

BOOK REVIEW

by Diane Griffin

WATERSHED RED, THE LIFE OF THE DUNK RIVER, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND by Kathy Martin, Ragweed Press, Charlottetown. 155 pages.

While familiar as a child with place names such as the Dunk River, Scales' Pond and Middleton Pond, I actually knew little of them until reading Watershed Red. Reading Kathy Martin's book is like re-discovering old friends but on a much richer basis.

Obviously any book will always be of interest to the inhabitants of the area it addresses. Frequently for many authors, the target audience is not much larger than that. Not so in this situation. Watershed Red is a book that one can pick up and read for pleasure, even if one happens to absorb a lot of information while doing so. It is well written and shows an obvious sense of humour. The mosquito is described as a success story which hums over the Dunk River. After reading the book, almost everyone would have to admit knowing more about the sex life of the oyster.

The book is biologically accurate based on Kathy's personal and professional experience which included many hours in the field, some of which were during adverse weather conditions. However, this has evidently given the author an even more intense feeling for her subject. Although packed with information, the book does not descend into stuffiness but remains highly entertaining throughout.

The undertaking of writing on a topic as large and diverse as a watershed would be an intimidating challenge to most people. It requires an author to have a broad perspective of natural and human history and to be very well organized. Fortunately, Kathy possesses these traits as evidenced by the well organized approach in presenting the material to the reader. We are introduced to the Dunk River area, lead from the upstream to downstream, taken to the inland portion and finally into a conclusion on "2½ Centuries on the Land". We are left with a sense of concern for agricultural practices and other human impacts but the author does not editorialize or leave us with a negative feeling. While it is true that modern economies thrive on uniformity and biological systems are destroyed by it, there is hope for the future.

Kathy has effectively incorporated historical references into the text. I found it particularly fascinating to learn of Francis Bain's description of the area as well forested in 1883. It is a sharp contrast to the highly agricultural nature of the area today. It was a revelation to me that sailing vessels used to come as far up river as Johnston's Bridge. This area is extremely shallow now because of the heavy loads of silt that have made their way into the river. The book is well named in that with each rain this soil causes the river to run red.

Several chapters are devoted to specific topics. A remnant beech tree over a century in age is used to give the concept of the original forest as well as the natural history of this species. A chapter is devoted to the eel which is viewed as a nuisance in many river systems but is highly prized by those who savour its rich white flesh. Whether we personally like the eel or not, we are left with an appreciation of its role in nature.

Ragweed Press and Kathy Martin are to be commended for the high quality of this publication. Watershed Red is professionally written, designed and edited. The pleasing illustrations by Connie Pound-Gaudet show artistic talent as well as a love for her subjects. In these times of increasing paper and publication costs, it is amazing that one can still buy such an excellent book for \$6.95.