

# BOOK REVIEWS

## *Songhees Pictorial*

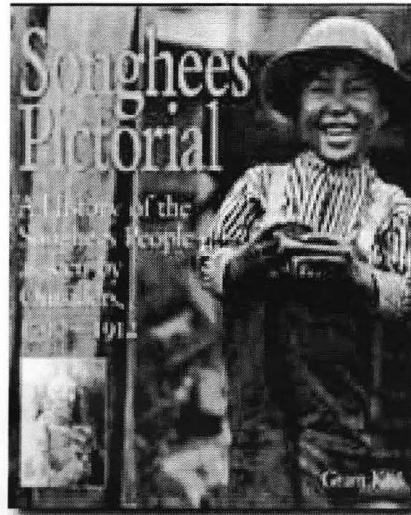
*A History of the Songhees People  
as seen by Outsiders, 1790 – 1912*

by Grant Keddie

Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, 2003. 175pp.,  
illus., maps, bib., index. \$39.95. ISBN 0-7726-4964-2.

I remember making an appointment with Dan Savard in order to view the Salish division of the provincial museum's photo collections. After some security precautions, I was ushered into a vast room of cabinets in which were the ethnological photographs. One corner was the Salish division—fairly small compared with the larger room and yet what a goldmine of images. I spent my day thumbing through pictures and writing down the numbers of cool photos I wished to purchase. It didn't take too long to see that I could never personally afford even the numbers I had written down at that point. I was struck by the number of quite excellent photos in the collection, which had not been published to my knowledge. I compared this with the few photos that seem to be published again and again. Well, Grant Keddie has had access to this intriguing collection, with modern high-resolution scanning equipment, and has prepared this edited collection for our viewing.

The first editorial decision limited the scope of the book to the subject of the Songhees People, the asserted inhabitants of Victoria. However, this decision does not always sit quite perfectly with the subject matter of several images, which show the Victoria camps of Haida, Tsimshian, and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples within Songhees territory. The Songhees are speakers of the North Straits Language, as are the Saanich, Semiahmoo, Lummi, Samish and Sooke. Klallam is a closely related language, which Montler (1991) places in a larger Straits language, but it is not mutually intelligible with the North Straits Language. Wayne Suttles (1952) pointed out that the Straits Language occupied a large territory without good salmon streams. The salmon resources in this territory were accessed on the open ocean by means of the reef net technology. The early journals Keddie has quoted refer to the people as the Sonese, Samose, Stamish, Tchanmus, Ssamis, Etzamish, Samus and Tsomass before 1844, when the



name Songhees appeared. Given the similarity of the sounds of some of these names to Samish and Saanich, I would be more cautious as to whom is being referred. The oldest journal reference indicating tribal territory in this area is the Galiano expedition (Wagner 1933). From June 5th to June 9th 1792, contact was maintained with Tetacus, a Makah tyee who accompanied the expedition to his "seed gathering" village at Esquimalt Harbour. At this time, Victoria may have been in Makah territory or at least high-ranking marriage alliances gave them access to the camus resources. Makahs may be married with Klallams as well as Songhees.

Keddie attempts to sort out the location of the Klallam village or villages from the historic accounts. From the misty past, the territorial allegiances seem broader than a simple one to one correspondence with the Songhees of today. I assume that the abundant camus meadows in the Victoria area were a draw that attracted a broad range of relatives and in-laws with a broad range of trade goods as well as their local hosts. This sort of large seasonal gathering around an abundant resource was common in the Coast Salish area. The reef fishery at Point Roberts, the lower Fraser fishery near the Deas Island tunnel, the upper Fraser fishery at Yale and the wapato sloughs near Katzie are other examples. These were reported to draw about 2,000 people each according to the Fort Langley Journals (Maclachlan 1998).

