

# PRAIRIE FORUM

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## CONTENTS

Introduction	v
ARTICLES	
The Rhetoric of Public Architecture <i>George Woodcock</i>	149
Security, Approval and Mastery - Symbols of Saskatoon: The Cultural Baggage of Some Settlers in Western Canada <i>David Neufeld</i>	159
Bank Branches and Elevators: Expressions of Big Corporations in Small Prairie Towns <i>Deryck W. Holdsworth and John C. Everitt</i>	173
Wilderness Suburbs: Boom and Gloom on the Prairies, 1945-1986 <i>Robert Robson</i>	191
Computers and the Prairie Grain-Handling System <i>Joel Novek</i>	221
Income Distribution and Agricultural Policies <i>I.L. McCreary and W.H. Furtan</i>	241
BOOK REVIEWS	
REICHMAN, O.J., <i>Konza Prairie — A Tallgrass Natural History</i> by J. Stan Rowe	251
PHILLIPS, Bob, <i>Prairie Journal: Persons &amp; Places of Western Canada</i> by Nick Russell	253
BALDWIN, GED, <i>Frontier Justice, The Reminiscences of Ged Baldwin</i> by W.H. McConnell	254
HOY, Jim and ISERN, Tom, <i>Plains Folk: A Commonplace of the Great Plains</i> by John F. Osborn	256
LEVINE, Allan, <i>The Exchange: 100 Years of Trading in Winnipeg</i> by G.C. Church	258
FULLER, Errol, <i>Extinct Birds</i> by Margaret Belcher	260

WILSON, Gilbert L., <i>Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians</i> by Barry Kaye	263
PARKER, James, <i>Emporium of the North: Fort Chipewyan and the Fur Trade to 1835</i> by Paul C. Thistle	264
AHENAKEW, Freda, <i>Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach</i> by Deborah James	266
POOLE, D.C., <i>Among the Sioux of Dakota: Eighteen Months' Experience as an Indian Agent, 1869-70</i> by F. Laurie Barron	268
BROWN, Lorne, <i>When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State</i> by John Bullen	270
LUEBKE, Frederick C., KAYE, Fraser W. and MOULTON, Gary E. (editors), <i>Mapping the North American Plains: Essays in the History of Cartography</i> by Lillian Wonders	273
WAITE, P.B., <i>Lord of Point Grey: Larry MacKenzie of UBC</i> by James M. Pitsula	275
MORLEY, Patricia, <i>Kurelek, A Biography</i> by Helen Marzolf	277
BLANCHARD, J., <i>A History of the Canadian Grain Commission: 1912-1986</i> by J.W. Stewart	280

land and cultivated their crops. Like-a-fishhook village survived until 1885 when it was broken up by the American government and its inhabitants were placed on individual land holdings on the nearby Fort Berthold Reservation. It was there that Wilson conducted his interviews with his two main informants.

As described by Buffalo Bird Woman, agriculture was almost wholly woman's work. Hidatsa males are shadowy figures in her narrative. The men hunt, go to war and flirt with the girls as they work in the fields, but apart from the cultivation of tobacco by some of the old men, agriculture was left largely to the women. Buffalo Bird Woman's picture of agriculture is largely a static one but there are occasional references in her narrative to some of the changes in agriculture brought about by contact with Europeans. Digging sticks and bone hoes and knives had largely been replaced by iron axes and hoes and steel knives. Once the Like-a-fishhook residents were moved to the Fort Berthold Reservation the Hidatsa were also introduced to new seed varieties. But Buffalo Bird Woman was not convinced that the white man's ways were necessarily the best. It was her opinion that Europeans knew little about the cultivation of beans and that the traditional Indian way of corn cultivation was "better than the new way taught us by white men."

Hanson's introduction is valuable because it places Indian agriculture on the Upper Missouri as described by Buffalo Bird Woman in its historical, geographical and ecological context. The book also includes fifteen photographs taken by Wilson and forty sketches, maps and plans. Many of the sketches were redrawn from sketches made by Edward Goodbird, Buffalo Bird Woman's son. *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden* is a useful addition to the Borealis Books reprint series. It contains a wealth of detailed information about Indian agriculture in the Upper Missouri region and can be recommended to all scholars interested in Indian lifeways on the northern Great Plains.

Barry Kaye  
Department of Geography  
University of Manitoba

*Emporium of the North: Fort Chipewyan and the Fur Trade to 1835*, by James Parker. Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1987. Pp. 208.

In the past fifteen years the book shelf for titles dealing with the fur trade in the Canadian west has been significantly expanded. The questions for those interested in the field have now become: does any particular new offering deserve to be added to one's collection, and does it add anything new to the scholarship on the subject?

