

The Loyalist emigration was a significant episode in Canada's past, and Audrey Marsh's attempt to bring it to life for the children of today is a laudable one. It remains, however, only sporadically successful.

*Chris Ferns teaches English literature at McMaster University. He is the author of Aldous Huxley: Novelist (London, 1980).*

## MÉTIS FRONTIER LADY

*Tell me, grandmother*, Lyn Hancock with Marion Dowler. Illus. Douglas Tait. McClelland and Stewart, 1985. 160 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7710-3809-7.

This tale of the settlement of the Canadian West is told so quietly that the epic proportions of its subject matter go almost unnoticed. It is not that pride in country or a sense of achievement are downplayed, but that they are handled as a routine part of pioneer life: without such self-assurance, the opening of the Canadian West would have taken longer, and probably would have been more violent. The role of women, particularly Amerindian and Métis women, was vital; through them early fur traders and settlers were able to adapt to unfamiliar and often severe conditions, and so establish a foothold in this immense new land. As life became more sedentary the Métis women who had grown up between two worlds helped effect transition from one mode of life to another. Their contributions went largely unrecorded and unacknowledged.

Jane Howse Livingston, the grandmother whose story is told by Hancock and Dowler, was a product of this inter-cultural scene. Joseph Howse (c. 1774-1852), the leader of the first HBC party to penetrate the Rockies, is remembered geographically in Howse River, Howse Peak, Howse Pass. When he retired to England in 1815, he left his Cree wife Mary and his family behind, the usual practice among HBC personnel at that time. Howse's son, Henry, established himself at Red River, and there Jane was born in 1848; her mother was Janet Spence, the daughter of Magnus Spence (also with HBC) and of Christiana, a Cree. Jane was the seventh of the couple's thirteen children. In sharp contrast to Amerindian social norms, big families had become the rule among fur traders. Jane in her turn married Sam Livingston, an Irishman who as a teenager had immigrated to America in 1847 to escape the Irish potato famine. Lured west then north by the prospect of gold, he found prosperity instead as a trader and as the first farmer in the Calgary area. Jane Howse Livingston had fourteen children; among her grandchildren is Dennis Dowling, the narrator of this book.

Such a family history provides a natural framework for a personalized recounting of the opening of the Canadian West. Hancock concentrates on better-known aspects of Canadian frontier life, in clear terms, aided considerably by Douglas

Tait's meticulous drawings. Particularly welcome are the maps illustrating the movements of the story's protagonists.

Hancock's formal, not to say didactic writing style, keeps her a certain distance from her characters. Jane Howse remains a shadowy figure, perhaps because her memories have been recorded at second hand. Inevitably, one wonders how her story would have emerged if it had come directly to us. She would not have called ninety pounds "as much as voyageurs could carry during a portage"; voyageurs vying with each other as to the loads they could handle could . . . and did . . . carry four times that amount on short portages. She would not have included Big Bear among the chiefs who fought in the 1885 uprising; the Cree leader resisted Ottawa but never resorted to violence.

Today, Jane Howse's life seems exotic, but when she was living it, coping with the unexpected was simply part of daily routine.

*Olive Patricia Dickason teaches Canadian native history at the University of Alberta and is the author of several articles on early relationships between Europeans and Amerindians in the Americas.*

## WORLD WAR TWO ON THE PRAIRIES

*Hockeybat Harris*, Geoffrey Bilson. Kids Can Press, 1984. 158 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-57-5.

Geoffrey Bilson has written two other children's books, *Death over Montreal* and *Goodbye Sarah*. *Hockeybat Harris*, a historical story intended for ten-to-twelve-year-olds, deals with the evacuation of British children to Canada. Bob Williams eagerly awaits the arrival of his family's "guest child." When David Harris finally arrives, he is boastful and quarrelsome. The main plot deals with Bob and David's ultimately successful attempts to be friends. The first chapter of the book deals not with David, however, but with Bob's Jewish friend, Danny. Danny resents Bob's excitement about the evacuees' arrival, because Jewish refugee children are being refused entry to Canada by the Mackenzie King government. Bob promptly writes a letter to King, asking that the Jewish children be let in, because "they are being bombed and put into concentration camps" (p. 18).

Here, I feel, historical accuracy and historical plausibility part company. I don't dispute the facts presented by Bilson, a respected History professor at the University of Saskatchewan. It presumably is possible that a Saskatchewan ten-year-old might, in 1941, have shared the knowledge and attitudes of a liberal historian of the 1980s, but it is not likely. Laudable though it may be to show children a virtuous reaction to the anti-Semitism described in Irving Abella's