

Prisoner — you deserve to be hanged! Had the jury performed their duty, I might now have the painful satisfaction of condemning you to death, and you, gentlemen of the jury, you are a pack of Dalles horse thieves, and permit me to say, it would give me great pleasure to see you hanged, each and every one of you, for declaring a murderer guilty only of manslaughter.

Williams has, in fairness, presented some of the smaller and more disagreeable aspects of Begbie's career, particularly his wrangles with the Colonial Office and his pleas for advancement to the Colonial Chief Justiceship. On the other hand, the author enriches the biography by revealing Begbie in his social dimension. Whether singing operatic duets with the Philharmonic Society in Victoria or entertaining at dinner parties, he brought the same zest that he displayed at the Barkerville assize. Begbie was probably one of Canada's first tennis hosts, entertaining for lawn tennis parties on his three grass courts in 1880, shortly after the founding of Wimbledon. And, of course, Begbie was a founder and the first president of the Union Club a year earlier.

Williams has adopted the somewhat cumbersome and difficult biographical method of organizing the book by subject rather than chronologically. This approach sacrifices some of the drama that chronology gives to the march of historic events. It is a tribute to Williams that he still sparkles through this difficult format. His biography is highly readable for layman, lawyer and historian. In addition *The Man for a New Country* is important primary scholarship; it is a British Columbia biography of first-rank importance. Morriss have done an attractive job with the printing and the selection of photographs is excellent.

*Victoria*

BRIAN R. D. SMITH

*Go Do Some Great Thing. The Black Pioneers of British Columbia*, by Crawford Kilian. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978. Pp. 188; \$12.95.

From the time of the American Revolution until the Civil War, British North America was regarded as a haven for thousands of black Americans fleeing from conditions in the United States. Many of the black fugitives were escaping directly from slavery, while a sizeable minority were freemen seeking an end to the restrictions and humiliations suffered by all American blacks. The blacks, both slave and free, had grand

expectations for their lives in the British territories. They knew they would not be enslaved here, and they believed that they would be free as well from all connotations of colour prejudice and be allowed to participate in all the rights and privileges of a British subject. Compared to the situation in the United States, British North America was seen as the promised land where blacks could expect the earthly fulfilment of their dreams of equality. In symbolic expression of this belief, many of them fell to the ground, kissed the soil, and thanked God for their safe arrival "on the other side of Jordan."

For the early arrivals in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Upper Canada, employment was easy to obtain, for if they did not achieve prosperity at least they found a role in the expanding colonial economies. It soon became apparent, however, that the role assigned to blacks was fixed at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. Welcomed as labourers and in the service category generally, they met resistance when they tried to buy a home, rent a hotel room or ride inside a stage coach. The vote and jury service, two overwhelming desires for people denied citizenship in their native country, continued to be beyond their reach in those early years, and certain jobs and even land ownership were sometimes kept from them.

The blacks, despite these disappointments, preserved the hope that things would improve, and meanwhile they set about making themselves valuable and loyal members of British colonial society. They sought land for farms, to become self-reliant proprietors and thus to disprove the contention that blacks could not care for themselves. They expressed their gratitude to the British Crown, joining and sometimes establishing militia units to protect colonial independence from threats of American annexation. When allowed the vote they exercised the franchise diligently, almost always casting their ballots in favour of the government and conservative candidates supporting the British connection. Anxious for an education to improve themselves, they found that white parents and teachers were not inclined to have them share common facilities with white children. In both Nova Scotia and Ontario legally sanctioned separate schools were established for blacks. Christian churches, too, placed restrictions on black members, with the result that most black Christians were forced into all-black congregations. When the Civil War and Reconstruction seemed to promise that the United States, at last, could be a reasonable home for black men, a majority of the fugitives returned south. Their experience had taught them that here was not their Canaan after all. The remnant who remained in the new Dominion

of Canada continued to struggle, largely ignored by the white majority, for the fulfilment of their expectations in a self-declared land of freedom.

Crawford Kilian has written a fine book illustrating the British Columbia chapter in this typical black story. His narrative begins in California in the 1850s, where "free" blacks were persecuted and exploited, denied the vote, unable to testify against whites in court, shunted into segregated schools and churches, and regarded as unworthy of citizenship. The case of Archy Lee, a hitherto free black arrested as a fugitive slave, was the proverbial final straw which inspired a mass black meeting in 1858 to consider migration from California. They sent a Pioneer Committee to Victoria to assess their opportunities, and this committee's favourable report encouraged hundreds more blacks to ship for Victoria during the summer of 1858. Many of the blacks were seen to kneel and pray as they first stepped onto the soil of Vancouver Island, for this was, as committee member Wellington Moses wrote, "a God-sent land for colored people."

Governor James Douglas, himself alleged to be of partial African ancestry, was prepared to welcome the blacks. Labour was scarce, and most of the new arrivals had skills to contribute to the burgeoning town of Victoria. Of equal or even greater importance, the gold rush had attracted gangs of white Americans whose loyalty to the Crown was suspect at least. The blacks were recognized as potential allies in enmity to American annexation, and as permanent residents whose interests could check those of the white transients in support of established law and order. He blithely promised them instant citizenship, including the right to vote and serve on juries. Douglas' accommodating attitude was reflected in the economic opportunities of boom-town Victoria. Good jobs were immediately available, though the service category tended to predominate, and several blacks made considerable profits in real estate as the influx of miners and camp followers pushed property values to incredible heights. In 1860 the blacks expressed their gratitude and satisfaction by voting in favour of the government party and against the reform element led by Amor De Cosmos, and by forming the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Company as an all-black militia unit prepared to defend British Victoria from American incursions. At the time theirs was the only armed force protecting the colony.