Keddie has included some of Paul Kane's (Russell 1971) sketches of scenes around Victoria. Paul Kane was a talented

artist hired by Sir George Simpson as a Hudson's Bay Company expedition illustrator in the pre-photography era. He later composed some of his sketches into oil paintings after returning to his studio back east. These paintings appear to be prepared for a European audience. He unfortunately was nearly illiterate and hired a ghostwriter to tell his tale. Discrepancies between this journal, the Fort Victoria Journal and titles of sketches and paintings leave scholars many questions, which appear irresolvable at this date. For example: a sketch entitled a 'flathead' woman spinning wool is combined with a "Eus-a-nich" woman weaving a blanket, (called both "Sangeys" and 'Sangas' in his log), to make a composition entitled a Clallam Woman Weaving a Blanket. In addition, a child in a cradle, having its head flattened, is propped against the loom. This image appears in sketch form as a Chinook child and as a Caw-wachan child in a painting. Well, we can't trust this kind of labeling, but Kane was a good artist—note the seal bladders presumably full of oil hanging within the mat lodge. The sketches do show aspects of Straits Salish life even if we are not quite sure which tribe is represented.

Although starting from a somewhat shaky start, the history firms up with the beginning of the era of photographs. Historical documents increase as time goes on and photographs were also documented. Although this is easy to say, in practice, the documentation is often missing. Keddie has done a great deal of work sorting out the pictures and locating what facts remain relative to these pictures. The text is arranged in general historical order divided into units of significance such as attempts to move the reserve, etc. In the end, the book ends in 1912, after the reserve has been moved.

The value of this work as a history text is obvious, less so as an ethnography text, but how do we as archaeologists make use of this collection? By combining the interests of ethnography and archaeology, we can see the development of a specific community from first contact through the fur trade era to the acculturation of 1912. Because the photos have a limited range of subject matter—that which was of interest to the white photographers—we can see the development of two technologies during this time. These are houses and canoes.

Household archaeology has become a subject of current research. I refer the reader to R.G. Matson's (2003) study of a Coast Salish house, interpreting the UBC field school excavation of a house at Shingle Point on Valdes Island. Without going into Matson's data and its interpretation very deeply, he concludes that there is a sort of standard house—a rectangle made up of adjacent compartments about 20 or 30 feet on the narrow width combined to form a longer house. Can we see this type of house in the photos and is it the only style of house? The 1865 photo of Becher Bay village certainly shows such a house. This type of house is the one recorded by ethnographers almost exclusively. The other houses in this photo are of more modern construction and may be of the kingpost type of construction. Most other houses that follow the old style shed construction, which are visible in the photos, appear to be almost square with doubly wide construction.

On pages 95 and 96, house posts are visible, in scenes of potlaching, and they are identified as the remains of another house. It can be seen from their positioning that they are very close to the house behind and in fact, if they were part of that

house, it would appear very similar to the larger house in the background. These could also be the posts of a portion of this house after the occupants had moved to another location. The carved post is illustrated by Boas (1890:13). A similar looking post is also visible in the Becher Bay Village photo.

The sketch by Kane shows a third rafter support pole in the middle of the floor. Watercolour sketches by James Swan done in the Klallam/Makah area (just south of this territory on the American side of the Strait of Juan de Fuca) show this third post to be a fairly standard house construction feature in this nearby area (Miles 2003:58, 70, 81). If the house Kane sketched was in fact Klallam, the third post could be an introduced feature reflecting Klallam attempts to be close to the fort; however, adding a third post to support a longer rafter is no great jump in technology. The images presented in this collection suggest not an absolute house construction but rather a flexible system. This adaptability in design could be expected from a society that dismantled roofs and walls to move to seasonal or new locations.

Returning to a house post mentioned previously, it is one of two posts illustrated by Boas; the second is visible on page 102 in the company of two other posts. These are reported as not typical, since the rights to use these posts was inherited from Quamichan. The story does not stop there, as Barnett (1935-1936, (5): 38) notes in his unpublished field notes that the rights to these posts at Quamichan were inherited from Musqueam and that the carver who carved them was one and the same, a Musqueam tye. This leads into the argument that all carved posts are post-contact in the Salish area. This argument is countered by the fact that elaborately carved house posts were noted by Simon Fraser, along the Fraser River.

Of interest to ethnology and art history are the numerous photos of canoes. In general, there are reported to be three or four types of canoe used in this area with several more projected as being present in the near past. Art historians and ethnologists have noted that the canoes illustrated by the early Spanish and Russian artists and other engravers differ from the historically photographed canoes. A development of styles has occurred. A large canoe, flattened at both the bow and stern, was the northern standard, known as the head canoe. The West Coast canoe was more flattened with the prow projecting more forward (pp. 7, 39). The Salish canoe was used in the Gulf of Georgia area (pp. 23, 24, 25, 39, 57, 80, 84, and 126). Bill Holm (personal communication, 2004) assumes, and I concur, that the northern canoe evolved from the Salish canoe sometime after contact. Two mechanisms may be at work here. Thirty-foot canoes were lashed between the masts of sealing ships, which hired crews from the Gulf of Georgia region, for the northern seal hunt—thus they were in the northern area. Secondly, northern people started coming to Victoria to trade and came into contact with the Salish canoe design.

