

example of Spilsbury's early career. His radio telephones, like Osborne's marine engines, the Empire Machine Works' donkey engines, and Easthope motors, were home-made and not imported from Kalamazoo or Hamilton. Spilsbury rejected the temptation to go to Vancouver until he was nearly forty years old, choosing instead to cultivate his own potential and the economic potential of the inside coast. His story has contemporary relevance: while nurses, teachers, graduate students and others leave British Columbia in droves, *Spilsbury's Coast* suggests that there are ways of staying.

*Pender Island*

RICHARD MACKIE

*An Error in Judgement: The Politics of Medical Care in an Indian/White Community*, by Dara Culhane Speck. Talonbooks: Vancouver, 1987. Pp. 281.

For more than a century in British Columbia, white church-sponsored hospitals and residential schools have dominated the landscapes of native reserve communities. Their presence and authority have rarely been questioned. To the outside world these were necessary institutions created to improve the quality of health and education. In recent months, however, newspaper reports of church leaders, school officials, and dormitory supervisors sexually abusing children under their care have shattered this image of well-being.

Twenty years ago, another kind of abuse in native communities — deriving from the sometimes poor quality of medical child care — would have been conveniently and easily silenced. But today is a time of speaking out.

In 1979, in the small town of Alert Bay on Cormorant Island, British Columbia, a native child died from a ruptured appendix in a well-equipped hospital while under her doctor's care. In times past, the roots of such a tragedy might have been known but not aired. In 1979, this was not to be the case. A few in the community had been reared in the spirit of the political activism of the 1960s, and, upon witnessing this death, they did not let it pass.

One of these was Dara Culhane Speck. Culhane Speck had moved to Alert Bay in the early 1970s from Montreal. She describes herself as having been very much a part of the political and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Her fourteen-year-long association with the community, as a band member through marriage, and her participation in native political

organizations, band administration and band education, placed her in the unique situation of being both an insider and an outsider in Alert Bay. She was ideal to participate in the campaign to expose this case of possible medical malpractice. She believed that the situation in Alert Bay was not unique.

Culhane Speck has produced a book which she explains is “a critique of a system of relationships which has ramifications beyond the boundaries of Cormorant Island . . . not only in the sphere of medical care, but in education, economic development, land rights, social welfare, law enforcement and local government” (p. 20). In her first three chapters, she instantly captivates her readers with a synopsis of the events leading up to the child’s death. Here first-hand accounts are nicely interwoven with her own narrative. Following this she breaks away from the events of 1979 to present a comprehensive historical/ethnographic/sociological portrait of Alert Bay. Here we see the problems in the community not only in terms of native suicides, welfare, and alcoholism. On the contrary, Culhane Speck shows how a nineteenth-century social Darwinian worldview took root and permeated the social fabric of one small Canadian town. For anyone wishing to understand better the source of discontent in native-white communities, Culhane Speck’s account is worthwhile reading. She sees all too well the “big fish in the little pond” syndrome: the much sought-after positions held by doctors, coroners, chairpersons of hospital and school boards, the élite descendants of the first settler families, and, in general, “the relative prosperity and social prestige enjoyed by this sector of the White Community [which] depended on the corresponding want and dependency of the Indian community” (p. 97).

After her presentation of the historical roots underlying the social problems in Alert Bay, the author outlines the sequence of events leading to the inquest into the death, the responses to the crisis by the provincial and federal governments and medical profession, and the local community’s reaction to the latter. A bizarre twist is introduced in Chapter 10, when a new doctor arrives on the scene, is embraced by the native people for his humanitarian approach and good results, and then turns out to be a medical imposter who commits suicide the day after he is found out.

Chapter 11 follows the federal inquiry into the death and the attempt by all involved to reach a resolution. The final chapter and the Epilogue — the former, an account of a legal misunderstanding in Alert Bay in 1895, and the latter, a reflection on the events of 1979-1980, at the annual Sports Day in June 1983 — are short and add a quasi-poetic closing to this long and painful affair.

For those for whom sociological writing is often cryptic, dry, and overly "quantitative," Culhane Speck's account presents a lively change. Her main objective, she explains, has been to present the story as it was understood by the people in the native community, a point of view which is rarely taken seriously. Culhane Speck states clearly that this is a story which demanded that sides be chosen and that she took a side and had no regrets about her choice. She herself was a key actor in the account and hence could not stand aloof and present the story as a detached outsider.

This is a piece of real social scientific merit, one which acknowledges and incorporates the perspective of the "observer" as well as the "observed." It is beautifully written, highly readable, and educational for both an academic and a general audience.

*Vancouver*

WENDY C. WICKWIRE

*The People of the Snow: The Story of Kitimat*, by John Kendrick. Toronto: N.C. Press Limited, 1987.

John Kendrick has written an important human interest story about the people who constructed and were affected by Alcan's huge Kitimat project, completed in the early 1950s. As one of the major actors, he provides a valuable personal perspective on this exciting time in the development of the province.

Before assessing Kendrick's book, one should recall that Kitimat was one of the largest single private construction projects ever undertaken in Canada. As resident engineer for Alcan, Kendrick modestly omits clear reference to its colossal scale. The project required the construction of a major dam, 80 km from the nearest road, to reverse the flow of the Nechako River; a 16 km tunnel, 120 km from the nearest road, to feed the water to an underground powerhouse which was also at an inaccessible location; a transmission line over rugged mountain tops and through avalanche-prone valleys; a world-class aluminum smelter at the head of Douglas Channel, then only accessible by boat; and lastly, a new town to house over 10,000 people. In spite of the size and complexity of the project, a mere forty-two months elapsed from the start of construction to the time the first aluminum ingot was poured.

Kendrick's long association with Kitimat commenced in 1937 when, as an engineering student, he was hired by the B.C. government to work on remote field surveys of the hydroelectric potential of the area, which could