

BOOKS

LIVRES

Veillette, John and Gary White with commentaries by Harold Kalman, Robin Fisher, and Warren Sommer. Early Indian Village Churches: Wooden Frontier Architecture in British Columbia. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977.

Downs, Barry. Sacred Places: British Columbia's Early Churches. Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 1980.

Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in A History of Building Types sees the study of architecture by type to be particularly revealing of the ways in which architecture reflects the character of society. While church architecture was not one of the twenty types he examined, due to the tremendous number of church structures to be found, surely no type is more expressive of the society which creates it.

Two recent books, Early Indian Village Churches and Sacred Places cover this area, and although different in approach, provide an interesting compliment to one another. It must be said immediately that Early Indian Village Churches, while nominally dealing with the narrower subject range of the two volumes, is an immeasurably richer book. Sacred Places, while distinguished by truly beautiful photographs, is hampered by a text too tightly restricted by a desire for a chronological progression, and made doubly frustrating by the lack of any footnotes to at least aim the reader towards the source of answers to questions left hanging in the text. Granted that the purpose of this volume is to be a popular history of religious structures in British Columbia, from those created by its earliest native inhabitants, to the large Gothic Revival churches being built by approximately 1900, and also granted that many of the anecdotes related are both charming and interesting, one cannot help but wish for a fuller treatment of the subject. The photographs, while lovely, are not numbered in the text which leads to confusion and some searching through the pages for the visual material, which also includes excellent archival photographs. Mechanical gremlins lead to some unfortunate typographical errors and to the double insertion of one fifteen page section of the text.

Early Indian Village Churches benefits from a highly coherent organization which frees it from any chronological restraints and instead allows separate essays on the history of missions in British Columbia, mission church architecture, and

on the state of the churches today. These are preceded by a cogent and illuminating Foreword by Harold Kalman and followed by individual studies of selected churches within eight specific geographic areas. There runs throughout an intelligent appreciation of the diverse social, economic and material questions related in the creation of a structure. Thus, for example, the Lillooet-Brigade Trail area of southern British Columbia is identified in a brief entry and followed by nine separate sections dealing with churches such as the Gothic Revival Church of the Holy Cross (1905-06) in Skookumchuck. Church of the Holy Cross is fully described and its design perceptively analyzed with the aid of excellent black and white photographs. As a social document, as well as an architectural record, this volume serves as a fascinating study of the period between 1860 and 1900 when approximately 80 per cent of the province's Indians became at least nominal Christians, and churches were erected as a monument to this conversion.

Robert Hunter

The British Columbia Parliament Buildings edited by Martin Segger, Vancouver, Arcon, 1979, 88p.

This recent book on the history of the British Columbia Parliament Buildings in Victoria is of interest to the politician, scholar and tourist alike. Not only does it give to politicians, other parliamentarians and civil servants a sense of the many economic, political and philosophical forces behind the erection of the building in which they work, but it also accurately documents and perceptively analyzes the architectural forces behind its design. The book also serves as a verbal and visual introduction to the building to potential visitors as well as a valuable memento for those who have visited.

Following a supportive preface by Premier William Bennett, the book describes the construction of the Victoria building within the Canadian architectural context of the period 1875 to 1915. Several other legislative buildings were erected at this time including those in Quebec, Ottawa, Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg. We are given not

only a brief history and architectural description of the British Columbia building, which was designed by Francis Mawson Rattenbury in 1893, but also a sense of nineteenth century taste and aesthetics. Spaces were smaller. Detail was extravagant. We become aware of the American and British architectural precedents and influences upon this building which were very much appreciated upon its completion. We are given a rare opportunity to view the building through the eyes of a late nineteenth century newspaper reporter. The book reproduces in full an 1898 account of a tour through the building. All the interior spaces are described in detail with respect to their design and function. Factual explanatory notes are supplied in the margin by the editor.

The following chapter proceeds to explain some of the political history, form of government, and legislative assembly procedures in British Columbia. The remaining chapters describe concisely but thoroughly the history of the first government buildings in Victoria, the competition which was held to select a new design, the biography and architectural work of the chosen architect, and the many craftsmen who were selected to add to the building their metalwork, sculpture, carving, painting and glasswork. The book concludes with a brief description of the restoration work which was carried out in the building after 1973. Two appendices list the many competitors for the original design and describe objects and areas of interest on the surrounding grounds.

