

## **This Belongs in Reference Libraries of BC**

Andrew Scott's book on place names is also a ripping good read

*By Dave Obee*

Move over, John Thomas Walbran. After a century, your time in the sun is just about up, thanks to a guy from Sechelt named Andrew Scott.

Scott spent three years sifting through government records, maps, newspapers, census data, directories and other sources, gathering every nugget he could find about why places in these parts have the names they have. The result is this book, which brings together information on 4,000 places.

To cut right to the point: This is one of the most important books about British Columbia published this century. It's as simple as that. Scott's work represents a huge step forward in what we know.

This encyclopedia is not a boring recitation of place names and their origins. Scott goes much deeper than that, spinning stories about the places, the people whose names are on our maps, and the times.

It makes for fascinating reading, and it will be used as a key reference for years to come—if not decades. We know there is a demand for this type of thing, after all. Walbran's success is proof of that.

It is inevitable that Scott's *Encyclopedia of Raincoast Place Names* will be compared to Walbran's work. The two books cover the same ground (and the same water, come to think of it) a century apart.

Walbran's *British Columbia Coast Names 1592-1906*, which covered 1,500 places and took a decade to compile, was published 100 years ago, in 1909, by the Geographic Board of Canada in Ottawa. The green hardcover sold for \$2 new, but by the 1950s was going for \$50 to \$100.

The Vancouver Public Library reprinted the book in 1971, and it's been in print virtually ever since. It is still a vital reference work, and is a must-have in any serious library of BC history.

All of that is despite book's flaws, and there are many. Walbran based his research on the best information he had at the time, including interviews with old-timers, but many more sources are readily available today. Walbran was wrong about some places, and missed others entirely. Beyond that, many names have been added to the map since Walbran's day.

Take Patricia Bay, for example. It's not in Walbran's book. If you must know, check Scott's work—and you will find that it was named

after Princess Patricia of Connaught, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria.

The bay, on the west side of Victoria International Airport, was known as Union Bay when Walbran was with us. That does not matter, though; Walbran did not include it as Union Bay either.

Walbran's book has Cosmos Heights and Amor Point, both named after the eccentric Amor De Cosmos, the founder of the *British Colonist*. Scott has those as well—and adds DeCosmos Lagoon, DeCosmos Point, Amor de Cosmos Creek, Amor Lake and Mount DeCosmos.

James Bay is named, not surprisingly, after Sir James Douglas, the colonial governor and Hudson's Bay Company boss. Same with James Island, James Spit, Douglas Channel, Douglas Island, Mount Douglas and Douglas Point. Again, Scott has more than Walbran had.

For those who are counting, it's a tie: Seven for the guy who ran a colony, and seven for the guy who ran a newspaper (and, admittedly, the province as well, as the second premier).

But it is not a tie between Walbran and Scott; the new book has more entries for both Douglas and De Cosmos.

There is no entry for Foul Bay in Walbran's book; you need to look at Gonzales Bay, and even that entry has no reference to Foul Bay, even though that was the name in common use in Walbran's time.

The Foul Bay entry in Scott's book directs you to the Gonzales entry, and there Scott mentions Gonzales Lopez de Haro, a mate on the first European vessel to enter Juan de Fuca Strait. He also tells of the former name, Foul Bay, which came from the bay's poor anchorage, and was not meant to be a slur.

The name was officially changed in 1934, although somebody apparently forgot to fix the road named after the bay.

Walbran does not have Ripple Rock, the underwater hazard near Campbell River that was cut down to size in 1958. Scott has it; the rock was named after the appearance of the water that swirled around the rock's twin peaks.

Several places have been named after Walbran, including an island, a point, a rock, a creek and a mountain. Walbran's book has three of them, but Scott's book has all five.

This does not mean that Walbran's book should be shelved. It still has value, thanks to the anecdotal information that it contains. The author was easily distracted, it seems, and enjoyed taking his readers down sideroads.

Scott's book is, however, the new reference point. Its 4,000 entries include, by rough count, about 50 million facts of one form or another.

There is no doubt that there will be some quibbling about some of them, just as there will surely be questions about places not included.

That is part of the thrill of a book such as this. We love to match wits with it.

The name Walbran has become synonymous with the book he wrote. Will we say "Scott" when we mean *The Encyclopedia of Raincoast Place Names: A Complete Reference to Coast British Columbia*?

Odds are, yes. This book is that good, and that important.

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