

for themselves. Anyone can “plug in,” enjoy the narrative, and abstract whatever information they need.

Had the rest of the *Guide* followed a similar approach, would a stronger base for the study of local history have been formed? The answer depends on the specific guidance sought by the reader. Much of the information found in the theme chapters could have been distilled into less confusing units and brought together in a short, concise research manual designed for local history committees. Conversely, building on the style of the appendices, an extensive analysis of the structure, evolution, and context of local sources could have been undertaken which would have enabled anyone to enter the complex world of everyday life. The search for a compromise between these two approaches inevitably results in fragmentation. An attempt is made to please several constituencies without satisfactorily assisting any one group. That is the *Guide's* major weakness.

Robert Tapscott
Provincial Archives of Manitoba

Vision of an Ordered Land: The Story of the Dominion Land Survey. J.G. MacGREGOR. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981. xiii, 202 p. ISBN 0 88833 071 5 \$12.95 pa.

The Boundary Hunters: Surveying the 141st Meridian and the Alaskan Panhandle. LEWIS GREEN. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982. xii, 232 p. ISBN 0 7748 0150 6 \$18.95.

One of the most delightful descriptions of the process of boundary creation comes not from the deliberations of politicians or from the notebooks of surveyors, but from the pen of Spike Milligan in *Puckoon*. In this humorous tale of problems in Ireland, Milligan describes the antics of a group of British and Irish boundary commissioners as they struggle for control of a red pencil they were using to mark the Ulster boundary on the face of a map. Their resultant pulls and pushes produce a boundary running through the middle of a cemetery. It was then up to surveyors to demarcate the line on the ground and for the residents of Puckoon to live with a divided cemetery. This fictional account illustrates the two phases of boundary creation: the political and the practical. Looking at a map of Canada one takes for granted the lines that separate Canada from the United States, the lines that separate one province from another, and the lines that separate one township from another. There is an orderliness about these boundaries — a recognition that without them there would be chaos. But little thought is given to how they were determined and even less recognition is accorded the surveyors responsible for their demarcation on the ground. The two books under review attempt to examine how certain Canadian surveys were made and in the process highlight the contributions made by a heroic group of men — the surveyors of Canada.

Of the two, James MacGregor's *Vision of an Ordered Land* is the more general in scope in that it deals with the surveying of western and northern Canada between the years 1869 and approximately 1918. During that fifty-year period, the surveying of the vast prairies was accomplished by federal government and railway company surveyors. It is within the framework of this survey work that the orderly and planned settlement of western Canada took place. The rectangular survey system,

with its division of land into sections, townships, and ranges related to a principal meridian as the line of reference, defined locations for intending settlers and imprinted on the landscape the familiar checkerboard effect which persists today as a reminder of the important role performed by the survey in western Canada.

MacGregor subtitled his book "The Story of the Dominion Land Survey" and the emphasis should be placed on *story*. He focuses on what he calls the "Homeric days" (p. 169) and "old-time glamour" (p. xii) of the surveyor. The book, he says, is "merely a love affair with surveyors and the life they led." (p. xiii). The history of the survey he leaves for others. Armed with such a disclaimer, MacGregor proceeds to clothe his text in the trappings of academic credibility replete with citations to numerous published works, university theses, specialized periodicals on surveying, official government reports, and documents from the provincial archives of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia and the Public Archives of Canada. But even here MacGregor takes liberties by frequently failing to provide proper citations (e.g. p. 92, and p. 106) and, what is worse, by making important statements without any reference to sources (e.g. John A. Macdonald's refusal to permit the use of iron posts, p. 73) or making erroneous statements (e.g. John Macoun was not employed by the Special Survey, p. 44). If MacGregor's is not a history, then is it a story? Anecdote piled on anecdote, no matter how amusing (I particularly like the one about the starving surveyor eating his pet bear) does not a good story make, particularly when most of it has been previously told by others including Don W. Thomson in his *Men and Meridians*. The work of surveyors like E. Deville, W.F. King, J.J. McArthur, and O.J. Klotz deserves a more complete treatment than that received from the hands of MacGregor. The omissions of the irrigation survey work on the St. Mary and Milk Rivers of Alberta by F.H. Peters, a future Commissioner of Irrigation and Surveyor General of Canada, and the forest survey work of Elihu Stewart D.L.S., Superintendent of Forestry, particularly his 1906 investigation in the region drained by the Mackenzie and Yukon rivers, also weaken the book. Furthermore, the process by which a surveyor's field work was translated and transformed into the more understandable and usable form, the map, is never addressed. MacGregor does much better when describing in layperson's terms the complex technical work of the surveyor such as the laying out of the Dominion Land Survey system and the effect on it of converging meridians. Unfortunately, there is not enough of this in the book. The contributions of a good editor would have eliminated the tedious portions of the text, the irksome typographical slips, and other lapses in editing (e.g. 1973 for 1873, p. 26; W.D. King for W.F. King, p. 62; astronomer general for Chief Astronomer, p. 53; no reference to John A. Macdonald in the Index despite his being mentioned at least three times in the text). Finally, the publisher should have invested more in the book's binding, as the spine easily splits resulting in numerous loose pages.