This small, compact but well organized book contains a wealth of information. Unfortunately for some, there are no footnotes. However, a very adequate bibliography is presented in a narrative format as acknowledgements. The high quality paper and large print make it easy to read. One of the highlights of the book is the forty excellent colour photographs. There are numerous other sepia toned historical photos and drawings, and several black and white photos. Unfortunately, the illustration captions are brief or non-existent. The book is available in hard and soft cover, the latter having a fairly durable binding.

Martin Segger, the editor, received his Master's degree in art history from The Warburg Institute, University of London. He now lectures in Renaissance and Baroque art and is Director of the Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery at the University of Victoria. As one of Canada's leading architectural historians and an active preservationist,

he has written several books and articles on British Columbia architects and architecture. Other contributors include George Giles, F.R.A.I.C., former Deputy Minister of Public Works for British Columbia; Douglas Franklin, an instructor in architectural history at Camosun College in Victoria; and Robert Watt, Chief Curator, Vancouver Centennial Museum. By selecting and combining contributors with different viewpoints and areas of expertise, Mr. Segger has put together a well-rounded publication.

The British Columbia Building, as one of the more historically and architecturally significant buildings in Canada, deserves the thorough and beautifully illustrated treatment it has received in this book.

Diana L. Bodnar, Vancouver, British Columbia

J. Edward Martin's recent book The Railway Stations of Western Canada, an architectural history is a thorough study of railroads and their development in western Canada. Mr. Martin has chosen to treat his subject chronologically and we follow the development of railway stations from tents and box cars located at sidings to magnificent structures such as Winnipeg's Union Station (1911) by Warren and Wetmore.

Mr. Martin divides his book into chapters that are subdivided under Parts I, II and III. Part I examines the period from 1875-1900, Part II from 1900-1940, and Part III from 1940-1980. While it is useful to divide one subject into manageable segments, the author goes to extremes and the end result is a text that reads unevenly. For example, Part II consists of 48 pages and is divided into seven short chapters with such titles as "Competitions Spur" and "The Smaller Railways". Each is treated as a completely separate topic and neither flows into the next segment nor out of the previous one. This method of division coupled with short paragraphs makes the book read in a choppy manner that is often unsettling. However, Mr. Martin should be forgiven his style as he solves the perennial Canadian problem of trying to remember where the Grand Trunk, Canadian Pacific, Great Northern, etc. went and when they were built.

Mr. Martin should also be commended for his use of illustrations. Most stations mentioned in the text are accompanied by contemporary or historical photos, line drawings, elevations or floor plans. These serve to illuminate the incredible detail with which Martin describes his subject.

Martin's is a detailed study, dwelling on particulars but he falls into the trap that so many architectural historians fall into--over-labelling. For example, he refers to the GWWDR station in Brandon as "Frontier Gothic" and the BCER station in New Westminster as "Renaissance Industrial". Never having seen these terms before, it is difficult to decide what such buildings ought to look like.

Despite its faults, The Railway Stations of Western Canada is a very useful volume since it honours the railway station - at one time, the most important building in every town in the West.

Sally Coutts

May be ordered from: Studio E. Martin, White Rock, B.C. \$15.95 special price to SSAC members.

ENQUIRIES:

The Australians with Frank Lloyd Wright is researching the influence of Wright in Australia. They are anxious to hear from any Australians (including expatriates) who worked for Wright. Contact: Donald L. Johnson, Senior Lecturer in Architectural History, Flinders University, Bedford Park, South Australia 5042

Railway Hotels (1880-1900) in the Chateau style. M.A. student requests information. Please contact D. Charest, 10921 University Avenue, Edmonton T6G 1Y1

Michael Serio is preparing his thesis on the renovation and retro-fitting of existing single family dwellings, with particular emphasis on energy efficiency. Any information may be sent to: Michael Serio, 43 Brandy Crescent, Woodbridge Ontario L4L 3C5

Note: Credit for the book reviews in the last issue should have been given to Trevor Boddy.