It was a pattern that would have been recognized by blacks in Eastern Canada, and unfortunately the pattern was to continue into its familiar second phase. When the Anglican rector Edward Cridge welcomed blacks into his church, some of his white parishioners left, declaring that "the

Creator had made a distinction which it was sinful to ignore." Congregationalist William Clarke, who like Cridge refused to discriminate, lost white members to another Congregational minister, Matthew Macfie, who segregated blacks on one side of his church. Amor De Cosmos, disgruntled at his defeat in the 1860 election (a defeat, by the way, which was ensured by the black voters who held the balance of power), challenged the blacks' right to vote, and commenced a campaign in his *British Colonist* to deprive the "alien blacks" of their citizenship privileges. The courts eventually decided that the blacks did not in fact qualify; the Alien Act of 1861 enfranchised blacks as naturalized British subjects, but they were still not allowed to run for the assembly. In similar contradiction to Douglas' promise, blacks were barred from jury service until 1872.

Saloons, restaurants and places of secular entertainment followed the example of church and government. The most dramatic example was the Colonial Theatre, where blacks were relegated to the balcony. In 1860 a riot occurred when some blacks tried to sit on the main floor, and later a group of the colony's most distinguished black citizens was pelted with eggs and flour during a hospital benefit performance. Blacks were omitted from Queen's Birthday celebrations and from the farewell dinner in 1864 honouring their erstwhile patron James Douglas. Even the loyal Pioneer Rifles were prevented from joining the parade to welcome the new governor, on the grounds that as a military unit they would lead the parade and thus cause humiliation to the whites forced to walk behind them. Not surprisingly, the Civil War had its effect on the West Coast blacks. The earlier promises had been betrayed, and a new free America now offered a better opportunity, or so it seemed. Many blacks, including some of the community's leaders, teachers and successful businessmen, therefore returned to the United States. No longer numerous enough to pose a threat to white sensitivities, the blacks who stayed fell from notice and were left in relative peace, "integrated" into the lower echelons of British Columbian society.

In addition to the basic story of the black pioneers' experience in British Columbia, Kilian provides biographical details on several of the most prominent participants. Mifflin Gibbs is featured, for as the chief spokesman and most affluent member of the black community his career reflects both the opportunities and the disadvantages of being black in mid-century Victoria. Gibbs was one of those to make a fortune in real estate, and he invested his profits in the Queen Charlotte coalfields and later in building the railway to service the mines. In 1866 he was elected

to Victoria city council and even served as acting mayor; in 1868 he attended the Yale convention as the elected delegate of Saltspring Island, thus earning a place as an "uncle," if not a father, of Confederation. Yet he was jostled and insulted at the Colonial Theatre, prevented from running for a seat in the assembly and kept from jury service, and so in 1870 he went back to the United States, where he enjoyed a distinguished career as a judge and diplomat. Also featured is the Stark family, who pioneered on Saltspring Island, and the miners, carpenters, tinsmiths and merchants who participated in the settlement of the mainland colony. Through these personal stories Kilian stresses the contribution made by the original blacks and their descendants to the development of a free, prosperous British Columbia.

And yet, as Kilian explains in his epilogue, the black contribution has gone unrecognized. The Ku Klux Klan claimed 10,000 members in British Columbia during the 1920s, hotels and swimming pools discriminated by colour into the 1940s, and in 1954 the black wife of a white teacher was ordered out of a private boarding school. Above all, white society's attitudes were revealed in black employment patterns, for blacks were considered fit only to serve. The blacks themselves, never content, began to organize for change in the 1950s. The formation of the British Columbia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People is presented as seminal, followed by several other organizations with political, social or cultural purpose. Today, over a century after their initial arrival, blacks are well served by black organizations and by black politicians, and British Columbia in general continues to benefit from their presence. If it ends, in this sense, as a "success story," Kilian's book declares that more remains to be done, and it is not a story from which white Canadians can take much satisfaction.

Aside from its important message, this book is an excellent read. It is very well written and generously illustrated. The atmosphere of pioneer Victoria and the gold rush is charmingly evoked, and the treatment overall is sensitive. There is something here for every appetite — adventure, murder, pioneers, Indians, high ideals, entrepreneurial success, corrupt politicians — all of it presented with taste and style. If there were a British Columbia Book-of-the-Month club, this volume would surely rate as a monthly selection. In any case it can be recommended as a gift for a relative or friend interested in British Columbia's past. Kilian explicitly denies any claim to scholarly merit, and it would therefore be inappropriate to complain of occasional lapses in historical accuracy, or of the limitations of some of the sources used. As a narrative

account it is an admirable example of its genre. In his introduction Kilian expresses the hope that academic historians will pick up the story, and there can be no doubt that he has challenged the professionals most effectively.

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