Two design types are noted within the Salish canoe design. The Gulf of Georgia design has a diagonal cutwater, a small keel part way along the hull and a rounded cross section from that point. These are usually called sealers and the keel is alleged to make them float more quietly in the water, without making a slap, which would wake the seal (pp. 80, 84). The Comox design has a vertical cutwater and a more solid look. This design is not limited to Comox and is also known as a freighter (p. 84 top).



These canoes are made out of a half log so they tend to be smaller than whole log canoes. Salish style canoes are usually only visible in older photos as they were replaced almost entirely by the West Coast canoe. The reason for this is reputed to be the fire in San Francisco, which resulted in a local lumber boom, which decimated the good canoe trees through the Lower Mainland forests. The large trees on the West Coast remained, giving the West Coast canoe makers a trade advantage. From photographs, at least, the West Coast canoe is more typical as a Salish canoe than the so-called Salish canoe.

The 'northern canoe' on page 89 looks very similar to the 'Salish canoe' on the top of page 84. It does have a slight flare on the bow and a slight upturn on the stern, which could identify it as a northern canoe, but they are not as developed as a classic northern canoe with its large added-on pieces both on the stem and stern. It is also relatively small for a northern canoe. This could be the transitional canoe hypothesized by Bill Holm. One may be visible at the back of the Tsimshian camp on page 110. It must be noted that most of the canoes in this northern tribe's camp are West Coast canoes.

Both the northern canoe and the West Coast canoe are made out of whole logs. This allows a wider spread when the log is steamed into final shape. Both make use of add-on pieces on the stem and stern to build up the prow and fill in any rotten wood (likely at the bottom of a large cedar tree), with solid wood with the grain running in the same directions as the add-on, for strength. As a result, they are larger canoes and are alleged to be more seaworthy on the open ocean.

Kane's paintings show the Salish canoe in conjunction with a large canoe with a nearly vertical bow. This is shown in his sketches (p. 24) and in his studio paintings and especially his *Return of the War Party* (not shown in this book). This has led to speculation about a large war canoe known as the *Munka*. *Munka* is a Kwakwaka'wakw word for war canoe but the example painted by Kane seems to have a lot more in common with the West Coast canoe. The second canoe is a head canoe traveling backward. Kane's field sketch shows a West Coast type canoe 56 feet long and 9 feet high. Both the West Coast and the head canoe have fancy paintings on the sides. This is much more typical of models rather than actual canoes and it has been assumed that Kane based his artwork on models rather than actual examples. If this were the case, where did the measurements come from? Holm's rule that model canoes are proportioned 1/3 shorter than full size ones is born out in the proportions of these two canoes. The question is: are there any photos that show a long, tall West Coast canoe known as a war canoe? On page 118 are two pictures of "war canoes" used for racing. They do have quite high bows similar in proportion to Kane's sketch of Canoes returning from gathering camas. I believe this is the origin of Kane's large canoe—it is a racing canoe. The modern racing canoe has been modified like a European racing shell and has a much lower bow these days. I believe this photo shows an intermediate stage of the development of the modern racing canoe from a prototype in a large West Coast canoe, probably a whaler, used as a war canoe and a large transport canoe.

Steven Brown (Brown and Averill 2000) has collected Bill Holm's paintings into one volume with much detail in their meaning and how they were produced. His volume is a good

start to understanding the West Coast canoes from Bill Holm's perspective. Brown also wrote a chapter, *Vessels of Life: Northwest Coast Dugouts in The Canoe: A Living Tradition* (Jennings 2002:74-95), which is a good introduction to the subject.