When we ask these questions of James Parker's *Emporium of the North*, we

find that it is a generalized, almost synchronic treatment of Fort Chipewyan as a regional trade depot in the Lake Athabasca region from the arrival of Peter Pond in 1778 until the rather ill-defined cutoff date of 1835. The book treats its subject topically with separate chapters outlining the chronology, locations of the various forts, problems with transportation and supplies, life at the fort, Indians and the methods of trade, and the economics of the trade. An excellent bibliographic essay on the previous fur trade literature, written by Patricia A. Myers, has been appended. The book contains many interesting details of fur trade logistics, both geographical and proper name indexes, and several instructive illustrations and tables. Unfortunately, the reproductions of historic maps by Pond and Thompson are presented in formats which are much too small to be useful.

In general, the book is thoroughly documented using archival and published sources. Unfortunately, the quality of the documentation is not consistent throughout and some key statements are made without proper support. In comparing the European competitors, Parker refers to the Northwesters as "fierce rivals," "bullying," and "tormentors" (pp. 18, 35), however, no evidence is presented or footnoted to justify the use of such descriptors. Another case where Parker seems merely to be uncritically repeating outdated interpretations is in his assertion that Indians were "certainly" dependent on European trade goods by the middle of the eighteenth century (p. 88). The author expresses certitude in this statement, but he cites no evidence whatsoever on this highly debatable question. In the absence of documentation it is difficult to give any credence to such an early date for Indian dependence with regard to the Chipewyan, since European traders had not even penetrated the Athabasca region until 1778 and only a small proportion of the local Indians ever made the long and difficult journey to outside posts prior to this time. Oddly, Parker seems not to have recognized that this is a fundamental issue being argued in much of the fur trade literature. This controversy cannot be dismissed so lightly.

Another important shortcoming of this book is Parker's tendency to ignore the importance of the Chipewyan Indians to his story. One indication of this is that, apart from references to the Métis Cuthbert Grant (junior and senior), the proper name index identifies only a single historic Indian name, that of Mattonabee. Other than in the one chapter devoted specifically to their role, the crucial labour and influence of Indians tend to be invisible. In statements such as that referring to the Athabasca River delta being "bewildering to all but the most experienced voyageur" (p. 29), Parker simply excludes Indians from his universe of concern. His underplaying of the role of the Indians in the crucial task of provisioning the posts is also questionable. One might also have hoped that the author would have made use of more of the available ethnography of the Chipewyan beyond Diamond Jenness's dated source in order to attempt to make more sense out of Indian actions and responses to the trade influences. Indeed, Parker cites more sources on the beaver and the buffalo than on the Chipewyan in his bibliography.

Direct quotations from European fur traders on such questions as Indian leadership (p. 90) would have benefitted from ethnological analysis and interpretation.

The concluding chapter begins with a statement that Fort Chipewyan became the regional focus for "trade, transportation and the complex group of personal relationships..." (p. 141). James Parker has successfully outlined the mechanics of the fur trade at Fort Chipewyan. However, he has made little or no attempt to demonstrate these "personal relationships," either between Indians and traders or among the Europeans themselves. *Emporium of the North* could be recommended for those readers interested in a basic introduction to the fur trade or to the regional history of Fort Chipewyan. Unfortunately, those looking for a new contribution to current fur trade historiography will be disappointed.

Paul C. Thistle

Curator, The Sam Waller Little Northern Museum  
The Pas, Manitoba

*Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach*, by Freda Ahenakew. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1987. Pp. 170.

This book constitutes a nontechnical introduction to the grammar of the Plains Cree dialect. It is intended primarily as a tool for teachers of Cree, and is meant to be accompanied by Ahenakew's *Stories of the House People* (1986), a collection of spontaneous stories by Cree speakers. Ahenakew, who is herself a native speaker of Cree, points out that existing books about Cree structure, all of which are written by nonnative speakers, often present among their grammatical examples sentences which are in fact awkward or unnatural (among other related problems); and she argues that the language is best taught by the use of readers containing dialogues or texts representing spontaneous speech by native speakers. She proposes, for instance, that examples from such texts be employed to illustrate various points of grammar, and throughout the book she demonstrates how this can be done, using examples from *Stories of the House People*. She also brings her own intuitions as a native speaker to bear both in making generalizations about Cree grammar and in providing further examples beyond those in the texts, and this constitutes one of the great strengths of this book: it contains a number of interesting comments and observations which are not, to my knowledge, made anywhere else in the existing literature on Cree. Particularly significant is a lengthy section on different syntactic uses of the particle *ôma*, "this" (pp. 143-59).

Cree is a highly inflected language in which nouns and verbs take a complex set of prefixes and particularly suffixes. These express a variety of aspects of meaning, some of which would be expressed by independent words and/or by words governing word order in a language such as English or French. Most of Ahenakew's grammatical discussion deals with this inflectional system. The bulk of the remainder comprises a short look at the syntactic behaviour of that class