LORDS OF THE WESTERN BENCH: A BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF THE SUPREME AND DISTRICT COURTS OF ALBERTA, 1876-1990, Louis Knafla & Richard Klumpenhouwer (Calgary: Legal Archives Society of Alberta, 1997)

Lords of the Western Bench: A Biographical History of the Supreme and District Courts of Alberta, 1876-1990 is the product of the herculean efforts of authors Louis Knafla and Richard Klumpenhouwer. In it they catalogue, in biographical form, all 187 federally appointed judges of Alberta, from its birth in the N.W.T. to the Alberta of 1990.

Their effort will find its biggest audience among Alberta lawyers and judges, but should extend to anyone with a modest interest in the history of the province. By its biographical nature, *Lords of the Western Bench* does not lend itself to capturing the reader for a prolonged period. Its appeal lies in the reader's ability to comfortably browse from anywhere in the book, and they may be surprised how quickly time will pass.

A strong introduction sets out the objective of the authors' work and on its own is a readable insight for what follows. Biographical sketches, of necessity, centre on the tiring statistics of birth, death and some of what goes in between. Nonetheless, the authors have admirably brought colour to many of the judges by a welcome mix of their jurisprudence and folklore.

It is not easy to catch the essence of a distinguished judicial career in a few paragraphs; although the authors have managed a fair measure of analysis of the work of the distinguished jurists. As well, through diligent searching, they have been able to write something of interest on almost 187 judges.

It is curious that the authors elected to portray the entire Bench over this prolonged period as pristine. One of the lures of history has been the peccadilloes or worse of its participants. Undoubtedly, most of the Alberta judges have met the appropriate standards of judicial conduct, however, that still leaves enough exceptions that the authors might be tempted to lift that veil in their next edition.

The reader will be pleased with the care taken in ensuring readability and accuracy of the contents. I noted only two modest exceptions, those being the transposition of the portraits of two serving justices, to whose benefit the reader will decide, and moving the Scott, Milvain and Manning firm from Calgary to Edmonton. The latter raised that old chestnut ... "and thereby strengthened both cities."

Some readers may initially dismiss this work as a who's who of the living and dead. This would be a mistake. This book is complete on detail and succinct in presentation and will be an important reference text for Alberta historians.

The authors ask that this volume be treated as a work in progress. It is that, but it is more. It is a compelling glimpse of the Alberta judiciary over more than 100 years.

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