

A NOTE ON SOURCES

This issue of *Sound Heritage* is based upon the recollections of Okanagan pioneers as recorded by Imbert Orchard in 1964–65. While working as a script editor for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Vancouver, Orchard initiated and directed the *Living Memory* project. He travelled extensively throughout British Columbia, recording interviews with members of the pioneer generation of various regions of the province. From these tapes he produced almost 200 historical documentaries for radio.

Imbert Orchard was born in Ontario in 1910. After a public school education in England, he studied History and English Literature at Cambridge. Upon his return to Ontario, he developed an interest in local history. Eventually, however, his career took him into the fields of education and theatre.

It was the Second World War that brought him to British Columbia for the first time. As Orchard recalled his first impressions of the province:

All this is background, you see. I went into education and then into theatre. The War came along and I came out to B.C. and joined up out here. I'll never forget the impression that B.C. made on me. I remember very vividly, approaching the Rockies, and then going over the Rockies; it was in the month of May. And I felt that I was in a completely different country, a country that I somehow felt was my own.

Back in Ontario I used to look out of my bedroom window and I could see these hills, and I loved hills. I was always trying to find the highest hill and go up the highest hill. When I got to B.C. it was incredibly beautiful, incredibly mountainous, all things that I liked. As the train came through down to Vancouver it was just marvelous, because it was May and the trees were beginning to bud or blossom. And I fell in love with it right away.

I remember going to a library and trying to find a history and there wasn't anything, hardly. But what I did get out was one of those early books—it was the chap who talked about the San Juan Incident and how they used to be facing each other, these two military presences on the San Juan Islands. But then they went to church every Sunday on board the boat together. And that fired me, you know, with a little bit of the background of B.C.; immediately, I got interested. I could see that this was another story altogether, and a rather richer one than what I was used to in Ontario.

I feel that [the history of] Ontario *is* very rich and that what happened in those years, the pioneer years—say, 1797 to 1837, that sort of period of settlement in the bush—had happened in B.C., of course, in the '80s and '90s. In other words, the development that took that time in Ontario—from 1790 to 1970, if you like—that period is “squeezed up” in B.C. In about a hundred years less of time it's come from the bush to the big cities. This was a fantastic development. This country interests me because of that.

It also interests me because the stories, as I got to see them, were rather large-scale; they were kind of “epic”. The people seemed rather “bigger” than those characters that settled in Ontario at that time. These people were touched with this primitive life. The Indian presence was much stronger here. It was a much more challenging life, therefore it produced a different kind of person. And I could feel that the country was more on an “epic” scale. And also, I early realized that there was a tremendous variety in this country. There's more variety in climate and terrain between Long Beach and the Rockies than there is in all the rest of Canada. We've got everything here, with the exception of a hot, hot south, but we even have our deserts, small patches of them. I began to see that this was a story all by itself and almost a country all by itself. And at that time I was looking for that kind of thing.*

Orchard's travels in British Columbia in the course of military camouflage exercises during the war gave him further insight into the character of the province.

After the war, Orchard returned to teaching drama in Alberta, and studied theatre in Europe for a year on an overseas fellowship. He returned to British Columbia in 1955. Shortly afterwards, he was hired by the CBC in Vancouver as a regional script editor, with the responsibility of receiving and reading television scripts.

In 1959, Orchard met Constance Cox, who had grown up in Hazelton, B.C., in the 1890s and who had many colourful memories of that era. He recorded an interview with her with the intention of using the material as a basis for a book. However, Mrs. Cox's recollections eventually became the nucleus of a series of 15-minute radio programs. Entitled *Living Memory*, they were first broadcast in 1961 and were researched and compiled by Orchard. Public reaction to the series was positive. That same year, Orchard made a special trip through the Skeena River and Bulkley Valley regions to record interviews with local pioneers.

Of course, I didn't know who to look for when I went into the Skeena because I was all new to the thing. Once you get into a community, it's very easy to get from one person to another. You can go to a post office and talk to somebody across the counter

* Imbert Orchard interviewed by Derek Reimer, 1978, Aural History Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

Imbert Orchard on a field recording trip, 1971.



and say: "Who are the old-timers?" You can go to a garage; you can go to a library; just go, and you'll soon find they'll hand you around to the right people. Most people who have lived there for a number of years know who the old-timers are, the characters who can tell the story from way back. But you go, and you visit these people and you find that one's memory isn't half as good as other people think it is. You find his speech is really too poor for broadcasting purposes; too slow, too rough, whatever it happens to be. But then you find the really good people who have a marvelous recall, are still quite vital and feel like talking to you. They're worth all others put together, really, because you can go on for hours and hours with them. You get a tremendous amount, usually, if it's a good speaker. You're getting a life story. . . .

