

BOOK REVIEW

'Beautiful summary of Tlingit life'

KAHTAHAH

Juneau, Alaska

By Frances L. Paul, illustrated
by R. Munoz, Alaska Northwest
Pub. Co. 1976

It is seldom that this reviewer has the opportunity to study a book for children or young adults. But this book is different. The original work was written in 1938. Frances Paul tried to present a picture of Tlingit life as it was during the transition from the old, traditional way of life, to the changing times when the Whitemen were on the scene.

Katahah is more than a young person's book, it is an excellent picture of Tlingit culture in changing times. Frances Paul had the ability to weave the old customs and traditions into a narrative of change and contact. To a certain extent, the book is an autobiography of Frances Paul. But more than that, it is a beautiful summary of Tlingit life.

Many times teachers have asked for a good book on the Tlingits that would appeal to younger readers. Other Native people have asked how they might present their story so that readers might understand what it means to be a Native of Alaska. Well, this is the book that these people have been waiting for. In many years of study, this reviewer has not found a work so well adapted to teaching and at the same time, a resource of ethno-historians.

Rie Munoz, as usual, has done a beautiful job of illustrating the story line. For those who want a good book on the Tlingits, and a guide for future writings, this is the book to look at. Kahtahah is not just good reading, it is a service to all those who want to increase their understanding of Native Alaskans.

This is a fine book!

Wallace M. Olson
Juneau-Douglas Community
College

KAHTAHAH by Frances Lackey Paul is the story of a Tlingit girl in the critical period of her youth. Her story demonstrates the changes that the Tlingit people were encountering in the late 1800's as more white influence was being felt.

Each page of the book is filled with details which add up to a picture of the Tlingit way of life illustrating customs and social structure around the end of the last century. It is the inclusion of these specifics which makes the story come alive for the reader.

Kahtahah's life during this time of transition from the old social customs is pictured by her last year in the home of her foster father, Chief Snook, a noble man who believed in adhering to the old ways of the Tlingit people. In contrast to this traditional lifestyle are Kahtahah's attendance at the mission school and her eventual Christian marriage to Yeilienuk, who calls himself a "white" Tlingit. Frances Lackey Paul shows a deep understanding for the turmoil created by change and attempts to give the reader a feeling for these people caught in transition.

Interwoven into the story are many traditional Tlingit folk tales. By not isolating these tales but by placing them in their original social context, Frances Lackey Paul has given us a glimpse of the educational function oral literature played in the lives of the Tlingit people.

No comment on this book would be complete without mentioning the beautiful illustrations by Ric Munoz. Each sketch is a work of art and combined with a historically accurate text with language which flows smoothly results in a rare book which knows no age limits.

By Linda E. Wiggins
Instructor of Cross Cultural
Communications, SOS - U of A