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Review of Heaven is Near the Rocky Mountains

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Heaven is Near the Rocky Mountains. Edited by Hugh A. Dempsey. Calgary, Alberta: Glenbow Museum, 1989. Introduction, sources, index. xxxi + 189 pp. \$14.95.

Thomas Woolsey was a Methodist missionary in the Edmonton region between 1855 and 1864. This book is a collection of his letters and journals, edited by historian Hugh Dempsey. Woolsey seems to have been concerned more with combating his Oblate "Romish" competitors than he was in understanding the Cree, Stoney, Blackfoot, and Sarcee Indians with whom he came into contact. Woolsey was thoroughly convinced of the superiority of his Methodism over heathenism and popery alike. He seems to have been a decent and articulate person, but not a particularly engaged observer of the Indian peoples to whom he ministered.

These letters and journals reflect the world he brought with him to the frontier as much as they do the life of Native people in mid-nineteenth century northern Alberta. There is much of interest to the historian in the details that Woolsey recorded about his travels in the area. The reader can learn a great deal about methods of transportation and the politics of fur trade posts from these journals, but there is very little detailed information about the lives, economy, and beliefs of the Native people to whom Woolsey ministered. Some of the most interesting references are to a Stoney prophet who "had experienced a vision and had proclaimed himself to be Jesus" (x) and to a Blood Indian Chief's medicine bundle consisting of "a bell, detached leaves of 'Sketches by Boz,' a rudely-executed chart of the so-called true church from the beginning even until now, a copy of the French Catechism, and last, though not least, copies of the 'Wesleyan Missionary Notices'" (59).

The introduction by Hugh Dempsey is informative but not critical. This book cannot compare in content or presentation to something like George Nelson's *The Orders of the Dreamed* edited by Jennifer Brown and Robert Brightman. Unlike Nelson, who entered deeply

into the life of Cree and Ojibwa people and wrote about his knowledge with eloquence and intelligence, Woolsey remained a complacent outsider whose writing reflects his Methodism rather than the Indian people to whom he ministered. The book is a useful source of information about Edmonton in the mid-nineteenth century but is not a work of any particular literary or ethnographic merit. Neither Dempsey nor Woolsey confront nor overcome the assumptions implicit in Woolsey's Methodism.

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