

# WORD by

Once a struggling regional university publisher on the brink of demise, UBC Press is now one of North America's most venerable university presses and has played a key role in disseminating leading social sciences research. After nearly 40 years in the publishing industry, UBC Press's retired Associate Director, Editorial, Jean Wilson reflects on her 20-year career at the Press and the critical importance of scholarly publishing to the academic community.

**Frontier:** *You joined UBC Press as Managing Editor in 1988 when the Press was struggling and you are consistently credited with helping to revive it. Why was it struggling and what did you do to help restore it?*

**JW:** UBC Press was quite dysfunctional in the late 1980s. People didn't work well together and the Press had lost its focus. It had published some important books especially in B.C. history and Native studies, but essentially, it was a small west coast publisher that no one east of the Rockies took very seriously. There was an internal review in 1989 after which most of my senior colleagues were fired and I was made acting director. I had the position for a year and then UBC hired Peter Milroy to be the new director of the Press and I became the acquisitions editor. We refocused the publishing list in areas that the Press already had strengths in, particularly B.C. history and Native studies, and dropped other

areas that were well covered by other Canadian scholarly publishers.

**F:** *UBC Press is now one of the most respected university presses in North America. Why?*

**JW:** We publish books that are very well received and well reviewed in their fields. People know that we take a great deal of care with our books at all stages. We have very rigorous standards for editing and production and I think we may be the only university press on the continent that still hires proofreaders. Our list has grown because of the editing and production quality of the books and authors know we'll deal with the manuscripts expeditiously and professionally.

**F:** *What is UBC Press most proud of?*

**JW:** We're proudest of the contribution we've made to scholarship and publishing in Canada over the last 20 years.

**F:** *How do you see UBC Press's role evolving?*

**JW:** The Press can maintain its present strength and maybe even grow a little bit more, in the sense of maybe publishing 70 books per year. At present, we publish about 60 books per year. The Press was one of the first presses to edit manuscripts online and it's quite likely that it will lead the way in digital publishing, doing fewer hard copies of books and more in digitized form. I am confident it will maintain its

reputation as one of the leading scholarly publishers in Canada.

**F:** *You have been in the business of university publishing for 40 years. How have you seen the industry change?*

**JW:** When I joined University of Toronto Press (UTP) in 1968, typesetting was all hot-metal typesetting; now we're into digital publishing, which is very indicative of how rapidly technology has changed. In terms of the industry, today there are a lot more scholarly publishers. In the 1970s, there were only two well-established scholarly presses and now there are nine English-language university presses.

**F:** *Why are university presses so integral to the university and its research endeavours?*

**JW:** If scholarly books aren't published, the research done at universities languishes in university libraries as theses and reports that don't reach the right audience. If academic presses don't publish what has been found out through academic research, then they shortchange both the academic community and the larger world of scholarship as well. UBC Press has been and will continue to be a great asset to UBC, both in terms of the prestige it brings to the university as an important publisher of books in the social sciences, and in terms of the role it plays in disseminating research results in Canada and internationally. ■