what is fact and what is conjecture. Also questionable is Jameson's presentation of Oliver as a man with no faults in personal, business, or artistic affairs.

The greatest criticism of *W.J. Oliver* pertains to the completeness of research, for although Jameson made use of many excellent primary sources, she did not investigate other potentially valuable records such as those at the Public Archives of Canada. A particular point can be made with regard to photographic records. Jameson states that the National Parks collection held by the National Photography Collection includes "a large proportion of original Oliver negatives and prints" which were "largely unprobed." Given that photography was Oliver's life work and that his work was national in scope, neglect of this material is inexcusable. It is a serious mistake to accord the photographic records produced by a photographer any other than top priority in research into that photographer's life and work.

In spite of these shortcomings, *W.J. Oliver: Life Through a Master's Lens* fills a void in the study of the history of Canadian photography. Oliver was one of a generation of photographers in twentieth-century Canada who vigorously recorded life and land and whose work largely went uncredited. Oliver's work transcends the regional and the ordinary, and it is therefore most fitting that his life and legacy are honoured in this publication.

**Margery Tanner Hadley**  
Banff, Alberta

**The Best Gift. A Record of the Carnegie Libraries in Ontario.** MARGARET BECKMAN, STEPHEN LANGMEAD, and JOHN BLACK. Toronto and London: Dundurn Press, 1984. 192 p. ISBN 0-919670-82-2 \$29.95.

Andrew Carnegie believed that "the best gift" any community could receive was a free public library, and through his philanthropy 2,509 library buildings were constructed throughout the United States and the British Commonwealth between 1899 and 1917. Although Carnegie himself directed funding at the beginning, in 1901 he turned over the library building grant programme to the Carnegie Corporation, the agency responsible for his philanthropic work, where it was administered by James Bertram, his secretary. From the outset two conditions had to be met before a grant was made: the community had to provide land for the library building and to provide through taxation not less than 10 per cent of the cost of the building for annual maintenance of free library service. Library planning left to elected officials and local architects frequently resulted in