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## British Columbia History

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## *From the Baltic to Russian America.*

Alix O'Grady. Kingston, Ont., The Limestone Press/  
Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 2001. 304 p., illus.,  
maps. \$28 paperback.

Too few British Columbians possess a significant knowledge of the early history of Alaska when it was the stronghold of the Russian American Company (RAC) and its fur trading empire, headquartered in what is now Sitka (Novo-Arkhangelsk). This book, hopefully, will serve to stimulate interest in that period when Russia controlled a vast part of the North West coast of the continent.

The reader is introduced to a newly married couple, Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell and his wife, Baroness Elisabeth von Wrangell, both from the then Baltic province of Russia. Both were from aristocratic backgrounds, but it appears that neither family was particularly wealthy. He was age 33 and she was 19. They met on May 3, 1829. Upon first seeing Elisabeth, Baron von Wrangell was infatuated. She was a friend of his cousin. They were introduced, married and left on the epic adventure which is the subject of the book – all within a month.

The Baron had recently been offered the appointment as chief manager of the RAC and Governor of the Russian-American colonies for a five-year period and a change in company policy required all chief managers to be married. While his marriage was timely, his love for Elisabeth was genuine. In order to assume his appointment, the couple undertook a journey which lasted eighteen months and involved crossing Russia to Siberia, a distance of 6000 miles and then a like distance by ship across the North Pacific to Sitka, for a total of 12,000 miles. To describe such travel as arduous would be understating the obvious, considering geography and conditions in 1829. By comparison, travel across frontier America to Oregon or California, while also arduous, took about 8 months. However, Wrangell had already distinguished himself as a naval officer and explorer while Elisabeth had the advantage of youth and its adventurous spirit.

The journey was interrupted by one consequential stop for 8 months in Irkutsk where Elisabeth gave birth to their first child, Marie Louise, on April 23, 1830. Barely 4 weeks later on May 27 they continued their travels by barge, when the spring breakup opened passage on the Lena River. They departed the port settlement of Okhotsk, August 24, 1830, on board an RAC three masted sloop of 210 tons, for Sitka. Elisabeth, who had dreaded the voyage, had her worst fears confirmed as they were swept by howling gales. Waves washed a whaleboat overboard and water sloshed into the cabins. Her colourful recollections of the voyage were not recorded until after their arrival in Sitka, on September 29, 1830. As they approached Sitka, they were met by a flotilla of Tlingit (Kolosh) canoes, to pay their respects, led by the chief (toyon) dressed in tails with a silk waist coat and jodpurs! Three Tlingit toyons were invited to their cabin where Ferdinand served then a bottle of "the cheapest wine" which they appreciated and asked that some be provided to their oarsmen as well.

Elisabeth described their cabin residence as "lovely and friendly despite the few inconveniences." She undertook her new role as chatelaine with enthusiasm. Her presence was an uplifting influence upon the community. She was popular with all levels of society. She entertained regularly, was a gracious hostess, developed relationships within the Tlingit people and hosted many visitors such as Peter Skene Ogden and Sir George Simpson. Her legacy continued through subsequent chatelaines, so that Sitka came to be known as the "Paris of the North."

The book divides itself into three distinct sections. The first, the journey, to Sitka, which is largely narrated by Elisabeth primarily in her letters home. The second section deals with the Baron's five year term as Governor and chief manager of the RAC voiced through his journal entries and reports, with few contributions from Elisabeth and none following the death of their daughter Marie Louise, never a strong child, in 1832. The final section is again the

Baron's narrative. His term has been completed and they journey home via California and Mexico where he has diplomatic duties. They cross Mexico and make their way up the east coast to New York and thence to Europe. Elisabeth then became the first woman to go around the world without crossing the equator.

Back home, the Baron resumed his career with the Imperial Russian Navy, eventually attaining the rank of Admiral. Sadly Elisabeth died on March 31, 1854. In a letter to her friend Lutke the Baron confides, "My unforgettable companion and faithful friend of 25 years has separated forever; her soul has fled this earthly life and gone to its eternal resting place." His grief and pain are evident to us 150 years later. He survived Elisabeth by sixteen years. They had nine children, five of whom reach adulthood. He never remarried.

This book is a worthy and welcome addition to northwest history. Its epistolary format puts the reader "there" and makes it difficult to put aside.

*Norm Collingwood, retired Provincial Court Judge with a special interest in the north.*

## *Halcyon; the Captain's Paradise - A history of Halcyon Hot Springs.*

Milton Parent. Nakusp, Arrow Lakes Historical Society, 2005. 104 p., illus., map. \$25 hard cover. Available from Arrow Lakes Historical Society; PO Box 819, Nakusp, BC. VOG 1R0

The author has drawn on an excellent collection of photos and archival materials of the Arrow Lakes to write a history of Halcyon Hot Springs. Known to the Lakes Salishan band of the upper Columbia, these hot springs were not preferred to their sweat baths. Few references to Halcyon are made in the prehistory or fur trade documents and only the briefest of references are made prior to the mining era of the 1880's.

