

***Siammon Life, Siammon Lands.* By Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983. Pp. 176, photographs, maps, appendices, bibliog., index, \$14.95 paper)**

Wendy Wickwire

Volume 6, Number 1-2, 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081250ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081250ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Wickwire, W. (1984). Review of [*Siammon Life, Siammon Lands.* By Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983. Pp. 176, photographs, maps, appendices, bibliog., index, \$14.95 paper)]. *Ethnologies*, 6(1-2), 174–176. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081250ar>

one of them. Its well written text, coupled with a multi-media presentation that incorporates catalogue reprints, illustrations, quotations, and an abundance of photographs, makes it enjoyable reading. The comprehensive index and short bibliography suit the book to classroom use as well. For anyone who has even casually noticed pieces of ironwork, the study sets what he has seen in a national and historical context.

Although designed as an introduction, *Iron* may contain useful information to those with specific interests. In their discussions of particular foundries and craftsmen, or the development of a specific artifact such as the iron stove, Arthur and Ritchie share a wealth of detailed knowledge. The book also discusses the difficult problem of determining if certain artifacts are cast or wrought. For even the experienced eye this can often be a puzzle and the writers give the expansive fence enclosing the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa as an example. At such a length and height, cast would be the immediate opinion of most, but as the authors point out, it was actually wrought by imported English smiths.

This is not to say that *Iron* is without flaws. The book is subtitled *Cast and Wrought Iron in Canada from the Seventeenth Century to Present*, but anything west of Ontario is largely neglected. There are only a few isolated references to Western Canada, such as a brief mention of prefabricated iron buildings in Victoria and Winnipeg. I am not familiar with the West and therefore am uncertain whether its absence here is an oversight, or if it does not figure prominently in iron development. If it is the latter, readers like myself would benefit from a statement to this effect. If, on the other hand, as the list of acknowledgements and the geographical scope of Arthur's earlier works indicate, it is because he, at least, has done very little fieldwork there, then perhaps the book would be better titled, *Iron of Eastern Canada...*

A personal disappointment with the study is that one of the most interesting iron products, the iron bridge, is not included. An entry in the bibliography assures the reader the subject was not overlooked entirely by the authors, and perhaps encourages further investigation on one's own. However, in a comprehensive volume of this type, the absence of any discussion of iron bridges seems an obvious omission.

Whatever its problems, in the end, *Iron* achieves the author's stated purpose of providing "an introduction to iron: its preparation, forming, applications, and decorative properties and uses." (xiii) It successfully makes a case for the role of iron in the gradual sophistication of Canadian culture and brings to the attention of the novice and expert alike, the "beauty and spirit of ironwork."

Diane TYE
Amherst, Nova Scotia

Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands

By Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard

(Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983.

Pp. 176, photographs, maps, appendices, bibliog., index, \$14.95 paper)

Ethnography, like all dimensions of anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s, is becoming infused with a new humanistic spirit. In the past, in the name of value-freedom and academic objectivity, much of the descriptive reporting on cultural traditions was distinctly lifeless. For this reason, many ethnographies have been confined to academic journals and museum annual reports. Today, however, with the growing interest of Native Peoples in their own distinct and fragile heritage, anthropologists are being challenged to make their "data" accessible and appealing to a wider readership, one that includes both the

scholar and the Native high school student.

The task is not an easy one, for the critics are quick to attack the ethnography which sacrifices fine detail for the sake of wide popular appeal.

Herein lies the major attribute of a new ethnography, *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands*. Its authors, Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, have painstakingly assembled a work which successfully meets the rigorous scholarly standards of the Boasian tradition of ethnograph, and yet also, in its poetic style and presentation (complete with numerous archival and present-day photographs, explorers' maps, and sketches), can be categorized as "popular".

Kennedy and Bouchard bring a unique perspective to British Columbia anthropology. They do not work under the auspices of an academic institution, as is the case with most anthropologists. Rather they work out of a self-generated project, The British Columbia Indian Language Project, which is now about a decade old and based in Victoria. Unhindered by an academic schedule, the Kennedy-Bouchard team has been free to pursue extensive fieldwork, not just during a short summer or winter "break"...

Few elders in southern British Columbia, from the coast to the interior, have not spent days with Kennedy and Bouchard crawling up remote jogging roads looking for long-ignored rock-formations and place-names, or boating in an artificial lake to identify the village sites that once lay below it, or sitting on front porches in the sweltering heat telling stories and mending fish nets. This intense work, some of it among the first systematic study to be undertaken in southern British Columbia, has enabled Kennedy and Bouchard to establish deep and lasting friendships with the elders with whom they have worked. It has also enabled them to amass a rich and diverse field collection, ranging from myths, place-names, fishing and

hunting technology, to classified word lists and practical writing systems.

