

## *Book Reviews*

**Canada: A History in Photographs.** ROGER HALL AND GORDON DODDS. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1981. ill, 256 p. ISBN 0 88830 202 9 \$24.95.

First there was Pierre Berton's *Remember Yesterday: A Century of Photographs* (1965). Then there was Donald Kerr's admirable *Canada: A Visual History* (1966), followed by a host of titles which includes Kaye Lamb's *Canada's Five Centuries* (1971), the fifteen-volume series *Canada's Illustrated Heritage* (1977-78), and now *Canada: A History in Photographs* (1981) by Roger Hall and Gordon Dodds. Like the search for the Great Canadian Novel, the quest for the Great Illustrated History of Canada continues.

"More often than not," write the authors, "the photograph has been merely dropped into a printed text to 'liven it up' ... to *illustrate* the written word ... [thus failing] to take full advantage of an important and dramatic source." Moreover, they say: "Rarely has the photograph been seen as an archival medium in its own right, a source material with its own virtues and problems." These are not new opinions. But coming from a prominent archivist and a well-known historian, these views will comfort archivists who believe that historians have scant understanding of photographs, and who have been accused of such sins as "media myopia" when pressing the case for photographs as archival documents.

In pursuit of their ideals, the authors have spread the net for photographs widely and, on the whole, extremely well. They draw upon the resources of thirty-six institutions in all provinces of Canada and the Yukon Territory. The photographs they have selected not only represent the better-known collections in public archives, libraries, museums and galleries, but also lesser-known collections in the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française, the City of Ottawa Archives, the United Church of Canada Central Archives, and York University Archives. Explaining their decision to avoid the old visual bromides, Hall and Dodds advise: "The Last Spike is not driven in these pages yet again." What makes the photographs a pleasure to explore is the fact that so many of them are bursting with people and activity. Anyone, for example, who has tried to locate good photographs of the interiors of nineteenth-century factories will realize that the authors have accomplished no mean feat of selection. Inevitably, there will be personal favourites. Mine include the photograph of the forlorn-looking Santa Claus parade on the bald prairie that was Winnipeg's Portage Avenue in 1914 (p. 108), and that ultimate statement of multiculturalism, the photograph of the

Japanese-Canadian boys at Steveston in 1973 showing off their bubble-gum cards of NHL stars Pierre Bouchard and Richard Lemieux (p. 246). Two nagging questions about selection criteria remain unanswered. Is the photograph supposedly showing an office interior in Montreal about 1902 in fact a modern re-enactment (p. 87)? This reviewer is willing to wager that the photograph is not what it purports to be, with apologies to the Bell Telephone Company Archives should he be proven wrong. And why are there no fewer than twelve photographs of Edmonton in the space of seven pages at the end of the book (pp. 245-51)? Given that one of them shows a meeting of the Committee for an Independent Canada, the extent of Mel Hurtig's influence on the selection process becomes a moot point.

Does the book break new ground in its treatment of photographs? I think not. One's suspicions are aroused by the introductory disclaimer: "Our book is *not* an illustrated history, nor is it a mock-antique bow to the nostalgia trade in photographs or a specialized study of photography ... [but] simply a photographic record of Canada." Is this an attempt to avoid providing any basis for criticizing the book? What comes somehow to mind is a recent observation by critic Paul Steuwe that "as long as you confess to your sins in advance, it is perfectly all right to go ahead and commit them."

According to the promotional statement on the attractive and well-designed dust-jacket, the book's images are "complemented by an engrossing text." Hall and Dodds have attempted to relate text to image through the rather mechanical device of transferring to the text all the descriptive information contained in the captions of photographs. The outline accompanying each photograph therefore includes only the location, the date, the institutional reference number, and, whenever known, the name of the photographer. These names, plus the photographs of the Topley Studio (p. 30) and of Ernest Brown's camera collection (p. 74), represent no more than a nod in the direction of the history of photography in Canada.

