

Book Reviews

Montreal between 1821 and 1871. Ken Pryke details the relationship between poor relief and health care in Halifax between 1827 and 1849 while Heather MacDougall surveys the emergence of the "sanitary idea" in Toronto between 1866 and 1890. Wendy Mitchinson explores the reasons for committals to the Toronto Asylum in the mid-nineteenth century. Michael Bliss resurrects J. B. Collip, the "forgotten member" of the Canadian team that "discovered" insulin in 1921–22. Janice Dickin McGinnis traverses the path from Salvarsan to penicillin in VD control in Canada between the wars. And finally Suzann Buckley assesses the reasons for the decline of maternal mortality in two Ottawa hospitals, making the case for more extensive and sophisticated use of hospital records by medical historians.

Taken together, then, this is a useful collection of "soundings": eclectic, often insightful, but very much within the Anglo-American empiricist tradition of historical writing. What is missing perhaps is a deeper reflection on more fundamental theoretical issues facing the would-be historian of Canadian medicine. Only Buckley touches on the central issue of whether methodologies, and more importantly, theoretical paradigms and explanations developed abroad can, in any wholesale fashion, "be parachuted in to explain the Canadian situation". Is there anything unique in the Canadian medical experience? Is there indeed a "Canadian" medicine? Important and central questions! This collection serves only to whet the appetite not only for more empirical "case studies" but for those more critical theoretical pieces on which any national historiography must be built. One can only endorse the editors' view that "while medical history in Canada has come of age, there is still much more work to be done." A critical "Canadian" social history of medicine remains to be written.

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ELIZABETH ATWOOD LAWRENCE, *His very silence speaks. Comanche: the horse who survived Custer's last stand*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. 358, illus., \$39.95, \$16.00 (paperback).

A biography of a horse and the chronicle of its posthumous existence hardly sounds enticing as a description of a book. Such a banal précis, however, does no justice to this excellent volume. On 25 June 1876, Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his cavalry engaged with Indians at Little Big Horn. Not one cavalryman was spared. The survivors numbered Indians, horses, and dogs. Custer's last stand very quickly became, and has remained, a significant symbolic event in American life. The meanings with which it has been charged, however, have been varied greatly according to who was doing the symbolizing. Besides the battle as a whole, the engagement also furnished a cluster of subsidiary but historically important symbols. One of these was Comanche, the mount of Captain Myles W. Keogh. Comanche became the horse who was inaccurately dubbed the "sole survivor" of Little Big Horn. In a fascinating historiographical and anthropological study of myth-making, Dr Lawrence peels layer on layer off the stuffed remains of this animal, now residing in Kansas.

Claiming knowledge of, or association with, the horse became a valuable commodity from very early after the battle. Not surprisingly, therefore, the horse's public character and qualities soon became a jumble. Those who declared they knew him well described him as a bay, others, however, knew him to be a buckskin. One authority described him as a colt, another as a gelding. Dr Lawrence in her recovery of the original does a very clever job of relating the horse's gradual accretion of attributes to changing American images of the frontier, pioneering, the land, and above all the Indians. For the medical historian there is some excellent material here on veterinary medicine. The reader may occasionally feel less than comfortable with Dr Lawrence's impassioned analysis and, at times perhaps, wonder whether some of the detective work might have been better left in the footnotes, but as a study of the historical making of such an apparently uncomplicated object as a horse, it is a book well worth reading.

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