

Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story, by Donald MacKay. Vancouver and Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre and University of Washington Press, 1982. 361 pp. Photographs, maps, appendixes, selected references, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Empire of Wood addresses an important topic. It is the history of MacMillan Bloedel Limited, the leading forest products company in the Canadian province of British Columbia, where the forest industry has dominated the economy since the turn of the century. From inauspicious beginnings as the H.R. MacMillan Export Company—established in 1919 with little capital and a staff of three—the company expanded into lumber production in the 1920s and plywood manufacturing in the 1930s to prosper during World War II. By 1969 it produced 6 percent of the lumber, 40 percent of the plywood, and 30 percent of the doors manufactured in Canada; it had also acquired extensive timberlands on Vancouver Island and the mainland coast of British Columbia. Mergers with Bloedel, Stewart, and Welch in 1951, and the Powell River Company in 1960, produced an increasingly integrated corporation, with assets in excess of \$100 million (1951) and \$348 million (1962) and with a major presence in the growing newsprint manufacturing business. By 1979, MacMillan Bloedel employed 24,500 people and its facilities included seventeen logging camps, nine sawmills, three panelboard plants, two newsprint mills, three pulpmills, one fine papermill, and a paper-bag and specialty plant in British Columbia; panelboard plants in Saskatchewan and Ontario; a newsprint mill in New Brunswick; and a lumber mill, two panelboard plants, and a lineboard mill in Alabama. There were also several corrugated container plants in each of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

This, of course, is a fine example of the growth of corporate capitalism, of the consolidation of power, and of the integration of operations that have transformed the forest-products industry, almost everywhere, and have largely eliminated independent operators, individually owned mills, and brokers from the business. It is also a crucial component of the process that led Martin Robin to describe British Columbia as "the company province" in *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (1972). But anyone who turns to this volume for an analysis of the reasons behind increasingly elaborate industrial linkages or for a discussion of the profound effects of MacMillan Bloedel's development upon social and economic life in British Columbia will be disappointed. Commissioned by the company to "compile" their history, and given full access to corporate archives and the personal papers of H.R. MacMillan, Donald MacKay has produced a superficial and flawed book. Despite a

nod in the direction of the company's thousands of employees—the book includes several photographs of men at work as well as a seventeen-page chapter on “High Riggers and Headrigs” that is romantic, anecdotal, and inadequate—this is history from the boardroom. It reflects the entrepreneurial spirit and free-enterprise convictions of the company's founder in its frequent quotations from MacMillan and his successors; it has little sympathy for the struggle of workers and their unions; and its focus is squarely on the growing company, so hard-nosed evaluation of its place in British Columbia is avoided. In the end, as its chapter titles reveal, this book is a celebration of corporate achievement, a “whiggish” chronicle of competition, takeovers, assets, and dividends.

Parts of this story are of considerable interest. Vigorous, opinionated Harvey MacMillan, sometime Chief Forester of British Columbia and chairman of the Canadian War Requirements Board, dominates and carries the early part of the book, and his presence punctuates later chapters as, in life, it lingered in the executive suite of the company from which he retired in 1956. Useful nuggets of information about personalities and interpersonal relationships in the upper echelons of the MacMillan Bloedel hierarchy are scattered through the volume. Hitherto untapped sources provide insight into the attitudes and actions of the company's principals. And the basic compilation of information about the MacMillan Bloedel, Stewart and Welch, and Powell River companies is a welcome addition to the still sparse and unincisive literature on British Columbia's forest history.

Again, however, caveats must be entered. There is not a footnote in the book, and thus neither verification nor more extensive use of many of MacKay's sources is readily possible. The preface indicates that the author interviewed over fifty company employees, industry labor leaders, and officials of British Columbia and United States forest products companies, but there is no systematic identification of these people, no information about the availability of interviews as tapes or typescripts, and no clear indication how the information from interviews is incorporated into the book. The short list of selected references is both inadequate and inaccurate: Martin Robin's book is omitted, and “Farley, A.L. *The Forest Resource* Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1972” is actually a chapter (pp. 87-118) of J. Lewis Robinson (ed.), *British Columbia*, published as shown. Such casual, careless disregard for the usual conventions of scholarly writing might be explained, but is hardly excused, by the claim that this is a popular history. The book's uninspired first chapter—titled “Origins” in the table of contents and “The Pioneer Years” in the text—

calls forth similar reservations. It is a weak treatment of the context in which MacMillan rose to prominence. It reiterates the familiar assertions of earlier, inferior popular histories, skims over crucial issues of forest policy and timberland speculation, and contains a number of errors (e.g. "Mossan" for Mossom Boyd). Future historians of the British Columbia forest industry must do better than this. Overall, *Empire of Wood* suffers, even as a popular history, from a lack of thematic unity and interpretive bite. It has no story to tell other than the story of corporate development and much of this is conveyed in surprisingly ponderous prose. Yet by Canadian standards *Empire of Wood* is a "best seller" of sorts. With over nine thousand hardback copies in print, a paperbound edition of the book is soon to appear. I wonder why.

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The Corn Belt Route: A History of the Chicago Great Western Railroad Company, by H. Roger Grant. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984. xi, 231 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.00 cloth.

My warm and vivid recollections of the Chicago Great Western Railroad (CGW) begin during the age of steam and pass with the railroad itself during the time of the diesel. Two are representative: the afternoon passenger train to Omaha hurtling down the track west of Moorland—tender swaying, cars rocking, and the entire steel missile enveloped in smoke and dust—and Engineer Fuller who, while his train was being "worked" at the Fort Dodge passenger depot, patiently fielded questions about railroading and delivered various time tables to this preadolescent interrogator. One recollection memorializes CGW's train service and the other the cheery friendliness of its employees.

The Great Western was the brain child of Alpheus B. Stickney, a curious and independent-minded entrepreneur who drove a CGW predecessor into Iowa from the North, acquired various other rights and properties, added more construction, and in 1888 had a line in place between St. Paul and Chicago via Oelwein and Dubuque. A year earlier Stickney had purchased and extended yet another property to give him a diverging line from Oelwein to Kansas City. He did not rest. More track linked Mason City with Fort Dodge and then Council Bluffs and Omaha as well as Oelwein and Clarion. A series of branches and secondary main lines in Minnesota served Mankato, Red Wing, Winona, and Rochester. CGW's bread-and-butter routes

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