

## Richard Rajala, *The Legacy and the Challenge: A Century of the Forest Industry at Cowichan Lake*

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Rajala, Richard. *The Legacy and the Challenge: A Century of the Forest Industry at Cowichan Lake*. Lake Cowichan: Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, 1993. ix + 142 pp., illus., map, \$12.95, ISBN 0-88878-338-8.

In an era of continuing, widening and often heated debate, over the extent and methods of logging on the British Columbia west coast, and about what future — if any — local logging and milling communities will have, I welcomed the publication of this short study, an overview of the history of the one of the most important centres of the forest industry in British Columbia over the last 120 years. Realizing that it had been written by an author with strong local ties and an acknowledged expertise about the history of the west coast forest industry, and published by the Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, I was expecting the book to provide me with an increased understanding of the history of the industry, and of its very real impact upon the lives of many individuals in the Cowichan Valley. Given the development of the Cowichan and Chemainus Valleys Ecomuseum, I expected it would prove a useful tool, for local museum workers as well as visitors to the region wishing to learn more about the history of its main industry. As a reviewer for *Material History Review*, I was hoping that the strong local connections of the writer and publishers might mean that the book would provide some very real and new insights into the individual working and private lives of local loggers and mill workers.

Rajala was raised in the town of Mesachie Lake and worked at a mill at nearby Honeycomb Bay, along the southern shore of Lake Cowichan. He personally witnessed the transformation of the life in the region, as the forest resources were dramatically depleted in recent decades, and once thriving communities declined or disappeared. He attended the University of Victoria, where his 1987 master's thesis, on change in the industry, received the Governor General's Gold Medal. At the time that *The Legacy and the Challenge: A Century of the Forest Industry at Cowichan Lake* was published, he was completing his doctoral degree at York University and teaching at the University of Victoria.

For those wanting to use the book as a resource for the display of forest technology and material history, the book will probably have limited use. While the author has strong local ties, and presumably knows of many residents and former residents with personal experience in logging and milling work, who might have given detailed accounts of life in the industry (including rich details of work in the dangerous mountainous terrain and camp life), Rajala provides an account that is an overview of the industry in the Cowichan Lake area, and often concentrates on changes in ownership in the industry and the politics of organized labour. While such an approach can obviously be quite useful, in setting the context for local developments, it has meant that *The Legacy and the Challenge* provides only limited insights into details of work in the woods; it is sadly short of accounts of the personal struggles of the owners of small logging outfits to survive in a tough industry and avoid bankruptcy, the experiences of individual loggers coping with dangerous working conditions and growing mechanization, the struggles of Sikh and Chinese forestry workers working and living with racial prejudice and isolation, and the lives of women and children in the valley.

Ironically, this shortcoming, for some readers, is related to a strength of the book; unlike many local histories, this volume reaches beyond the strictly local or regional, placing the development of forest resources in a larger context. Given the limited space presumably available to him, the author chose to concentrate on giving readers a sense of how the experience of resource extraction, in the Cowichan Valley, has related to the larger issue of capitalism, labour practices and the development of forest policy on the provincial, national and even international levels. In doing so, Rajala has given us the benefit of his extensive research into the larger field, making the book a useful tool for readers interested in the bigger picture, be it the general history of the forest industry and other natural resource industries, and resource-based communities in North America. Rajala's study has added value since he also included extensive references to his sources.

Sadly, the credibility of *The Legacy and the Challenge* will suffer with many readers due to the poor proofreading. This reviewer encountered at least twelve typographical errors even before the start of the first chapter, a precedent which was unfortunately followed throughout the balance of the book — including the title of the final chapter, which was misspelled “Falldownn.” Given the expertise and credibility of the author, I can only conclude that responsibility for such oversights may rest with the publishers. They are a disservice to the author and an otherwise good product.

Given the limited space available for this review, I will note just a few other points. Rajala has given a useful summary of some of the earlier environmental debates that centred around logging practices on the West Coast. He mentions that in the late 1920s, “...the first concerns were expressed about the pace of deforestation and absence of young growth on the expanding area of cutover land,” (p. 27). Later (p. 70–71), he notes:

Prominent Cowichan resident Francis Dickie penned a scathing indictment of British Columbia logging practices for Maclean’s in 1936, arguing that the expense of modern machinery encouraged operators to destroy the forest while cutting so there would be “a fat profit afterward.”

The author also supplies (p. 92) some dramatic figures to stress the devastation that had occurred to forests in the Cowichan Valley by the 1940s:

By this time 74 200 acres had been denuded in the area tributary to the lake; 41 percent in

the previous ten years though logging and accidental fires. By the end of 1946 over 400 000 [my highlighting] log cars had been carried over the [Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway] line, representing over two billion feet of timber.

Given today’s loud debate about the future of the surviving forests, Rajala provides valuable insight into the real, long term strength of forest interests in British Columbia, the vulnerable position of forest-based communities, and the very long struggle, with limited successes, of environmental activists who call for alternative approaches to the management of coastal forests. It is in this area that I believe Rajala’s short study will prove useful to curators and historians who choose to study the history of our resource-based society, and the environmental movement in North America.

The only other point I wish to make relates to the limited use of maps and illustrations in the book. A more effective use of detailed maps or plans of logging operations, logging camps and sawmill towns, photographs of workers, their families, the depletion of the forests, as well as illustrations of changing logging and milling technology, would have added much to the value of the publication, to everyone from specialist researchers to visitors to the region.

Yet, despite the problems I have noted, I believe *The Legacy and the Challenge* is a useful addition to the literature on resource industries and related communities. I hope a new, much more fully illustrated edition (or second volume), containing more personal accounts or reminiscences by loggers, mill workers and their families, will be published.

## John McIntyre, *Children of Peace*

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McIntyre, John. *Children of Peace*, Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1994. xvi + 260 pp., 18 illus., hardcover \$42.95, ISBN 0-7735-1195-4.

In *Children of Peace*, W. John McIntyre tells the story of a utopian community that flourished in the wilderness of Ontario between 1812 and 1890. It was led by the charismatic and sophisticated David Willson. The movement he founded focussed attention on direct revelation

to every individual of the “Inner Light,” by then a contentious issue even among the Quakers (and, in one form or another, among many other Protestants as well). The Children of Peace could be considered a movement that failed, of course, because only physical remnants of it have survived to this day. But it could also be considered a success, as McIntyre points out, because for several generations it met fundamental human needs: spiritual, social,