There are pitfalls in trying to write a text that relies too closely on the act of looking at photographs for inspiration for the narrative. Employed too often, the practice can result in a rather thin text. Certainly, the remark: "There was another use for 'hot air' — transportation" (p. 177) bridges the gap between adjacent photographs of politician William Aberhart and the airship R-100, but it does so in such a flippant way that the reader may well wonder whether Hall and Dodds commit the very sin they criticize. Do comments like that suggest they have carefully considered the particular "virtues and problems" of photographs?

Regrettably, both Hurtig Publishers and T.H. Best Printing Company have served the authors exceedingly poorly. There are undeniable economic constraints on high-quality publishing and printing, but why must we continue to put up with reproductions that reduce fine photographs to muddy shades of gray and black which lack detail and are unable to leap off the page with any snap? The Notman photograph (p. 23) of Ottawa in 1872 exemplifies the unsatisfactory reproduction of many of the photographs in the book. And why is it necessary to print outlines vertically down the sides of photographs, rendering them easy to overlook and difficult to read? Examples abound of lax editing and proofreading. For example, we learn (p. 48) that "a Canadian artillery captain, S. Frank Peters, packed a camera along with his Gatling gun at the battle of Batoche." Whoever let that one through deserves to be shelled by the nine-pounder guns that were the actual armament of Captain James Peters' artillery battery, and perhaps by Captain Arthur Howard's

Gatling gun as well. The airship R-101 did not crash in Normandy (p. 177), but near Beauvais in the département de l'Oise. The names Carmack and Carmacks are misspelled three times on the same page (p. 67), a record surpassed only by the misspelling of the name Aberhart (p. 176) four times on a single page. And the corvette *Cabot* (p. 203) never existed — the ship is actually H.M.C.S. *Cobalt*. These major and minor faults are the more regrettable because they also flawed the previous Hall/Dodds/Hurtig book, *A Picture History of Ontario* (1978).

The Great Illustrated History of Canada has not yet been written. It probably will not be written until archivists and historians take their own advice about the value of understanding the nature of the photographic record in archives. Only then will we see a book which does justice to this country's photographic heritage.

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**Dreams of Empire: Canada before 1700.** ANDRÉ VACHON (in collaboration with VICTORIN CHABOT and ANDRÉ DESROSIERS). Translated from the French by John F. Flinn. Public Archives of Canada series: **Records of Our History**. Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1982. xi, 387 p. ISBN 0 660 11074 1 \$14.95 pa.

*Dreams of Empire: Canada Before 1700* inaugurates a new series with an old tale. It is the first in the Public Archives of Canada's ambitious *Records of Our History* series of travelling exhibitions of archival documents. The Archives hopes the series will interest students and the general public in Canadian history and the primary sources from which that history is written. The exhibition version of *Dreams of Empire*, which I did not have an opportunity to view, was mounted first at the Archives in Ottawa from 3 December 1981 to 4 April 1982. The published catalogue for the exhibition can, however, be reviewed separately.

The volume opens with an introductory essay that provides an overview of the period and its principal developments. The chapters are organized thematically and further divided into subthemes; both are preceded by brief explanations and guides to the illustrative material. Although this occasions some minor overlapping, it allows readers to work through the volume as a whole, to read a chapter or section at a time, or to simply browse at leisure. Each item reproduced is identified by captions that provide a technical description, place the document in context, give a concise summary of the most important contents, and indicate its provenance. Of these, only the title and attribution of authorship for *Premier établissement de la foy dans la Nouvelle-France* (1691) to Chrestien le Clercq need be questioned.

The choice of reproductions matches the judiciousness of the format selected. Text and illustrations are well integrated. The 250 reproductions have been chosen from fifty-two Canadian, American, and European private and public collections. Many are familiar to archivists and historians, but others such as drawings by Father Claude Chauchetière of La Prairie and Louis Nicolas are refreshingly new. All are reproduced to the highest technical standards. It is a delight not only to be able to read the writing on many maps but also to see their subtle colour shading, especially for exquisite specimens such as the "Cantino" map (1502), Pierre