

An Introduction is enterprising -- in that it was undertaken in Canada at all -- and intellectually promising. It also is timid and unfinished. We need a revised and somewhat expanded version of this book, one that brings us up-to-date with the field and one that is willing to discuss the full potential of archaeology -- below, on, and above the ground -- for advancing our understanding of what happened to people in the past.

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Western Canadian History: Museum Interpretations. D.R. Richeson, ed. Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1979. National Museum of Man Mercury Series, History Division Paper No. 27. 158p., illus. ISSN 0316-1900.
Reviewed by Alan F.J. Artibise.

It is a fond assumption of academic historians that the public read their books. It is not a very accurate one. Best-sellers in the field of scholarly publishing are volumes that sell in the neighbourhood of 5,000 copies. Since one of the major goals of historians is to interpret and present a society's past to all its citizens, concerned practitioners of the craft of history must look to other means to get their messages to the general public. There are many ways that this goal can be achieved. Some historians are frequent public speakers; others act as consultants for films and television. In recent years a significant number have contributed to Canada's Visual History, a joint project of the National Film Board and the National Museum of Man. This series produces slide sets which are now in use at all teaching levels, providing the results of recent academic research to large numbers of primary, secondary, college, and university students. Yet, in terms of impact and of numbers reached, museums remain the most effective way to reach the general public. For this reason alone, academic historians can no longer afford to ignore these institutions.

In western Canada historians have particularly strong opportunities to work with and learn from museums. Not only are there numerous museums, but many institutions -- ranging from the large, government-sponsored, provincial museums to small, privately operated, local museums -- are still relatively flexible in terms of their programmes of artifact collection and research, the delineation of exhibit themes, and the provision of background publications. In each of these areas cooperation between museum curators and professional historians would be of benefit to both the curators and the historians, and, most importantly, to the museum visitors. A key area where cooperation is needed is in the provision of synthesis. Provincial and local museums, by their very nature, concentrate on limited geographical areas and the theme of interdependence between the West and the rest of Canada, or between the West and the rest of the world, is dealt with only rarely. While it is probably neither feasible nor desirable to deal with such broad themes in particular institutions, the exhibits that already exist or are planned can be supplemented and complemented by audio-visual presentations or attractive publications. Professional historians can act as partners in museum work by orienting their research in specific directions and by preparing material that relates directly to museum exhibits. (A not unimportant side benefit is that if such publications find their way into museum bookshops, the historian will have greatly expanded the market for his work.) But if such cooperation is to take place, historians have a good deal to learn about museums. Fortunately, there is now an excellent place to start this education in the most recent addition to the National Museum of Man's Mercury Series. Not only is the volume distributed gratis, but it is a fine introduction to the West's major museums and it should be required reading for all historians.

Western Canadian History: Museum Interpretations consists of an introduction by the editor and six articles. The introduction, written by David Richeson who is Western Canadian Historian in the History Division of the National Museum of Man,

is an especially valuable summary of the reasons for a lack of understanding between professional historians and museums. Perhaps the key to the sharp separation of academic historiography and museum historiography has to do with the use by museums of artifacts. For most historians, material history is a new area and, not surprisingly, it is either ignored or dismissed since these approaches to it are more convenient than attempting the difficult task of understanding. It is to be hoped that the publication of this volume (together with the Material History Bulletin itself) will break down some of the existing barriers so that a point will soon be reached where material history is seen to be as legitimate and as necessary a branch of the broader field of human history as, say, cliometrics has become. Richeson's introduction also contains an overview of the factors that affect the development of museum exhibits (such as the quality of the artifact collection, size of budget, and availability of resource people), and a survey of the themes presented in western museums. The introduction also mentions themes that are conspicuous by their absence, including labour, education, religion, secondary industry, commercial activity, and the service industries.

The editor's succinct overview is followed by six detailed discussions of how segments of western Canadian history have been presented in particular museums: "Exhibits as Overviews: The Case of British Columbia Modern History," by Daniel T. Gallacher; "Vancouver Centennial Museum History Galleries: A Critique," by Robert D. Watt; "Glenbow's 'History of Western Canada' Gallery," by Hugh A. Dempsey; "History Gallery Themes: The Provincial Museum of Alberta," by Robert B. Davidson; "A Survey of Transportation in Saskatchewan: An Exhibit Storyline, Western Development Museum, Moose Jaw," by Diana Matthews; and "Interpretative Themes in Socio-Economic History at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature," by Philip L. Eyler. It is impossible in a few pages to discuss each of these articles properly, but, taken together, the contributions to this volume do suggest several overarching themes that can be discussed.

All the articles mention the fact that museum curators do not see their exhibits as either definitive or static. Indeed, several of the authors offer frank critiques, pointing out existing weaknesses and omissions and delineating what remains to be done. Despite the fact that there is a continuing need for larger budgets and more gallery space, none of the articles dwells on these obvious facts or use them as excuses. In part, of course, this is a reflection of the museums discussed. All are relatively large and wealthy institutions. It would be interesting to learn of the situation in regard to space and budgets in smaller, less wealthy museums. The point is, however, that the museums discussed in this volume are realistically focusing on utilizing the space and resources they have, rather than sitting back waiting for increased funding to "solve" present problems. Indeed, the need to utilize fully existing resources -- in terms of space, staff, and artifacts -- may, in fact, be beneficial. Instead of rushing to fill new galleries with newly-acquired artifacts, and doing so without proper planning and research, the museums can concentrate on improving existing exhibits. The 1980s, then, will be an era of review and consolidation and this is to be welcomed. It is to be hoped, however, that the review process includes as wide a range of historical specialists as possible.

Western Canadian History: Museum Interpretations is a stimulating volume that can be highly recommended. It most certainly will be welcomed by anyone interested in western Canadian museums and should be welcomed by everyone interested in western Canadian history. But as useful as this volume is, it does have weaknesses that deserve to be noted since this collection should be followed by similar volumes that deal with other regions and other institutions. Since the volume suggests by its title that it deals with the interpretation of the history of western Canada by museums, it would have been useful for the reader to have been provided with an annotated list of all western museums, together with some analysis of how the ones discussed in

detail in this collection are or are not representative of the larger, regional situation. A second omission, in all save the article on the British Columbia Provincial Museum, are lists of pamphlets, guides, books, etc. produced by the museums to supplement their displays. Finally, a general bibliography dealing with western Canadian museums should have been included.

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"The World of Children: Toys and Memories of Childhood,"
 Vancouver Centennial Museum. Curator: Ivan W. Sayers.
 Designer: Mary Paddon. Opened: May 1978. No catalogue.
 Reviewed by Zane Lewis.

"The World of Children: Toys and Memories of Childhood" opened at the Vancouver Centennial Museum on 26 May 1978 in order to coincide with the International Children's Festival held in adjacent Vanier Park. Originally scheduled to last for two months, repeated requests from the public extended the exhibit to a year. It was designed to be a random reflection on what it was like to be a child with no attempt made to narrow the focus. A more specific approach would have required access to a collection more comprehensive than the Centennial Museum possessed. Instead, a thematic approach was selected covering the major facets of a child's world. Important gaps were filled by making some excellent institutional and private loans. Because of the Festival, it was also decided to include ethnological material from around the world.

Captions were provided and some of the cases contained appropriate poems but there was no storyline. This omission did not adversely affect the exhibit since studies seem to indicate that the majority of museum visitors prefer looking to reading. I repeatedly asked myself if copy would have enhanced the exhibit and concluded that because of its general nature it was unlikely