I'm very interested in the fact that this way of doing things, going through the country in that way, you find the story of the country. You get them to tell you the story of the country and the story of their experiences in the country. So I'm not looking for any particular subject as a rule.†

The Skeena trip resulted in a second *Living Memory* series. A third and fourth series, about Victoria and the Fraser Valley respectively, followed, as did a number of longer special programs. Over the next several years, Orchard undertook further trips through the province, seeking out and recording the pioneers of each region before they died. By his own estimation, he travelled more than 24,000 miles and interviewed almost 1,000 people on tape.

In 1967, Canada's centennial year, Imbert Orchard produced a special series of 13 one-hour programs for the CBC. Each program dealt with the history of a

† Imbert Orchard interviewed by J. J. McColl, 1973, Aural History Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

specific region of British Columbia. The series was broadcast nationally under the title *From the Mountains to the Sea*. This was followed by a regular series of half-hour programs called *People in Landscape*. More than 90 of these programs were produced and broadcast between 1968 and 1972. There were four series: "Life in the Gulf of Georgia", "the Queen Charlottes and Bella Coola", "Fraser River Country" and "New Caledonia Country".

In spite of the large number of programs produced from Orchard's tapes, a large proportion of the material collected for the *Living Memory* project was never broadcast. Fortunately, both the programs and the original interviews are preserved in the Imbert Orchard Collection of the Aural History Program at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia. Material from this rich and fascinating collection of historical reminiscences has been used as the basis for three past issues of *Sound Heritage*: "Skeena Country", "The Gulf Islanders" and "A Victorian Tapestry". The present issue, "Bright Sunshine and a Brand New Country", is special in that very little of the material has been previously used.

Imbert Orchard conducted interviews with over 70 pioneers of the Okanagan region. Like his other interviews, these have special characteristics and are the products of the circumstances under which they were recorded. Interviewees were chosen for their alertness, clarity of memory, voice quality and historical significance. Orchard focused on the period between 1870 and 1914, which he feels to be the watershed of much of British Columbia's history. Because he had little time during the course of his journeys to do extensive preliminary research, his interviews were generally unstructured and his questions were open-ended in nature. His intention was to provoke a spontaneous flow of reminiscences from his interviewees. Primary questions usually included: "What brought you into this country?" and "What were your first impressions on your arrival here?"

It was very important to have been in the country and to have seen the physical set-up. I tried to bring that in as much as possible. I'm always interested in landscape and visual aspects. And while, in a sense, this may seem to have nothing to do with the "aural", it has a great deal. I think that if you are able to see things and to bring out what people saw when you're interviewing them, you are bringing the missing dimension into sound. It's important to be aware of the other senses. I would often get people—if I could, if they were that kind of person—say, "What did it sound like?" "What did it smell like?" "What did it feel like?" The senses: I'd get them to describe something in words. I think this is very important for the interviewer, because I think you've got to bring these other senses into this one-dimensional sense medium.‡

A certain amount of controversy exists over the historical accuracy of reminiscences recorded many years after an event. Orchard commented on this point in a 1962 report to the CBC:

Of great value is the variety of voices and personalities. Some are conversational and chatty, like those of our Victorian ladies and gentlemen. At the

‡ Imbert Orchard interviewed by Derek Reimer, 1978, Aural History Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

other pole are the first rate story tellers, who can sustain long passages, and who are more likely to be found in lonely places. Some people only manage to speak of facts. Others are more imaginative or vivid and can evoke a mood. And some are downright fanciful.

This brings up the question as to how "living memories" relate to history. The raw material is undoubtedly valuable to historians and other writers, yet we have no illusions about its precise historical accuracy. We always try to present each program in its proper historical context, and to avoid, or correct, any flagrant errors. But we place a lot of value on the personality of the speaker—his ability to express himself and be entertaining, or to tell a story well. We reach back to the past in a frankly subjective way through reactions, impressions and moods. In so doing we are getting a glimpse of history not made, but being made.‡

In "Bright Sunshine and a Brand New Country", the editors have attempted to give the reader a glimpse of history being made through the words of pioneers of the Okanagan Valley. These reminiscences, of course, will not provide a comprehensive account of the history of the Okanagan during the period. It is hoped, however, that they will allow the reader an opportunity to gain an insight into the lives and times of those pioneers.

‡ Imbert Orchard, "Report on the Living Memory Project", unpublished CBC report, December 1962. Imbert Orchard Papers, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.