

## REVIEWS - COMPTES RENDUS

Woodward Stores Limited. The Shopping Guide of the West:

Woodward's Catalogue 1898-1953. Introduction by Robert D. Watt. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977. xxviii, 160, 174p., illus. ISBN 0-88894-159-5. \$9.95. (Reprint of the 1912 and 1929 catalogues.)

Hudson's Bay Company. The Autumn and Winter Catalogue 1910-1911 of the Hudson's Bay Company. Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1977. 255p., illus. ISBN 0-920486-00-2. \$8.95

Merchandise catalogues are among the most useful tools of a researcher or museum cataloguer working with early twentieth-century domestic artifacts or economic material history. Thus the appearance of two recent reprints of mail order catalogues which served primarily the Canadian West is a welcome event. The Shopping Guide of the West, which includes Woodward's 1912 and 1929 catalogues, and the Hudson's Bay Company Autumn and Winter Catalogue for 1910-11 give two views of material history from the 1910-12 period in Western Canada. The Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg offered service throughout the North-West until 1913 through a mail order catalogue business begun in 1881. Woodward's Department Stores Limited of Vancouver, calling itself "The Great Mail Order House of the West," operated a catalogue service between 1898 and 1953 primarily in British Columbia and Alberta. Together the two reprints provide an extremely useful comparison of the items from which residents of this large, developing region could choose. Observations can also be made regarding popular styles, prices, social conditions, and, in general, the types of economic activities supported by the two merchandising companies.

The terms of business for both companies, reflecting the standard of the period, were "Strictly Cash." Money orders

rather than personal cheques brought goods by mail, express, or freight. Both firms had a policy of exchanges or complete refunds for most items. The companies indicated a flexibility which appears lost in current merchandising. "Write for Anything. We are Almost Sure to Have it. Anyway, we'll get it," was the optimistic policy printed at the bottom of every fifth page of the Woodward's catalogue. Guarantees were almost as optimistic. Cots "guaranteed to support over half a ton," blankets that were "the warmest in the world," and stove doors that would support the weight of a 225-lb. man were good samples of the advertising rhetoric of 1910-12.

A comparison indicates that Woodward's prices were slightly higher for most articles. This probably reflected higher original shipping costs for many items and a year's inflation in a buoyant regional economy. Studies of regional prices related to wages and incomes could be assisted through such comparisons of standard catalogue items. A direct comparison of regional differences in product preference is difficult because the Woodward's is a spring catalogue and the H.B.C. is for autumn and winter. In an interesting and useful historical introduction to the Woodward's catalogues, Robert Watt cites examples of regional specialization in such categories as types of clothing, the names given to products, and the sources of supply. Examples of regional appeal to consumers can be found in the H.B.C. catalogue which offered "Winnipeg," "Manitoba," and "Alberta" pillows, a "Western Beauty" doll, a "Western Treasure" range, and "Red River" blanket coats.

Footwear provided a good indication of the types of economic activities carried out in the region at the time. The H.B.C. had boots for "the farm, the driver, the teamster, and the outdoor working man," including genuine "Indian made" moccasins or skins to make your own. Woodward's offered boots for prospectors, miners, loggers, cowboys, and timber cruisers as well as clothing specifically for engineers, firemen, and

mechanics. A fisherman could be outfitted in boots and oiled coats from either company. Only the H.B.C., however, provided a choice of two models of full dress, black evening suits or tuxedos for men, possibly a reflection that the company dealt with an upper economic level in western society or that Woodward's was, as it advertised, a "Store for the People."

Considering the relative importance which the fur trade still held in the western resource-based economy at the turn of the century, a surprising aspect of the H.B.C. merchandise is the great variety of imported furs used in clothing compared to the use of beaver, muskrat, or other Canadian pelts. It is true that beaver appeared in collars and in women's hats, but it was far less common than such exotic furs as Chinese or Russian dog, Russian pony, Iceland lamb, Japanese bear, Australia opossum, English seal, and, for the man who had everything, "Natural Wombat Fur." A grizzly bear sleigh robe could still be purchased for cold weather outings, but the buffalo robes offered were African Cape Buffalo. Other natural materials not yet replaced by synthetics were sponges, tortoise shell, and wool, felt, or wood fibre mattresses.

No electrical items appeared in either catalogue although urban centres in the West had electrically-powered lighting and public transportation well before 1910-12. Human strength was the primary source of power for most domestic machines advertised -- which included washing machines, cream separators, carpet sweepers, and mangles. The same was true of machines offered for the mechanic, the carpenter, or the blacksmith. Hand- or foot-powered drills, blowers, grinders, and pumps all contributed to the physical fitness of the working man of 1910-12 whether he lived in British Columbia or on the prairies. The enterprising electrician or mechanic could study the mysteries of electric telegraphy or select from a variety of books offered by the H.B.C. on steam engines and farm engines. Woodward's, on the other hand, offered nearly a half page of Bibles, Testaments,

and Hymn Books, indicating that concerns of the spirit remained as popular as technological tracts.

