

Anyways

dey kill Almighty Voice over a damn cow.

Hees jus not right how dey can do dat.

Jus kill a man for killing hees own cow.

Dats how bad dat Indian Department he use to be in
dem days. [pp. 73-79]

That's not all the story, but that's all I am going to share with you here. When I read, I can hear and feel the nephew. I can hear and feel his love and respect for Uncle Big John. This is one good book that will always keep the stories alive. It's a good way to be. I send my regards, respect, and thanks to Maria and Sherry for this book, a real gift.

Note

1 In Indian languages there are no male and female pronouns. Only he is used.

Annalisa R. Staples and Ruth L. McConnell, *Soapstone and Seed Beads: Arts and Crafts at the Charles Camsell Hospital, A Tuberculosis Sanitorium*. Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta, Special Publication no. 7, 1993.

review by Dorinda M. Stahl

For many historians, incorporating traditional archival sources with more contemporary methods of research, such as oral tradition and material culture, continues to be a challenge in the re-construction of the past. The difficulty, however, lies not in recognizing the legitimacy of once ignored sources, but rather, in choosing an appropriate method that allows for the integration of those sources in a manner that is flattering and complimentary to the subject matter. *Soapstone and Seed Beads: Arts and Crafts and the Charles Camsell Hospital, A Tuberculosis Sanatorium* provides a plausible answer to this sometimes difficult question. By using sources from a multitude of disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology and epidemiology, Annalisa Staples and Ruth L. McConnell, with the assistance of Jill E. Oakes, re-construct the history of the Camsell by allowing the sources to, in effect, consult one-another and speak for themselves. It is this collaboration of sources that not only promotes harmony and balance in their historical research and interpretation of the Charles Camsell Hospital, but also allows for a work that is written with creativity and integrity.

Soapstone and Seed Beads is divided into two separate, yet interrelated sections. The first section primarily deals with the history of patient life at the Camsell. Much of the discussion centres around the Camsell Educational and Handicraft programs, the latter program being unique to the Camsell, and the impact both of these programs had on intercultural contact and the quality of patient life. Staples and McConnell explain that government policy at the time focussed on institutionalising Aboriginal patients of tuberculosis and that these programs, largely initiated by the staff of the Camsell, were designed to create an environment whereby Aboriginal culture and traditions could be at least partially practised. This was especially true of the Handicraft Program. The program, which was expanded in the early 1950s, encouraged patients to create and produce traditional art works such as beadwork, sewing, carving and painting and sell their productions in the hospital's giftshop, the proceeds of which would be directed to the creator of the art. Staples and McConnell suggest that the production of traditional art not only allowed for the Camsell staff to understand more fully Aboriginal customs and traditions, but also encouraged Aboriginal patients, both men and women, to remain at the Camsell for treatment.

The second section of *Soapstone and Seed Beads* discusses the process in which the 'artifacts' that were created by Aboriginal patients were collected and how those artifacts, combined with oral testimony as well as government and hospital records, allowed for the re-construction of the hospital's history. Much of this discussion focusses on the Camsell Collection, a compilation of over 400 artifacts from the hospital and the Camsell Project, a procedure that was dedicated to the collection, interpretation, organization and preservation of those artifacts. Staples and McConnell explain much of the criteria for documenting the collection such as various photographic, cataloguing and identifying procedures. They also include photographic representation of fifty-nine of the 450-artifact collection. Jill E. Oakes concludes the second half of the work with the discussion of the Charles Camsell Garment Collection - a collection which is included in the larger Camsell Collection. The Garment Collection consists of clothing left by Aboriginal patients who attended the Camsell Hospital and provides an excellent opportunity to better understand traditional ways of life. With the assistance of Jill Oakes, oral tradition interprets various pieces of clothing and comments on the meaning of dress, gender, patterns and symbolism in Aboriginal clothing. Oakes also includes photographs of some of the garments such as men's, women's and children's parkas and stockings, providing a visual aid to the written interpretation.

However, *Soapstone and Seed Beads* is not without its problems. One flaw is the labelling of traditional Aboriginal art as 'arts and crafts' – a term which is derogatory. Another problem lies in Staples' and McConnell's limited acknowledgment of the structure of the Handicraft Program – they themselves mention that the program was under the influence and subjected to the demands of the hospital staff and potential giftshop buyers. For example, they note that patients would be encouraged, if not forced, to produce artifacts that would sell. For the creators of the art, this meant making items that were perceived as being 'Indian' and 'authentic' rather than producing items that were actually traditional. This also meant painting and/or carving 'Indian' designs on European items such as napkin rings, tea cosies, place mats and cushion covers to encourage the sale of those items. It would have been valuable to explore these kinds of issues for it was during this era (post World-Wars) that museums, curators, governments and personal collectors were becoming reacquainted and re-interested in Aboriginal "artifacts." Was the Camsell Handicraft Program truly interested in the betterment of its Aboriginal patients or was it, in fact, an institution that exploited Aboriginal peoples solely for economic gains? Worse yet, was the hospital simply supplying artifacts to various buyers who feared that Aboriginal culture, and thus, Aboriginal "arts and crafts," would soon be extinct? Links such as these should have been examined.

Staples and McConnell also missed a golden opportunity to tap into the contemporary debate regarding material culture: who has the right to own it? who has the right to interpret it? is it art? is it artifact? These types of questions continue to surface in academic discourse and a work like *Soapstone and Seed Beads* would have provided a near perfect venue in which to address some of these issues.

Although *Soapstone and Seed Beads* does overlook some pressing issues, it is a work that is to be admired because of the way in which the authors manage to collaborate various sources. *Soapstone and Seed Beads* is a positive example that sources from various disciplines can be integrated successfully in historical research. *Soapstone and Seed Beads* should be seen as a model that can be followed by scholars who are concerned about achieving a more holistic and balanced style of history – a style which is long overdue.