Arrival of the CPR and consequent mining boom brought the first claimant to the site. One of the most intriguing characters in West Kootenay history, Robert Sanderson was an educated, energetic adventurer and entrepreneur, who after



building the railroad bridge at Revelstoke headed south down the Columbia to the Arrow Lakes. Captain of the sternwheeler *Dispatch*, and one of the founders of the Columbia & Kootenay Navigation Company, he became the first owner of the 400 acre site of Halcyon Hot Springs. Sanderson divested interest in 1896 and the next year sold the remainder to Alberta interests who had expansion plans. From newspaper quotes of that time the author provides a picture of a lively facility with a range of services and recreation opportunities. Robert Sanderson, meanwhile had followed the mining and smelting business to Trail, then Nelson, and in the early 1900's took his young family back to the upper Arrow across from Halcyon at Pingston Creek to a floating sawmill. From there he traveled to Arrowhead where he was Captain of a federal government dredge. Control of the Hot Springs changed hands in 1905 and again in 1910, a time of prosperity when Halcyon was a social destination for people of the mills and transportation centers of Arrowhead and Nakusp, and the mills and mining camps in Beaton Arm.

The period of greatest optimism for Halcyon was from 1910-1914 when the CPR decided to expand their tourism network into the Kootenay, Arrow and Okanagan lakes by linking first class rail service with luxury paddlewheelers: the *SS Bonnington* on the Arrow, the *SS Nasookin* on Kootenay, and the *SS Sicamous* in Okanagan Lake. World War I put an end to this optimistic vision and the paddlewheelers were scrapped in favour of more utilitarian shipping; the hotel at Balfour was turned into a sanitarium, and Halcyon met the same fate a short time later. Prohibition in 1917 further struck the hotel trade; the "only sure profit making service left for Halcyon was the treatment of workmen from the Trail smelter" for lead poisoning.

The period for Halcyon as a spa was dominated after 1924 by Brig.-Gen. Frederick Burnham, a medical doctor, and war hero of the Balkans conflict who ran the lodge until it was destroyed in 1955. One of

the Arrow Lakes' most memorable characters; puritanical, he allowed no smoking, drink, or dancing in his spa. The latter part of the book treats Burnham, his contacts, his family and employees. Depression years marked the beginning of decline for Halcyon, but surprisingly it rode out this period as Burnham catered to his small but loyal clientele. The late forties saw Burnham's idiosyncracies more evident and the economy of the region changed. Water links were the only lifeline to Halcyon and when the last of the paddlewheelers, the *Minto*, stopped service in 1954 the facility was doomed. Burnham died in the fire which accidentally burned Halcyon in 1955.

Many photos enliven the text of this attractively bound book. The "booster" style seldom detracts from an interesting read. It is quite well edited with one notable exception the spelling of the name of a source of photographs should be "Stan Sherstobitoff" (see p. 31, p.32, p.45).

W.A. Bill Sloan

#### Historical Atlas of Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley.

Derek Hayes. *Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2005. 192 p., illus. \$49.95 hardcover.*

Derek Hayes is back. He began his series of historical atlases with his *Historical Atlas of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest: maps of exploration: British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Yukon* published in 1999. With that volume he found his strength. He combined his expertise and interest in mapping and map collecting and his strong design sense with his interest in local and Canadian history to produce five more well-received historical atlases.

This time it's with the *Historical Atlas of Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley*. Like each of its five predecessors, this is a large-format, sumptuously illustrated, full colour atlas. It consists of maps, charts, photographs, sketches, bird's-eye views and property plats produced from European contact to the present in and about British Columbia's Lower Mainland. It also

includes cut lines explaining each illustration and short contextual histories written by Hayes. It and its predecessors are distinctive publications.

The distinctiveness lies not in the use of reproductions of historic maps and other materials but rather in the full use of colour, the emphasis on good design and an easily accessible approach to historical narrative. Historical atlases based entirely on reproductions of maps and charts have been produced in Canada prior to Hayes' work. John Warkentin and Richard Ruggles' *Manitoba Historical Atlas* produced in 1970 by the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba is a prime example. A solid history with well-selected historic maps in black and white, it lacks the eye appeal of Hayes' atlas series.

Beginning with a title page spread of a bird's-eye map of New Westminster, Burnaby and Vancouver that "was drawn about 1912 to illustrate the central position of two subdivisions for sale . . ." Hayes documents in text and historic illustration Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley from First Nations' settlements and first European explorers to satellite images and Geographic Information System (GIS)-based mapping of the region. In between, as foreshadowed by the title page bird's-eye view, the maps of the development visionaries with their transportation expansion dreams and their real estate maps dominate.

The atlas includes over 370 original map reproductions and over 100 period photographs. Some of the maps are good old standbys – the 1791 Spanish map, based on the explorations of Narvaez, showing what is to become Vancouver as *Ysla de Langara* has appeared many times in regional literature and the literature of exploration. Many others, less mainstream historically, such as the fire insurance atlas map of 1897 of Steveston showing the location of the salmon canneries and the early real estate subdivision maps in the Fraser Valley, are rarely seen.

Hayes' decision to include the lower Fraser Valley was a well thought out one. Geographically, Vancouver and the Valley