Popular culture, as reflected in the 1910-12 catalogues, was little touched by the automobile. The H.B.C. described one "Automobile Hand-Book" in which "Special attention is given to road troubles, battery, clutch, starting and ignition troubles. A few minutes spent reading this book will often save hours wasted on the road." "The Needful Auto Veil", in ten colours, was for the woman who planned a motor trip in an automobile like the one shown with a "stylish" dress. Woodward's advertised only men's or boys' auto caps as an indication of the dawn of the automobile era. Photographing automobiles or other marvels of the age was already popular and the H.B.C. had a wide range of cameras and photography supplies.

The state of sanitary facilities available in the West is illustrated by the "Odorless Sanitary Water Closets" and chamber pots offered for sale. Large bottles of scents and perfumes for men and women were available to cover the essence of a society where bathing for most was an infrequent occurrence, especially during winter. The vast array of drugs, chemicals, and patent medicines indicated that the health of both man and beast was still primarily the concern of the individual. Many patent medicine brand names from the period survive today, providing an unexpected continuity with the past. Others have been prohibited or have mercifully disappeared, including the amazing "Prince Rupert Drops" offered by the H.B.C., a one-bottle emergency kit if the claim is to be believed:

It cures coughs, colds, catarrh, croup, bronchitis, asthma, dysentery, diarrhoea, summer complaint, cholera, headache, piles, lumbago, spasms, cramps, pains, frost bites, burns, scalds, sprains, bruises, rheumatism, sciatica, neuralgia, pain in the joints and limb, and bites of poisonous insects.

All that for only twenty-five cents per bottle! Both catalogues listed a variety of worm treatments, bed bug poison, fly oils,

system vitalizers, rat poison, nerve and dandruff cures, and other cures and remedies to meet the needs of man and beast in a pioneer setting.

Toys and leisure items gave an indication of activities which could brighten the work-oriented society. Toys usually mirror the adult world and wooden express wagons, box wagons, wheelbarrows, and toy gardening tool sets offered by Woodward's indicated the values of the time. Woodward's claimed to offer more toys "than would fill the book" and drew particular attention to its "decidedly strong line" of iron toys, which included banks, fire engines, and trains, some with friction motors as an improvement over the older clockwork mechanisms. The H.B.C. included an "Esquimo Doll" completely dressed in fur, celluloid swimming toys, miniature steamer trunks, cap pistols, pop guns, and a simplex typewriter.

Watt's introduction to the Woodward's catalogues indicates that the company kept in touch with recreational activity and introduced equipment as sports grew popular. He points out that "curiously enough, bicycles, which were tremendously popular between 1890 and 1910, were not sold until the 1930s," a policy apparently followed by the H.B.C. as well. Illustrations in the catalogues, particularly in the clothing sections, seemed to promote certain leisure activities or to make them appear fashionable. Woodward's illustrated tennis, riding, playing ball, and golf while the H.B.C. used hockey, sledding, reading, rolling a hoop, and the ever popular "shovelling snow." Shoes and equipment were available for football, boxing, riding, hockey, golf, lacrosse, curling, and tennis. Camping, hunting, and fishing gear could have been used for either leisure or work, depending upon the buyer.

What does it all mean? Catalogues are, at best, an indication of the range of items and materials offered at a given time in a given region. The introduction to the Woodward's reprint (a feature lacking in the Hudson's Bay catalogue) makes

the former even more useful by adding background information and by asking questions which other researchers can pursue. However, the fundamental, unanswered question concerns the relative acceptance or popularity of an individual item or style. Museums and private collectors continue to acquire objects simply because they have survived and can be identified with a particular period, often through the use of catalogues such as these. The survival of the object, however, may indicate a lack of popularity or use. This is particularly true of shoes, clothing, and gadgets. The continued appearance of an item from year to year in catalogues certainly can be a guide, but relative price changes or changes in material may also affect popularity. Research needs to be done into sales and distribution of catalogue merchandise to establish popular acceptance more clearly.

The Woodward's and the Hudson's Bay Company catalogues are useful resources for the study of material history as well as an entertaining means of gaining a better understanding of our common past. Where else can one find offered a book for seventeen cents entitled, "How to Make \$500 Yearly Profit with 12 Hens," or a book which "fully explains how maidens become happy wives, and bachelors happy husbands in a brief space of time and by easy methods." With such advice readily available it is no wonder that the Canadian West of 1910-12 was a boom time for nearly everyone.

David Richeson  
 History Division  
 National Museum of Man

. . . . .