

added a fifth — the position of the observer, the four cardinal points always considered relative to where the viewer stood. Paraphrasing Lang, how do we fail to consider the position of “the observer” in the realm of writing?

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Calam, J. (Ed.). (1991). *Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a rural school inspector, 1915-36*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 212 pp., \$15.95 (softcover).

Alex Lord was a provincial school inspector for the province of British Columbia from 1915 to 1936 and principal of the Vancouver Provincial Normal School from 1936 to 1945. It was during his principalship at the normal school that Lord promoted the need for teacher training sensitive to the realities of rural life. It was to this end that he drew upon his own vast experience in creating a collection of stories and adventures designed to prepare the novice normalite for the prospect of rural appointment.

John Calam, professor emeritus of the Department of Social and Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, has organized these memoirs according to the regions throughout which Alex Lord travelled. He begins with a somewhat lengthy 32-page introduction in which he presents a biography of Lord, a description of the educational system of the time, and his own assessment of Lord's educational philosophy and its impact upon that system. Most importantly, the introduction shows why this book needed to be published.

Alex Lord's British Columbia was painstakingly compiled, edited, and notated by a large number of people who obviously have a great deal of affection for the man. Calam has organized and edited these memoirs with a loving and reverent hand. Unfortunately, Alex Lord's memoirs lack human interest. He writes in the plodding, bureaucratic style of a man who has produced many a government report. He painstakingly describes his method of transportation and the length of delay at each stop, so that many of his stories seem to be justifying why he took so long to get where he was going. There is scant fleshing out of the people he meets or even his own emotional state at the time. For the most part he seems bored and the feeling becomes infectious. Even experiences which were probably wildly exciting adventures at the time are described in such a way that they leave the reader flatly dissatisfied. For example, the emotions evoked while shooting the rapids through a canyon on the flood-swollen Fraser River are expressed thusly: “To the inexperienced, each time would bring a thrill of exhilaration or fear according to the condition of the passengers' nerves or con-

science" (p. 71). In all probability Lord intended it as a witty bit of understatement, but in a book full of understatement, it loses its effect.

Lord claims to have had at least a nodding acquaintance with everyone in British Columbia north of the 53rd parallel. Unfortunately, he attempts to name each one individually, as well as every politician who ever made a decision concerning northern B.C., usually just a name, date, location, and possibly an adjective or two. The result is a list of two-dimensional characters who will soon be forgotten by disinterested readers. One of the few characters given some scope is the packer, Cataline. The author is obviously intrigued by the man and he mentions him more than once. Lord's description, delightful and aptly suited to his understated style, is illustrated by the following excerpt.

His favourite drink was run, always taken with a ceremony which consisted of first pouring some on the top of his head, and then rubbing it in thoroughly with the tips of his fingers. Haircuts were rare, washing only by accident, and drinks frequent. The cumulative result over several months was certainly impressive. (p. 51)

One of the most frustrating aspects of this book is the lack of detail and elaboration in stories which should have been very interesting. For example, Lord tells the story of two conflicting school boards in Chilco (p. 55). He begins well enough, even using some direct dialogue. The ingredients of this potentially juicy story include a pretty schoolmarm, a crooked chairman of the board, and a feud that split the town. The narrative, however, is as dry as toast and ends with the Bishop of Caledonia's story about serious charges made against the Chilco curate. The second story has absolutely nothing to do with the first, other than their occurrence in the same location. Surely a person involved in the fracas could provide more detail for his memoirs than could be gathered from a government report. Another frustration for the reader is his typically bureaucratic reluctance to explore the incompetence of fellow bureaucrats, as illustrated in his reference to an apparently significant event which resulted in the closure of the Cache Creek residential school "because of conditions embarrassing to those in authority": end of story. There are no details, no elaboration, no intriguing inside information — just the facts of a government document.

In all fairness to Alex Lord, these accounts were not written to entertain, but rather to educate young normalites. These stories were also recounted while Lord was principal of the Vancouver Provincial Normal School and in a politically vulnerable position. They were, however, written by him after his retirement in 1950; they are introduced by the editors as unfinished recollections.

This book was published with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and is, as such, an unusually wise expenditure of taxpayer dollars. *Alex Lord's British Columbia* will never become a best seller, nor is it intended to be one. It is a reference book and the introduction and notes make it very useful as such. It would be of interest primarily to historians and educators

familiar with the area described and of course to family members of those individuals mentioned in the book.

I would recommend that the book be acquired by any university in British Columbia as well as by some of the libraries north of the 53rd. It is not destined to be a high demand item but it should be available throughout the library system in northern British Columbia. In high school libraries it would probably gather dust except in institutions in northern B.C. There it would frequently be picked up and excerpts read, although it is decidedly easy to put down for long periods of time.

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