Boas (1890:14) illustrated two canoes, which he alleged to be the typical canoes of the Straits people. One is called a war canoe and, if extended 1/3 by Holm's rule, fits the proportions of a racing canoe. The second, a reef net canoe, is an odd flat-bottomed boat with a flat stern added into a slot in the canoe. This has been speculated as a repair done by a Chinese craftsman from the Yangtze River region of China, as this is a style of repair from that area combined with the presence of immigrants from that area in Victoria (e.g. Durham 1960:67). Well, it's a model, but are there similar boats visible in any photographs? The answer is no. Several boats appear to be lifeboats from sailing ships (pp. 47, 55, 88, 121). Columbia River fishing boats are also visible (pp.126, 127,136, 137, 140). Several eccentric canoes appear in the foreground of the top picture on page 144. These may be the missing reef canoes. A flat bottom to resist rolling while hauling in the net is the main characteristic expected of these canoes rather than outer ocean seamanship. If there was in fact a separate reef canoe, it must have been rare or left near the reef camps rather than in Victoria.

Wayne Suttles mentioned an inherited house privilege.

On Discovery Island there was a house built later than the long, partitioned building that was the original settlement; it had a round door and a painting of a whale on the front. This house belonged to a man named George Sq'a'set whose wife was half Sooke and half Nitinat. The door and painting were her inherited privileges, presumably from Nitinat ancestry. (Suttles 1952:422)

Two houses at Becher Bay show this round door feature (p. 57). Kane's sketch shows a door that is round on top. Such a feature is not visible in any photo, but it may be seen in Warre's drawing on page 28. As this is hypothesized as the Klallam village or camp, this may be the house illustrated by Kane. Round doors are not reported in the rest of Coast Salish territory.

I have two main criticisms of the book. The first is there is no good map of the Victoria area showing the villages and place names of the Songhees as well as modern Victoria districts. I have spent a fair bit of time in Victoria, but I still couldn't recognize some of the places referred to in the text. I'm sure they seem like the back of their hand to people that reside there, but how about the rest of us?

The second criticism concerns the last chapter. It has a tacked-on quality. A summary of Salish beliefs may be appropriate as an introduction to how others see the Songhees, but it seems here to reflect what the Songhees think of themselves. While this would be a most interesting study in conjunction with this collection, the Songhees vision is quite remote from most pictures. The Mud Bay pictures are the only ones showing the people hanging around doing their daily business. Most of the other pictures are quite formal and serious. From my perspective the best photo showing the heart of Salish life is the cover photo of the smiling boy. This picture shows the humour and joy present in most interactions with Salish people.

A third and lesser criticism is woven through my review. Keddie has done extensive research here and has access to materials about which the rest of us can only speculate. Despite this

advantage, he tends to make statements of fact where, in fact, he is making statements of opinion. In fact, this review is full of such statements as well, although I have attempted to provide citations when these were at hand. Are our interpretations facts? You can almost hear the axes grinding out there! Nonetheless, on page 84, the lower photo shows three canoes Keddie identifies as traditional Songhees and a north-coast canoe. Behind the mat lodge are herring drying. There are two Gulf of Georgia or Salish canoes (which are no doubt Songhees), but the other is a West Coast style, not a northern canoe. Is the mat lodge made of tulle rushes or bulrushes? How can we know? If those are herrings, they are as long as the man's arm. This sort of 'shoot from the hip' labeling of pictures does not contribute to a scholarly work and distracts from the obvious amount of research that went into this book. In the end, my criticisms fall into a call for caution. This is a complex culture. As cultures change, there are usually developmental stages through which the culture passes. I'm looking for canoes and houses that do not fit the categories into which they have been pigeonholed by previous academics.

This is a very good collection of artwork and photographs, which should be part of the library of all students of west coast history, ethnology, culture contact and archaeology. Check out the provincial museum website for more goodies—100 pages of them. Also, although not exactly relevant to this review, check out the Songhees Nation website for cool web graphics.

### Don Welsh

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**I was born on Feb 9th 1946 in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I attended the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon from 1964 through 1969 and later in 1970, graduating with an Honours BA and later entering the Masters program under Dr. Pohorechy who taught me artifact illustration and intellectual independence. I "dropped out", went to the Haight Ashbury and Berkeley, lived in country communes, became an artist, worked in a print shop and book bindery, became a juggler, made juggling equipment and put on light shows. My interests returned to archaeology in the early 1990's after moving to the White Rock area. R.G. Matson was pivotal in helping me access local archaeology knowledge which led to my current position as Archaeologist in the Land Claims Department of the Semiahmoo First Nation. I am currently married with five sons, a daughter and two grandsons.**

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