

In the Context of its Time: A History of Woodlands

Val Adolph.

Victoria: Ministry of Social Services, Government of British Columbia, 1996. Illus. 149 pp. \$10 paper.

Memories of Woodlands,

Collected and edited by Val Adolph.

Victoria: Ministry of Social Services, Government of British Columbia, 1996. Illus. 142 pp. \$10 paper.

By Gerald E. Thomson, *University of British Columbia*

IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT BOOKS Val Adolph, former head of the Woodlands and Riverview Volunteers Association, chronicles the history of an important British Columbia institution. Woodlands School was the site of BC's first permanent asylum for the mentally afflicted and was designated as a training school for retarded children in 1950. In 1878 the original asylum opened in New Westminster as a virtual jail for the mentally ill. By 1897 the institution had greatly expanded but was still overcrowded and was renamed the Public Hospital for the Insane (PHI). Greater medical involvement led to an expansion in 1905, when work began on Colony Farm in Coquitlam, a working dairy farm. Woodlands, or PHI, was first put forward as a training school for retarded children in 1922 by Dr. Louis Sauriol but was not designated as such until after Essondale, renamed Riverview Mental Hospital in the 1960s, became the chief provincial hospital for the adult mentally ill. Colony Farm was subsequently designated as a secure facility for the criminally insane, being renamed Forensic Psychiatric Services.

The two books span Woodlands' dualistic past. The information in *In*

the Context of Its Time adds greatly to our rather scant knowledge concerning the evolution of mental health services within the public institutions of BC. The history of PHI/Woodlands was governed by larger historical contexts at work within society, and Adolph seems not to have recognized the evolving stages, from pure incarceration, to social segregation through mental hygiene, to rehabilitation or training, and, finally, to the current process of deinstitutionalization through community living. Today's deinstitutionalization, within which Woodlands' closure is occurring, is complemented by the earlier mental hygiene movement, which sought to segregate the mentally ill from society by placing them in large institutions. Dr. James Gordon Mackay, Assistant Medical Superintendent of PHI in 1907, was a leading figure in the provincial sterilization movement. Dr. H.C. Steeves, Medical Superintendent of PHI after 1920, was convinced feeble-mindedness was a genetically inherited disorder in 70 per cent of all the patients he saw at PHI. The history of mental hygiene in BC's school and medical systems, and of mental health services in general, still awaits comprehensive treatment.

Memories of Woodlands covers the time period when Woodlands was a training school for mentally retarded children. As a former summer employee of Woodlands School in the 1970s, I found the reminiscences of the staff to be very accurate and enjoyable. The passages capture the feeling of the hospital as a personable and congenial place. In a very persuasive manner, Adolph has managed to show how staff and patients made the institution more than a mere custodial hospital. To outsiders — all those who have neither worked nor lived in such places — this knowledge may be somewhat of a revelation, as it is common to view such institutions as oppressive places of incarceration. Adolph has been extremely successful

in collecting a variety of remembrances about recreational/vocational programs such as the “work gangs” and seasonal events such as Christmas concerts, summer camp, and the annual carnival day parade on the grounds. This book evokes the hospital as a home for both staff and patients over the years.

Both books provide interesting reading. While *In the Context of Our Time* does not directly address the contexts that actively shaped the institutional care of the mentally ill and retarded in BC, it does contain a wealth of detail about the evolution of PHI and Woodlands School. *Memories of Woodlands* brings Woodlands to life in a very personal manner.

*I Have Lived Here Since the World Began:
An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People*

Arthur J. Ray.

Toronto: Lester, 1996. 398 pp. Illus., maps. \$45.00 cloth.

By Bruce Rigsby, *The University of Queensland*

AS I PREPARED MY REVIEW, a colleague e-mailed to say that she and her husband were going to Canada later in the year and to ask me if I could send them copies of my course reading lists on Canadian indigenous topics. I replied and recommended Skip Ray's new book as the first item they should read for orientation and background. It is unfortunate that there is no truly comparable single-volume Australian counterpart.

Ray criticizes the evolutionist, assimilationist, and salvage ethnography assumptions of past anthropological and historical work, and he

focuses on the creative, often future-orientated engagement of Native peoples first with the British and French colonizing powers and trading companies, then with self-governing colonies, and later with the provinces and federal government of Canada. He draws together extensive research on Native involvement in the fur trade across the country in pre- and post-Confederation times, in prairie buffalo hunting, in cattle-raising and farming, and in goldmining and the industrial salmon fishery of BC. He scripts a panoply of Native groups and players. Some (e.g., the Huron and the Beothuk) have left the stage; others