Much ethnography glorifies a "golden age past" and ignores the changes which came about with the arrival of the White Man [This gap has been illuminated recently by anthropologist, Rolf Knight, in *Indians at Work*, (1978), a chronicle of the long-ignored role of Native Peoples in British Columbia's labour force]. In contrast, *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* highlights both the pre-contact past and the more recent history of the Sliammon Indians.

The cover design, a photograph of the Sliammon Reserve near Powell River, taken in 1983, is a good case-in-point. At a glance it is just a village — any village. But, a closer look reveals more. The small clapboard church steeple which rises above the village centre, the brightly coloured frame houses all in a clustre, the fishnets. This is a typical coastal Native community today.

There is a message which begins with the cover photo and which is reiterated throughout the book. The Sliammon occupy today's world, but they are not part of mainstream White culture. Their history, their myth, their traditions, set them apart. But, as we read on, we get a sense of the fragility of the Sliammon Way. The language, so integral to their cultural survival, is dying. Of the approximately 850 Mainland Comox people, only half (mainly the middle-aged and older) are fluent in their native tongue (p. 22). For the second of their two dialects, Island Comox, the situation is even worse. Only two elders have any knowledge of it, as it has now been replaced by Kwakwaka (p. 23).

The final three chapters chronicle the post-contact change. For example, in chapter eleven, imaginatively titled, "Floating Islands" (the native response to the first European ships on their waters), we see the Sliammon as the first explorers saw them — as "Good Indians", "expert hunters", women and children, neither "shy [n] or timorous", and generally, as people who respon-

ded with "kindness". By the 1860s, however, as chapter twelve explains, the image of the Sliammon changed drastically, as did their social order newly imposed by the missionaries, or "The Black Robes". Present-day reminiscences of elderly Sliammon describe poignantly the position of subordination in which their immediate forebears found themselves. Bill Mitchell told Kennedy and Bouchard of some of his duties as a Watchman, a position created by the priests. For example, if one entered the Church smelling of lotion of perfume, his or her punishment would be either "to stand in front of the altar with . . . hands out to the side or to pay a fine" (p. 122). Buying one's way out of punishment, today's elders explain, became the privilege of the well-to-do (p. 122).

The history of reserve allocation, the subject of the final chapter, is a long and complicated one. The authors present the issues well, particularly by illustrating them with original transcripts, such as that of a heated meeting of the Homalco People on February 15, 1915 to discuss, through an interpreter, one case of White pre-emption of Indian land.

It is the central chapters which comprise the core of the book. From Chapter three, "Food from the Sea, Food from the Land", to Chapter ten, "May the Waters Be Calm", we are taken through the traditional life cycle and worldview of the Sliammon. What is particularly special about these chapters is the first-hand narratives of the present-day Sliammon. Rose Mitchell recalls learning some of the lessons of life as a child "one day while [her] parents were digging clams" (p. 45), while Ambrose Wilson reflects upon his own puberty training. "At the time my voice was beginning to change," he explains, "my mother realized that I needed to train if I was to be a good man. . . .", at which point Ambrose recounts how his mother took him to a creek and told him what to do (p. 47). On the subject of

Indian power, Rose Mitchell explained to Kennedy and Bouchard, "Auntie was working on people who had died . . . but one day someone from the unknown grabbed her by the hand and said, 'You will be working on the sick. You will cure the sick people.' That's how she got the power" (p. 55). Chief Tom's wife lost her soul, we're told in the chapter, "Indian Doctors, Indian Healing", when she was a little girl, but an Indian doctor, whose power came from the owl, retrieved it and she recovered (p. 86).

Despite the upheaval in their lives throughout the past two centuries, the Sliammon today continue to carry within them the stories of their first ancestors — Mink, Raven, Crow, Beaver, Frog, Wolf, Deer, Heron, Mountain Goat, and Whale. Some of these stories, as told by today's elders, provide the bulk of Chapter ten, "May the Waters Be Calm".

The Sliammon occupy a special niche in contemporary Canadian culture. The old culture, pronounced dead by anthropologist Homer Barnett, who saw it in the 1930s, lingers on, and, thanks to this excellent new book by Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, a major contribution has been made to its wide recognition, appreciation, and, perhaps, even to its survival.

Wendy Wickwire

*Dept. of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia, B.C.*

"C.F.M.S. Mail-Order Catalogue",
Canadian Folk Music Bulletin
(Calgary: P.O. Box 4232, Station C.
Spring 19(1), 1985, Pp. 59)

The Mail-Order Catalogue published by the Canadian Folk Music Society contains over two hundred and fifty entries for records, cassettes and books of Canadian folk music; these can be ordered from the Society. Although in his introduction to the catalogue Tim Rogers states that this is only the first