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Review of

Vodden, Christy and Ian Dyck. 2006. *A World Inside: A 150-Year History of the Canadian Museum of Civilization*. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Pp.104, 129 illustrations, bibliography and index, \$29.95 soft cover, ISBN 0660195585

This handsomely produced and attractively presented book provides the historical context for developments that led to the emergence of the Canadian Museum of Civilization-le Musée Canadien des civilisations (CMC-MCC) since the mid 1980s.

It is, however, a short study. While fast-paced text is interspersed with numerous photographs that add a welcome dimension to the story, the purpose here is not in-depth history or analysis. This is historical overview in which the pages turn easily. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but it does mean that the true history of Canada's "national museum" in a style and scope akin to Morris Zaslow's *Reading the Rocks* (1975), a history of the Geological Survey of Canada, remains to be written. One can only hope that the missing of such an obvious benchmark as a 150th birthday won't mean that this necessary study will be put off indefinitely. It also means that the serious student must refer elsewhere to a series of other works for specific aspects of the story and for the biographies of some of its major players.

The genesis of today's CMC-MCC can be found in the early work of the Geological Survey of Canada, and in the Canadian exhibit at the first of the great international expositions in London in 1851. Realizing that politicians and public alike would respond positively to displays of the Survey's work, William Logan and his successors, Alfred Selwyn and George Dawson, were keen to add the creation of a small museum to its activities. Although geological exploration and the search for exploitable minerals were always the Survey's prime focus, it was inevitable that its staff in the field would collect native artifacts and record, in their writings and photographs, impressions and details of native life. Thus the Survey moved into the realm of anthropology and its first display dates from the early 1860s. After the Survey moved to Ottawa in 1881, its collections expanded to include all aspects of natural and human history. George Dawson's interest in anthropology was surpassed only by his passion for geology, and during his

twenty-six-year career at the Survey—the last six as director—he saw to it that much anthropological information was appended to its annual reports. By the end of the 19th century a number of other public and private ethnological collections had been added to those of the Survey, and it was these that became the foundation of the work of the Anthropology Division (1910) and the focus of its displays in the new Victoria Memorial Museum Building that opened to the public in 1912. The first three chapters of the book successfully chronicle the story from the 1860s to this momentous event—the arrival of a dedicated museum building, even though it was obliged to house not only the Survey's human and natural history collections and displays, but also the headquarters of the Survey itself and the National Gallery. It wasn't until 1959 and 1960 respectively that, in the wake of the Massey Commission's report on the lamentable state of Canada's museums, the Survey and Gallery moved out allowing the natural and human history museums to fully occupy the east and west wings respectively.

Four chapters document this remarkable fifty-year period which saw the National Museum of Canada (formally recognized as such in 1927) survive two world wars and an economic depression, yet experience the amazing scholastic achievements resulting from the field work and research of such giants as Edward Sapir, Diamond Jenness and Marius Barbeau. The management and display of the collections, the creation of a library and the introduction of school and public programming that gradually spread beyond Ottawa thanks to the work of Harlan Smith, are all interestingly, if briefly, covered. By 1960 the fight for funds and staff and space for its exhibits (if not for its collections, which were housed in buildings all over the capital) allowed for a certain stability. Budgets had increased dramatically and the human history side of the museum was sponsoring archaeological and ethnological research across the country and a key folklore program focused primarily in Quebec and the Maritimes.

Unfortunately only two short chapters are devoted to the tumultuous years of the 1960s and 1970s. These crucial decades witnessed the impact of the 1967 centennial of Confederation on matters of historical interest to Canadians, the exhibit design revolution inspired by Expo 67, and the creation of the separate “Museum of Man” (which became the true and immediate predecessor of the CMC-MCC), as well as the creation of an administrative National Museums Corporation and the introduction of the National Museum Policy of 1972. There is barely enough space given to develop a basic chronology of these changes let alone deal effectively with the issues involved. There is reference to the resurgence of research and the importance of the *Mercury* series of booklets that helped to publish it, as well as the complete recreation of the permanent exhibits when the Museum of Man reopened in 1974 after a long and costly renovation. These developments stabilized the museum and allowed it to consolidate its role, not only in Ottawa but also in relationship to museums across the country as part of the national interest in “democratization and decentralization.”

The 1970s were a decade of revolutionary change in the museum community. Governments at all levels invested heavily; new approaches to collections management and conservation, to exhibit design (which gave the Museum its stunning and provocative “Children of the Raven” Hall in 1975) and to educational programming and museum publishing, brought a whole new generation of museum workers onto the scene who demanded a new approach to museum operations. The National Museum of Man experienced all these changes, but the fundamental problems of inadequate space—even in a newly renovated building—and the continued housing of staff and collections in other parts of Ottawa were weaknesses that couldn’t be, and weren’t, overlooked by the Museum’s energetic director, Bill Taylor. These developments, along with the bitter struggle within and without the National Museums Corporation that ultimately led to its demise in 1990 and paved the way for a new era in the life of Canada’s national institutions, clearly merit more than a few paragraphs.

