

Quill and Quire (March, 1973)

HISTORY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA: From its Earliest Discovery to the Present Time, Alexander Begg, The Ryerson Archives Series, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., \$12.50, 568 pp.

Like so many publishing companies McGraw-Hill Ryerson has apparently decided to reprint a series of "interesting and important Canadian books long out of print". Assuming there is some value in reprinting such books, Alexander Begg's *History of British Columbia*, written in 1894, can legitimately be considered both important and interesting. The author's style is not that of today's historian. He uses no footnotes although most sources are identified in the text. The lack of an index is compensated somewhat by the way the book is divided into chapter sub-headings which make it easy to find material quickly.

Alexander Begg was a school teacher and newspaper editor in Ontario. He joined the Department of Internal Revenue and held other posts with the federal government before becoming Emigration Commissioner for the Province of British Columbia in 1887. His interest in that province led to the publication of this history seven years later. Most of his book deals with the period before Confederation concentrating on early discoveries, the development of the fur trade and the colonial era. The book is not a social or economic history but it includes interesting information on the economics of gold-mining and on the social conditions of groups such as the Indians and the Chinese. The work of religious missionaries is also examined at some length. The section dealing with the Confederation period is less well done. The author seems entirely too interested in the activities of various Governors-General and Lieutenant-Governors. He ignores the party system during this period of Canadian history. It is profitable, however, to consider the opinions of an eye-witness concerning such people as John A. Macdonald and such events as the building of the railway and the Alaska boundary dispute with the United States. Gary Levy