

*Tomslake: History of the Sudeten Germans in Canada*, by Andrew Amstatter. Saanichton: Hancock House Publishers, 1978. Pp. 183; *illus.*

It is often forgotten that Hitler's takeover of the Sudetenland portion of the Czechoslovak Republic in October 1938 endangered not only resident Czechs and Jews but some Germans as well. The Nazi forces which occupied the borderlands of Bohemia and Moravia ceded to the Reich at the Munich Conference posed an immediate threat to any prominent anti-Nazi members of the Volk. No group of such opponents was more resented by the Nazis than the Sudeten German socialists. Thus, in the aftermath of Munich, many of the socialist leaders fled their homeland to avoid the concentration camp or worse. Andrew Amstatter's *Tomslake: History of the Sudeten Germans in Canada* describes the flight out of the Sudetenland and the settlement in British Columbia of a group of these socialist opponents of Hitler.

Amstatter is well qualified to tell the story of the refugees. Born in 1906 in the Sudetenland and raised from youth in the traditions of a socialist movement, he had become by 1938 a leading party official in Asch, the western Bohemian city which was also the residence of the Sudeten Nazi leader, Konrad Henlein. Because Amstatter had long before 1938 been a marked man to the Nazis, he left the Sudetenland soon after the results of the Munich Conference became known. Fleeing first to Prague and then to Sweden, he eventually immigrated to Canada. Amstatter arrived at Tomslake in late July 1939. Establishing himself as a farmer, he remained in the Sudeten settlement there until 1959.

The author of *Tomslake* has divided his book into two sections. The first portion, comprising the first five chapters, describes the dramatic European background. Drawing heavily upon personal experiences, Amstatter illustrates the environment of Nazi terror which surrounded the social democrats at the time of Munich. After sketching the initial flight into the interior of Czechoslovakia, he then discusses the problems confronting the refugees in leaving Czechoslovakia. These ranged from finding other countries willing to accept them to arranging for visas and securing transportation that would carry them to safety. Next, the author narrates how Canada was selected as a refuge. He details the complex means by which the immigration was financed; he outlines the role which the Canadian railways played in settling the Sudetens in western Canada. Of the 1,000 or so Sudetens who fled to Canada, the CNR located half of the refugees in Saskatchewan; the CPR settled the other half in northern British Columbia.

At this point in his account (chapter 6) Amstatter leaves off describing the entire group and concentrates on the British Columbia settlement. In the following twelve chapters he elaborates on the obstacles faced and overcome by the former industrial workers and urban dwellers in their new land. More specifically, the author describes how the refugees were located together on an abandoned and only partly developed ranch amidst the bush of British Columbia's Peace River district. For the first year, life had to be lived on a co-operative basis until enough land was broken to provide each family with its own quarter-section farm. Often with touching humour, Amstatter recounts how the new farmers struggled to learn how to milk a cow, handle a breaking plow, dig a well, or plant a crop. All these tasks, the author points out, were complicated by other difficulties such as the severe weather or the language problem. In addition, Amstatter touches on the role played by the CPR management which purchased the land, dispensed the household goods, and controlled the farm implements. These officials, he admits, were often somewhat obtuse, refusing until 1942, for example, to allow the refugees a voice on the committee which directed settlement policies and activities. From this time, Amstatter insists, a steady improvement in the settlement occurred. Although a few members moved out during the war and some additional ones drifted away after 1945, the settlement continued to prosper to the present time. To Amstatter, this success represents a tribute to the intelligence, the determination, the flexibility, and the toughness of the Sudetens — both men and women.

In large measure, the shortcomings in Amstatter's eye-witness account stem from the author's too heavy reliance upon himself and his own experiences. Much of the book is merely recollections. After nearly forty years, a portion of what did take place was bound to have been forgotten or, when recalled, recalled inaccurately. For example, in chapter 5 the author asserts that two representatives of the refugees, Frank Rehwald and Willi Wanka, were sent to Canada to negotiate for the acceptance of the Sudetens. Wanka never made such a trip. Moreover, Amstatter's account of the settlement's evolution is overly sanguine. A more complete airing of the slights and needless sufferings inflicted on the settlers by insensitive bureaucrats and hostile government officials should have been provided. If the author had considered some of the defamatory reports filed by CPR officers and officials in the Immigration Department, his understanding of the difficulties faced by the settlers would have been expanded. No doubt his book would have been more critical of how the settlers were dealt with by those supposedly responsible for them.

Finally, Amstatter has described his own experiences and those of his associates at Tomslake in such a fashion as to imply that their saga constituted if not the whole story at least the most important part of the Sudeten presence in Canada. There is more. Besides Tomslake an equally significant and successful Sudeten settlement developed in and around St. Walburg, Saskatchewan. Moreover, those refugees who left the original settlements in Saskatchewan and British Columbia later formed an important Sudeten colony in eastern Canada (dispersed among Hamilton, Toronto, and Montreal). These other two Sudeten groups are as important as the Tomslake settlement in the overall history of the Sudetens in Canada.

Such shortcomings notwithstanding, Amstatter's work, which is the first book-length effort to describe Canada's Sudeten refugees, is important. For all its one-sidedness, it represents an invaluable historical document. The anecdotes, the colourful narratives, the sensitive impressions Amstatter provides are exciting, amusing, pathetic and always real. But the book is more than a telling primary source. From the onset, the author sets out to write a work on Canadian history which is transatlantic in scope. One cannot understand the German settlers of Tomslake, the author is saying, without knowing them first in their European context. Their trials, their strengths, their joys, their gratitude toward Canada cannot be fully grasped without knowing who they were before they became Canadians. There is a strong lesson here for those who might wish to write history dealing with other ethnic groups who have come to this country from abroad.

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*Vancouver: Western Metropolis*, edited by Leonard J. Evenden. Western Geographical Series Volume 16: Department of Geography, University of Victoria, 1978. Pp. xxii, 277; tables, graphs, maps and plates.

A collection of articles — thirteen in this instance — makes it difficult for a reviewer to discharge an obligation and distribute all of the laurels. Not every article can be discussed in detail. Therefore, much of this review considers the volume as a single work, particularly since Professor Evenden has taken a variety of research interests and edited a cohesive collection. The over-arching theme that Vancouver is a metropolis — a unique one — conveys a unity of purpose. The editor, in a generally