In the end, in finding the solutions to its problems and challenges in a dramatic new building in a high profile location, the National Museum of Man became the victim of its own success. The developments that followed the announcement of a new museum (1982) with a new name (1986) constituted an enormous challenge, one that has yet

to be confronted in a completely successful manner. Suddenly the museum had a destiny of its own. With collections numbering more than two million artifacts, the challenge—and expectation—was that the story of Canada’s human experience could be told creatively and dynamically. It is a challenge that doesn’t lend itself to the telling in a few pages; as a result, the presentation of beautiful and necessary photographs only serve to squeeze the effectiveness of an already limited text. The whole treatment becomes far too superficial.

The final chapter, therefore, has to be considered a disappointment. It is written as if the evolution of the Museum of Man into a themed attraction and “must see” tourist destination in Parc Laurier was an inevitable progression, and that George MacDonald’s energetic leadership that stressed “edutainment” and dazzling the public, was the only way to go. Perhaps in some form it was, given the expectations of the site and the iconic nature of the building. When the inevitable disconnect between huge expectations and inadequate funding obliged the museum to make draconian cuts and find new sources of revenue, it is hard to agree with the authors’ contention that:

the Canadian Museum of Civilization remains true to the vision of its founders. It continues to be *first and foremost* a research institution that puts its work on display for the benefit, enlightenment and education of all Canadians. (87, emphasis added)

In fact they don’t really believe this themselves as, a few pages prior to this statement, they write:

Faced with huge programming needs, the Museum took a hard look at its priorities, organization and operating methods. The result was a *shift in emphasis away from research and collections* to exhibitions development and public programming, accompanied by a more business-driven management structure. (72, emphasis added)

The lack of enough space to do the subject justice now becomes a real problem and means that the final pages of the book read more like a glossy promotional booklet—short on text and heavy on large photos—than an effective historical synthesis. It isn’t helped by the fact the book’s final four pages are devoted to the current director’s “Imagining Our Future.” In a history of this kind, a postscript can certainly be expected; this one is too long and at time borders on the self-serving approach of a speech to a Rotary Club luncheon. A large percentage of the CMC-MCC complex houses its collections and curatorial staff, but little time or

space in this section of the book are devoted to the nature, scope and importance of these collections and the business of curatorship. Instead we get a full page of happy people watching an IMAX film!

The CMC-MCC is a huge, complex and multifaceted business, and it is maybe too easy and perhaps unfair to descend to petty criticism. On a number of levels it is a highly successful attraction made possible by the hard work, energy and dedication of numerous people to a vision of increasing public awareness and participation in the process of creating and sharing new knowledge and teaching thousands of Canadians about the human experience in Canada. Contemporary history is notoriously difficult to write, particularly if the goal is, in a few pages, to touch all the bases and serve the public relations requirements of the museum today. This means that it is doubly difficult to explore the positives and negatives that have arisen from some of the decisions. Some critics, for example, have suggested that the decision to create the Canada Hall as a series of constructed environments reduces the story of Canada to the stereotypes of an elementary school textbook—others maintain it provides for visitor engagement and the sort of innovative interpretation provided by the actors of “Dramamuse.” Both are true, but if one covers whole pages with a single picture and devotes a lot of space to thoughts about the future, there is no room for such discussion in this book. It also means that the real challenges of developing a First Nations Hall in full cooperation with Canada’s

native peoples cannot be adequately explored, or indeed whether a national museum—a place for artifacts and their interpretation—is really the right location for an IMAX theatre, or a Great Hall that might provide for a dramatic sense of space, but which apparently best serves their interests as a reception or banquet facility.

These subjects deserve some debate. Some will say that this kind of book is not the place to engage such discussion; the desire is to “feel good” and present an uncomplicated narrative. However, in a couple of page-long sections the authors actually do step away from the narrative to highlight late 19th century “Important Developments Outside the Museum,” and a more recent thorny issue, the “Question of Ownership” surrounding native artifacts. The fact that the latter is not dealt with very effectively is less important than the fact that the museum’s approach to a difficult museological subject was raised. A couple more such issues might have been the “Place and Importance of Research” or the “Role of Entertainment in Education.”

This is certainly not a book without merit and the authors must have felt conflicted as they tried to meet a variety of goals, size and salability among them. But it falls down in the CMC-MCC years—in the very years in which it should succeed—under the weight of trying to “do” history and public relations at the same time. The first three quarters of the book, therefore, are the most interesting, satisfying and successful.

S. HOLYCK HUNCHUCK

Review of

Rochon, Lisa. 2005 *Up North: Where Canada’s Architecture Meets the Land*. Toronto: Key Porter.

Pp. 304, index, footnotes and bibliography, colourplates and black-and-white illus., cloth \$55, ISBN 1-55263-690-9. Foreword by Lise Anne Couture.

Lisa Rochon is a professor of architecture at the University of Toronto and the architectural critic for *The Globe and Mail* newspaper. She comes to this, her first book, with a *certificat d’études politiques*, a combined bachelors degree in French and journalism and a master’s degree in urban design. Despite such accomplishments, Rochon’s *Up North: Where Canada’s Architecture Meets the Land* is confused and confusing.

Rochon says the book’s “singular exploration” is of Canadian architecture that “aligns with the landscape,” (17), and adds that “the work celebrated in this book depends on its intimacy with the land, and with Canadians themselves” (23). From this, one might expect *Up North* to concern itself with architectural responses to the Canadian experience, climate and geography, through, for example, the use of natural building materials or the sensitive