

# BOOK REVIEWS

## *Authentic Indians:*

### *Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth Century Northwest Coast*

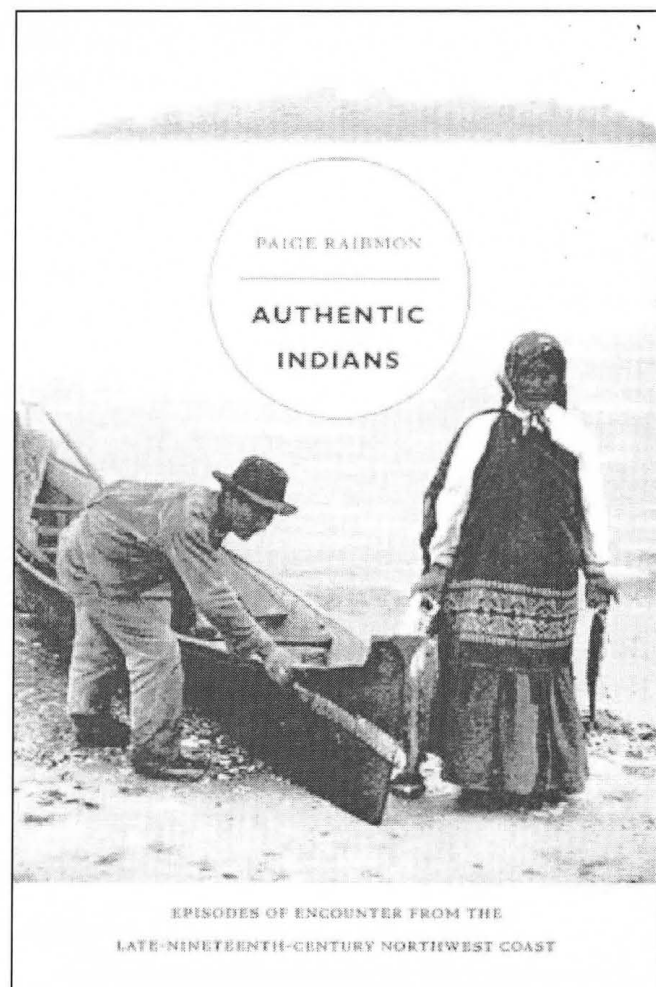
by Paige B. Raibmon

Duke University Press, Winlaw, BC, 2005.

xv + 307 pp., illus., maps. ISBN 0822335476, Price: s\$22.95

Paige Raibmon, an assistant professor of history at UBC, is one of the new cultural historians who both explore the world of the past and engage the world of the present through research with communities. In *Authentic Indians*, she considers the important issue of how white imaginings have come to form a template for imposing ideas of authenticity, and, by implication, inauthenticity, on Aboriginal peoples. Notably, she also considers Aboriginal strategies to manage their own identities and affairs. She points to the angry debate, begun in 1999, over the resumption of whaling by the Makah, a Nuu-chah-nulth group living on the Olympic Peninsula. In response, outraged citizens denounced the use of modern weaponry by the Makah whalers, calling for traditional methods only. Others, conversely, argued that the Makah no longer participated in the spiritual life of their ancestors and should and forego whaling and leave the past behind entirely. Either way, for many members of the general public, the Makah weren't really Indians. They were merely annoying fakes, intent on gaining an advantage through claims of distinctiveness. Meanwhile, the Makah, struggling to define themselves, debated the value of asserting their differences with the mainstream through the whale hunt.

There is now a considerable literature regarding the invention of the primitive by Enlightenment and later philosophers intent on addressing concerns about their own societies through depictions of Aboriginal peoples in contrast to themselves, as Noble Savages and as degraded remnants of the past. How Aboriginals have been understood and the processes of creation of ideas of authenticity vary regionally and continue to change, however, and Raibmon focuses on three well-known episodes to reveal something about the relationships of Makah and other local Aboriginal peoples to the mainstream society. Most significantly, she shows the importance of connections between these three episodes and the convergence of cultural and political developments. She argues, in common with others, that non-Aboriginal people, as in the Makah whaling case, have created definitions of Indian culture that limit claims to resources and sovereignty while Aboriginal



peoples have attempted to use these imposed definitions to their own purposes to survive colonialism.

