

BRITISH COLUMBIA: ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF GEOGRAPHICAL CHANGE

J. L. Robinson and W. G. Hardwick. Vancouver
Talonbooks, 1973. pp. 63, maps - \$.

Although literature on British Columbia is abundant, the uniqueness of **British Columbia: One Hundred Years of Geographical Change** lies in grouping the essence of this literature into a brief synthesis. One would rightly expect such a synthesis to be voluminous, which is why its unpretentious length is surprising. In their book, Drs. Robinson and Hardwick review the general economic and demographic trends in British Columbia since the period of first European contact and the effect of these trends upon the historic and geographic development of the province, especially the urban centres and their hinterlands.

In a short introduction the authors mention the early explorers who brought the province to the attention of Britain, its subsequent exploitation by fur trappers which instigated the founding of the port of Victoria, and the Cariboo Gold Rush which saw a swift influx of European settlers. They then identify four periods "in which the pace of change accelerated and the consequent geography of the region was greatly modified." These periods are: 1) Early Settlement (1843-1886), 2) Post-Confederation Speculation (1886-1918), 3) The Period of Production Expansion (1919-1946), and 4) Industrial Growth and Functional Integration (1946-1971). These four temporal-economic divisions form the framework for the major portion of the book.

During the period of early settlement the province's three major urban centres were founded; Victoria, New Westminster, and Vancouver. Victoria had strong southern trading ties, particularly with San Francisco. Export items such as coal from Nanaimo and timber from Moodyville (North Vancouver) and Granville (Vancouver) were important in maintaining these ties. Whereas Victoria controlled the province's sea trade, New Westminster controlled the Fraser River traffic. These two settlements constantly vied for commercial dominance until 1886 when the completion of the transcontinental railway caused the overnight rise to importance of Vancouver, its Pacific terminus. Vancouver soon overshadowed Victoria and New Westminster as a commercial, urban centre.

Although British Columbia had technically entered Confederation in 1871, the railway was needed to break the barrier of the Rocky Mountains. Eastern Canada became an important trading area although the southern ties were not broken. Indeed, the United States further strengthened its trading position with a rail line from Seattle to Vancouver. Many smaller lines were added to the growing British Columbian railway system that made the Interior and Coastal regions more accessible and brought further speculation into the province. With this speculation the resource industries boomed. Settlements that had been originally created to supply the gold miners and rail workers

with supplies had lagged after the 'rush', now experienced a sharp increase in population. Ranching and forestry resulted in cities such as Kamloops and Revelstoke while mining created the cities of Rossland and Trail. By the close of World War I the major geographical patterns of economic activity were fairly well established in British Columbia.

This period of speculation was followed by one of 'massive expansion in productivity'. All areas of the province were affected. A major impetus for this rising productivity was the increased development of hydroelectric power. This greater power source resulted in greater industrialization. Because of the development that is today growing exponentially the authors detect a tension in British Columbia between those dedicated to the conservation of the environment and those whose goal is to utilize the environment for profit. Such a dispute would not have been likely in the past but with increasing population pressures upon the province, more people are realizing the impact and consequences of their actions on the landscape.

In the concluding portion of their book, entitled "Functional Structure of British Columbia", the authors discuss the inter-relationships between areas of the Georgia Strait region as well as the Interior sub-regional capitals. This is not particularly well executed. To a resident of the area, even if only briefly, this seems to be merely a statement of the obvious which leads me to my main criticism of the book.

Drs. Robinson and Hardwick have only superficially skimmed the enormous amount of data that they have incorporated in a much too brief booklet. Any single aspect of British Columbian geographical history mentioned could have been more comprehensively expanded. Subsequently one has the impression that this is merely the rough framework for a future, more in depth analysis of geographic change (specifically, British Columbian).

Because the expertise of the authors is without question, the lack of original research or a new approach to the topic comes as a disappointment. Naturally one does not expect every publication to be radically different. However, I do question the value of repetitive works that seem to be published for the sake of publishing. I am referring here to **British Columbia: Studies in Canadian Geography** published in 1972 and edited by Dr. Robinson. This is a compilation of articles by various authors that deal with the geography and geographic history of British Columbia. In it are included articles by Dr. Robinson and Dr. Hardwick that are basically identical to their contributions in **British Columbia: One Hundred Years of Geographical Change**. The motive for this repetition escapes me, particularly as **British Columbia: Studies in Canadian Geography** is by far the more informative book.

Because the authors did not define the purpose of their work, I may be reviewing too critically. For a resident of the province it is doubtful that the book will be informative, but to a new or non-resident it is a good introduction to the province's past.

Possibly Drs. Robinson and Hardwick intended their book to be

considered as a text for a course at the secondary level. The general format of the work does suggest this possibility. Again, as a general background of British Columbia this would be an adequate base from which to branch into further study. However as a means through which to learn nomothetic geographic principles I would not recommend **One Hundred Years of Geographical Change**. It is too descriptive in its approach and only briefly hints at the geographic laws and theories that would be necessary to explain geographic change, not only in British Columbia, but globally.

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