

Daniel E. Moerman: Medicinal Plants of Native America. Two Volumes. Research Reports in Ethnobotany, Contribution 2. University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology Technical Reports, Number 19. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1986. 910 pages.

The true value of a reference work, such as Daniel Moerman's monumental Medicinal Plants of Native America, can only become evident over the years, as researchers access the data contained therein and assess its accuracy and utility. Nevertheless, preliminary examination of Moerman's work, and a brief field test among some Native students, demonstrates to this reviewer that these two volumes, while flawed in some respects, deserve a great deal of attention. Moerman has done all of us interested in Native medicines a great favour by laying the groundwork for what could become a resource of unlimited value.

In the forward, Richard Ford, of the Ethnobotanical Laboratory at the University of Michigan, describes these volumes as "the largest taxonomically reliable medicinal reference guide to Native American medicinal plants ever published" (viii). Indeed, Moerman presents 17,634 entries encompassing 2147 species of plants. For ease in utilization, the data are categorized in four basic ways: by taxon (genus and species), by indication (basic medical usage); by plant family; and by the cultural group or tribe recorded as utilizing the plant.

Volume one is composed entirely of the data classified by taxon. Each entry in this volume presents a description of the usage of the plant by each specific group or tribe, its common name and a reference number for the source of Moerman's information. These sources are contained in a bibliography in volume one. Volume two presents essentially the same information as in volume one, but in a variety of different forms: according to group or culture; indication; plant family; and common name. Hence, a researcher can access the



information in a variety of ways, which is especially valuable when one has only partial information, such as the common name, to begin with.

A reference work of this magnitude invariably has its problems, but in Moerman's case they are relatively minor. For instance, some of us would question why the Montagnais and Ojibwa are classed in the same culture area as the Iroquois, and not with the Native peoples of the "arctic and sub-arctic." The work also suffers from the inevitable gross categorization, wherein no distinction is made between the sub-groups of various tribes. The Cree are a good example of this: no reference is made to the distinctions between James Bay Cree, Western Woods Cree, and Plains Cree, even though these three groups accessed a variety of different plant species. This underscores another problem with the work, at least from a Canadian perspective: important Native cultures are absent. A brief examination of Moerman's database demonstrates that virtually none of the Dene peoples is represented, nor are Plains groups such as the Sarcee, Assiniboine, and Plains Ojibwa. Of course this may not be Moerman's fault, since he is very much dependent upon available sources. However, at this stage in the development of his database the utilization only of existing ethnobotanical studies, as opposed to other ethnographic and ethnohistorical works, clearly has limitations.

One other concern that I have about the data, and one brought to my attention by Native students, is the lack of common names in the various Indian languages. Many of my students knew only the Indian name for a medicine and, lacking any botanical knowledge, found these volumes frustrating to use. While the inclusion of Indian names would require a great deal more work (and I am quite certain that Moerman must be exhausted from his present effort), such an



addition should be considered in any reprinted or updated versions. In this way, the data can become even more useful to the many Native people who, in Moerman's words, "provided the fountain of human knowledge from which we are privileged to drink" (p. ix).

Moerman has made an excellent start in presenting these data for our use. Furthermore, in his introduction, ethnobotanists are invited to enquire about the development of computer-generated sub-lists that may be useful to them as research tools. I am pleased to see Moerman's continued interest in the area. Perhaps all of us who have data on Native botanical medicines, either through field research, ethnohistorical studies, or examination of secondary sources, should send these data along to Moerman. Such data would be easily entered into his data-base, and perhaps up-dates could be made available to researchers. In so doing, we all could contribute to Moerman's efforts, to our mutual benefit.

James B. Waldram

Robert Page: Northern Development: The Canadian Dilemma. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986. 360 pages.

This is the first comprehensive evaluation of the debate that has raged for the past two decades regarding the future of Canada's north. Professor Robert Page writes from an unusual vantage point, that of an academic historian who actually participated in the controversial events of the mid-1970s. It was a deliberate decision on his part to wait a number of years before putting the proverbial pen to paper in an attempt, as he states, "to allow some of the fires of controversy to cool." The result is an outstanding study, marked by careful