The first of the three episodes concerns a group of Kwakwaka'wakw people who performed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The late nineteenth century was a period in which a number of Aboriginal dance groups toured Europe, Australia, and North America, but the Columbian Exposition was different. Franz Boas, and his Tlingit/Scottish collaborator George Hunt, recruited and housed Aboriginal dancers, nine men and five women, a girl and a boy, in Chicago for seven and a half months. Boas hoped to educate the public about Aboriginal culture. The Kwakwaka'wakw, for their part,

responded to Hunt's offer to make money and to resist the assimilationist programs of church and state and to assert the existence of their own culture during a period of a ban on cultural practices. Raibmon points out that this episode, nonetheless "contributed to the dominant colonial image of traditional Aboriginal culture," affirmed stereotypes, and reinforced the idea of an opposition between traditional and modern.

In the mid-nineteenth through the first part of the twentieth century, hundreds of Aboriginal people from the Coast, hired by straw (or hop) bosses and often in family groups, moved to Puget Sound and the Fraser River to pick hops and earn lucrative wages. This activity attracted hundreds of tourists who boarded trains to watch the "lively and merry" spectacle, as noted at the time. Edward Curtis and others sold images of hop-pickers and life in a hop-camp "was a *de facto* performance." Some pickers earned money by staging dances for tourists, although many simply lived their lives as unconscious performers of their culture.

The third vignette tells a story of Rudolph Walton, a Tlingit store owner living in Sitka, whose children were expelled from the local public school because they lived in an Aboriginal area. But Walton and his wife, graduates of Sitka Training School and Presbyterian Church members, were what was then known as "civilized Indians," who had assimilated into white society and fulfilled white expectations. To white authorities, Walton's case created a dilemma in that it collapsed the binary oppositions between authentic and inauthentic that supported a colonial regime.

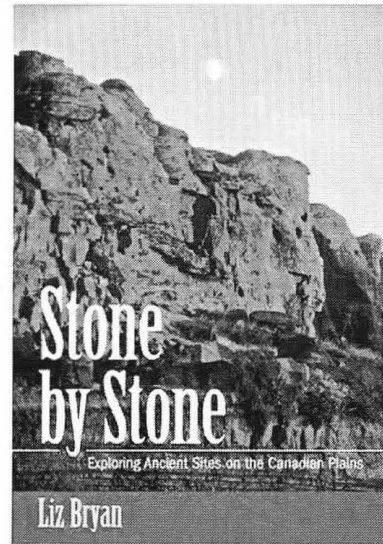
Through these stories, Raibmon shows the difficulties inherent in unstable systems of classification, and, further, the mutual engagement of Aboriginal people intent on making their own way and Whites intent on assimilating and managing Aboriginal peoples. She focuses on the "contradictory thickets of tourism, anthropology, and colonialism" (p. 198). By anthropology she largely means Boas and salvage ethnography, but Boas is no mere strawman for a critique of anthropology. She documents Boas' efforts to support Aboriginal interests and practices. This book is wonderfully illustrated with historical photographs and is built on careful and extensive research. The general contours of her argument were already known, but she has revealed the details and in this case, in the details hangs the tale.

### Bruce Granville Miller

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**Bruce Granville Miller is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (2001); *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (2004). His forthcoming books include *Transformations in the Field* (edited with Jean-Guy Goulet) and *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish* (edited).**

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### *Stone by Stone:*

*Exploring Ancient Sites on the Canadian Plains*

by Liz Bryan

Heritage House, Surrey, BC, 2005

176 pp., illus., maps. ISBN 1-894384-90-3, Price: \$29.95 (pk).

*Copy made available for review by the Nanaimo Historical Society*

For all those looking for the ultimate guidebook to archaeological sites on the Canadian Plains, Liz Bryan's *Stone By Stone* takes the reader to some of Canada's most famous, and not so famous, archaeological sites. Unlike her previous book on Canadian Plains Archaeology *The Buffalo People* (new edition 2005) that concentrates more on the actual archaeological timeline, this one reads more like a travel guide. Through vivid personal descriptions and stunning photography, this book easily whisks the reader from such large-scale sites as Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park in Alberta to the solitary buffalo rubbing stones of Saskatchewan. Archaeological anecdotes place these fantastic sites in their precontact context, giving the reader a glimpse in to the sites' timeframe and function. True to the guidebook format, the book has detailed directions and maps so you can visit on your own. One can interpret a detailed map in two ways: an easy way to view the sites or an easy way to loot them. Detailed descriptions should always be given with caution.

The only real flaw in this book is the lack of a preface that clearly states that removal or excavation of archaeological material is strictly prohibited by law. The section on rock art barely touched on the edict of viewing rock art and preserving its integrity. There is little reference to site protection and a section of preservation would make this book more credible. Despite this glaring omission, this is a great introduction to the more well known sites on the Canadian Plains for those who require a more visual guide and well worth a look.

**Julie Cowie**

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**Julie Cowie is the Acting President of the Archaeological Society of BC – Nanaimo Branch**

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