Lewis Green's *The Boundary Hunters* has been accurately subtitled "Surveying the 141st Meridian and the Alaska Panhandle." Green explores the history of the boundary from the confusing provisions of the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1825 until the completion of the main survey work in the 1920s. The political background to the need for the survey work and the growth of Canadian nationalism as a result of the 1903 award are well-known, but Green approaches the topic from a different perspective — the actual demarcation of the 1040-mile boundary by surveyors from both countries. The terrain that the surveyors were required to cover and the ordeals most had to endure in order to put the boundary on the ground leave one in awe of

their achievement. The tremendous amount of information Green has amassed is both the strength and the weakness of the book. The detail provided makes the book a valuable reference work, but the author's preoccupation with dates of arrival and departure from the field, distances travelled, loads packed, and weather conditions encountered for all survey parties makes the book difficult to digest. Green divides his book into two main geographical sections, the Panhandle and the 141st meridian, and then into boundary stations within each section. There are historical as well as practical reasons for taking this approach, but it means the reader jumps back and forth in time, and it mitigates against one developing a coherent idea of the progress of the boundary survey.

Though extensive quotations are used (the longest running to three complete pages of text, pp. 169-72) with the intention of giving the flavour of field experience, their indiscriminate use reveals clearly that Green ought not to have relied so heavily on the surveyors themselves to tell the story because they were not natural storytellers. The surveyor was preparing notes in the field for use later in his official report. However, field notes do not translate well into narrative text. Green would have produced a more readable book had he concentrated on the survey techniques used to establish the boundary and the experiences of some of the principal surveyors such as W.F. King and A.J. Brabazon. It would also have been beneficial to identify the role and responsibilities of the boundary commissioners, for it was on their orders that men risked life and limb.

MacGregor and Green have drawn heavily on archival sources, particularly the field notebooks of surveyors. In each work extensive quotations are given from these sources with little or no attempt at interpretation. It is time for researchers in the history of Canadian surveying to be less devoted to the narrative and more concerned with analyses which can be brought together in the stimulating generalizations needed to advance the field. More analysis is required of the surveying techniques employed by Canadian surveyors and critical evaluations are needed of the contributions to the science of surveying of people like E. Deville, W.F. King, and O.J. Klotz. In regard to Klotz, MacGregor is clearly aware of the rich collection of Klotz papers in the Public Archives of Canada which would provide ample material for a full length biographical work. Also needed are studies of the interrelationship between the surveyor in the field and the bureaucrat in Ottawa, the role of the Board of Examiners for Dominion Land Surveyors and of the surveying profession, and the process by which field experiences were transformed into maps. The works of MacGregor and Green are welcome contributions to the history of surveying in Canada. But much remains to be done. To make this work possible, archivists should follow up on the acquisition leads both authors provide in their identification of valuable source materials such as the federal Department of the Interior records now in the custody of the Alberta Department of Transportation and the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century survey records of the International Boundary Commission which are still with the commission. These records belong in archives.

Robert J. Hayward
Federal Archives Division
Public Archives of Canada