Compte rendu

HAK, Gordon. *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858–1913*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

British Columbia's forest industry has finally begun to attract scholarly attention. Gordon Hak's study of the industry's early period follows Richard Rajala's *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest* (1998), and has since been joined by Richard Mackie's *Island Timber* (2000). All three books have much to tell us about a unique — and increasingly controversial — resource industry.

Turning Trees into Dollars traces the emergence of logging and milling in British Columbia. Its nine chapters examine the industry's growth up to the First World War, looking at such issues as markets, business strategies, and government policy, as well as the arguments of industry critics, labour relations, and conditions of work. Each chapter covers the whole period, providing a comprehensive overview of various aspects of the coastal lumber industry. (British Columbia's forests are distinct, and the industry that harvested the massive Douglas fir and western red cedar along the coast was quite separate from the one that emerged in the province's Interior.) The author's decision to pursue a thematic rather than a chronological approach means that the book sometimes reads more like a collection of discrete essays than a closely focused monograph. On the other hand, Hak does a thorough job of detailing the relevant issues, leaving the reader with a good grasp of the lumber industry's early period. Until now, as he notes in the Introduction, the best treatment of the topic was a rather dated MA thesis. With the publication of *Turning Trees into Dollars*, we have a new synthesis that incorporates extensive archival research as well as earlier scholarly work.

Much of the book deals with business or labour issues that touch only briefly on the themes of science and technology. Readers of this journal may be most interested in the book's final three chapters: one on industrialization as well as two on labour (separate chapters describe the work of loggers and millworkers). In the first of these, Hak follows Rajala in describing the changes in production in the forests and sawmills of the Pacific Coast during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as tantamount to an industrial revolution, an assertion borne out by much of his evidence. He also draws attention to the curious fact that while logging has attracted a good deal of popular history, sawmilling has been virtually ignored, speculating that this lack of interest could reflect its less glamorous setting or perhaps even the racial composition of the workers. Hak has a strong back-

ground as a labour historian and consequently the chapters on logging and milling, the last two in the book, provide thoughtful overviews of the nature of the work as well as the social construction of the workers' identity. The chapter on loggers, for example, describes the ways in which notions of masculinity and domesticity informed debates about the world of the logger. In the chapter on millworkers, Hak shows how the work was increasingly defined not just by skill but also by race. Non-white workers were confined to the less pleasant jobs while whites monopolised the more well-paid and skilled positions within the mill.

Overall the book will stand for some time as a very useful reference source; future scholars will thank Hak for pulling together in one volume a succinct account of the early lumber industry. Although I found it a very worthwhile study — and learned much as I read it — I confess that I did have some misgivings about the book. While the text is clearlywritten, it is certainly not lively and in places seems almost formulaic in its approach; only rarely do we hear the sound of the author's voice. Nor do we learn much of the context or background of this study. One exception is the chapter on critics of the industry, which does a good job in situating those within North America's conservation movement who opposed logging. Along with the subsequent chapter on timber licenses, this is perhaps the strongest section of the book. And finally, although two maps accompany the text, the book is otherwise without illustration, an unfortunate omission. Particularly for the last three chapters, line drawings and photographs would have done much to explain the processes explained in the text. By contrast, Richard Mackie's sensitive study of the Comox Logging Company, *Island Timber*, is lavishly illustrated and recommended to anyone who wants to see how logging was carried out during this period. Which is not to say that *Turning Trees into Dollars* is without virtues: it is a solid study of an important industry, for which the author is to be congratulated.

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