
Book Review

Lower Fraser valley: Evolution of a cultural landscape, edited by A. H. Siemens. BC geographical series 9. Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1968.

The declared purpose of this book, written for both visitors and students interested in the Lower Fraser valley, is to introduce this region of British Columbia, the development of its cultural landscape, and the rationale of its geographic patterns, all of which lay a groundwork for elementary geographic theory. The editor feels that the significant historical questions and contemporary problems of a "home area" provide an alternative to the ordinary textbook introductory geography, because the former leads to unexpected insights and increased involvement. The concern to present an introduction that underlines geographic knowledge as pertinent to day-to-day human life and not as a discrete body of facts enclosed in textbooks comes across: "For whatever purpose this collection may be used, it is intended that certain key traits of personality of the Lower Fraser Valley will become clear."

While Siemens is more than aware of the problems relating material directly to day-to-day realities and while he selected articles to suit his purpose, the fact is that very little of the personality of the valley is portrayed by the book. It is stripped of most of its folklore, myths, and metaphysical questions of its meaning; it is laid bare as an immutable object, impersonal and technical, a rational place to be known through dates, numbers, distances, climatic measures, costs, and production figures. None of the articles gives the Lower Fraser valley a personality; indeed, such articles have yet to be written.

This absence of cultural interpretations of the valley – questions of its "Americanness" or "Britishness" – is a major weakness of the book and one that endangers the central purpose. But this is saved by the editor's introductory comments, where he notes briefly the difficulties inherent in identifying the cultural "givenness" of the valley. A clear statement of concepts such as *cultural landscape* and *personality* would no doubt have assisted the editor and the reader.

Significant new studies on the valley are presented, and the utility of having these wide-ranging studies in one unit gives the book its importance. The material is supported by a useful bibliography of the valley, available in print for the first time. All authors write with a clear style, and the degree

of technical knowledge imparted is considerable. With the exception of the first article, the book is well illustrated with maps and tables, but no photographs of the valley landscape, apart from the wraparound photograph on the cover, are included. As well, no references to viewpoints in the field from which the landscape can be seen are listed. The increase in visual contact that would have resulted from photography and visual reference points would have involved the reader more with the valley and its problems.

As is Siemen's intent, this book is no ordinary introduction to the valley or to geographic theory. The different views, interests, and conclusions of the authors come through in a disarming way. For example, land ideologies of the valley are assessed as the result of government policies: "Land to many individuals is a commodity that can only go up in value. To a large extent, present and past activities of the various government agencies of the valley have fostered expectations through home ownership grants, purchases of land for public projects at high costs and the general eagerness to accommodate development anywhere at any time." Everyone will not agree with the views presented, but interpretations lead to counter-interpretations and the dialogue so generated advances the objectives of the book.

The first article deals with the prehistory of the Lower Mainland as it is interpreted from the stratigraphies of several sites along the waterways of the Fraser. Borden's analysis of prehistory, with its ecological emphasis, is a welcome contribution to geographic literature. However, it would have been better had the author risked some speculation and interpreted what community life was probably like in, for example, the Marpole phase. Sketch maps of the winter village settlement patterns generalizing the distribution and the size of household sites, ceremonial places, and activity patterns would have served the purpose of portraying life. The locational map of prehistoric sites shows their general distribution clearly, but it is useless as a means of locating the exact sites in the field.

The transformation of Borden's prehistoric landscape into an agricultural and urban area by European and Asian peoples follows in logical sequence. First, there is an overview of the initial occupants, their land tenure, and cadastral policies. Then the construction of transportation lines is described. After this there follows a background article on climatic patterns which supports an assessment of agriculture as a key resource in the valley's development. A more detailed account of a specific European group, the Dutch, and a specific sector of the agricultural economy, dairying, conclude the observations on that part of the valley that has remained essentially rural.

The final articles deal with that part of the valley that has been transformed by more intensive urban growth. Again, a background article that empirically describes the urbanization and the rise to dominance of one

centre, Vancouver, lays the groundwork for what was promised in the introduction, the pertinent geographic problems. These are assessed in relation to their social, political, and economic relevance to life in the valley. V. J. Parker concludes the discussion with his interpretation of resource development and the problems of urban expansion.

The articles and the general bibliography suggest that so far what has guided geographic research in the valley are questions for which supporting data are easily available. This book will no doubt lead to the elaboration of other questions. Possibilities seem most promising in two directions: the effects of geomorphological factors in settlement patterns, and the effects of a cultural adaption and adjustment in the creation of the valley's geographic folk art, the form and symbolism of its homes, barns, and fences.

This book deserves to be read by all students of the valley. Its importance comes not only from what is presented but also from the attention it draws to questions that have not yet been researched but that have promise because they are part of the valley's heritage and are stepping-stones to understanding other places.

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