

because it is representative of the idiom of all of the grandmothers' stories, and of the effect that many of the stories in the collection will have on the reader:

Well, I suppose I will once again tell about my grandmother because I used to love her a great deal, and she used to love me, too. But as for her, my grandmother liked to cook, and it was always she who cooked for us. Until the last she used to cook, and one morning she had made lots of bannock, and it was then, after noon, that she fell ill; and it was that same night that she died! And so it was her own bannock that was eaten at her wake; so active had she been, my grandmother.

The third section of the book is a dialogue between Alpha Lafond, Rosa Longneck, and occasionally Freda Ahenakew, who reminisce about living at Muskeg Lake. The conversation touches on many of the topics discussed in earlier sections of the book but it also includes topics such as medical services, language, and people they have known. At the same time, there are hints of family violence, domestic bliss, and many other topics.

Freda Ahenakew grew up with some of the grandmothers in this collection. As their listener and audience her presence is characteristically discreet. Yet readers will begin to sense that while she says very little, Ahenakew is there on every page of the text: patiently listening to her companions as they reminisce, laughing when their stories are funny, filling in a word here and there when that word escapes the speaker. Ahenakew's evident long friendship with a number of the grandmothers in this collection contributes to the ease with which the storytellers speak; the comfort known between friends who share and reminisce together in Cree, their common language.

The book will appeal to a wide readership of all ages: those who speak Cree or English or both, students of Cree, and anyone who is interested in early Cree life and the lives of Cree women.

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Other Reading

**wâskahikanîwîyîniw-âcimowîna / Stories of the House People*. Told by Peter Vandall and Joe Douquette, edited, translated and with a glossary by F. Ahenakew. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1987.

**kwoyask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahîhîc / Their Example Showed Me the Way: A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures*. Told by Emma Minde, edited and translated by F. Ahenakew & H.C. Wolfart. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997.



kôhkominawak otâcimowîniwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words. Cree texts edited and translated by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998. 408 pp.

kôhkominawak otâcimowîniwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words is a welcome reprint of the book originally published in 1992. Rich and descriptive narratives cover a broad expanse of the grandmothers' experience. The texts could be utilized for a variety of purposes such as the construction of Aboriginal women's history. All too often, Aboriginal history has focused on texts which deal with male concerns such as war and public politics. The stories collected are valuable as well for anyone wishing to have reading material accurately transcribed in Cree.

Beginning with her work at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre in the 1970s under the direction of Ida McLeod, Freda Ahenakew went on to collect and publish a wide variety of texts in the Cree language. In a world where English seems to dominate, it is especially difficult for smaller language groups to perpetuate themselves. Realizing that written texts would be needed in order for the Cree language to survive into the next century, Freda Ahenakew, along with her colleague H.C. Wolfart, have set the standard for the transcription of Cree texts.

Like the various elders books published by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre in the 1970s and 1980s, there are pictures of all of the grandmothers at the start of the book. The photographs help to re-create some of the atmosphere of the texts as they were originally heard. Furthermore, false starts and hesitations are also recorded in the text, which is a change from some of Ahenakew and Wolfart's earlier work. Despite these details which try to preserve the feel of the original oral performance, interesting questions remain concerning the transformation that the "text" undergoes once it is written down. While Wolfart touches on this issue in "Introduction to the Texts" (pp. 17-37), more could have been said.

A central characteristic of the texts is the personal relationship that exists between Freda Ahenakew and the grandmothers who told the stories. Wolfart notes that "most of the women whose life experiences she collected have known her for a long time" (p. 17). Indeed, early in the book, Ahenakew describes her relationships with the grandmothers (pp. 2-15). In keeping with the Cree oral tradition, the "texts" were told to Freda Ahenakew because the grandmothers had a personal connection to her.

All too often, the domestic sphere of Aboriginal life has been ignored and downplayed in favour of more "public" histories and narratives. The grandmother texts help to rectify this situation by describing life on the trap line (pp. 40-64), household chores (pp. 146-64, 331-34), marriage (pp. 211-19, 345-49) and difficulties of trying to teach Cree to grandchildren (pp. 301-03).

One of the strengths of these texts is that dialectical variation is preserved in the texts. There is no attempt to superimpose the speech community references of Ahenakew on to the words of the other grandmothers. For instance, Janet Feitz's text (pp. 40-64) is nuanced with the dialectical variation of the "Th" dialectic. While Cree is becoming increasingly more of a written language, there has also been a shift towards the standardization of Cree, with a Plains Cree hegemony emerging. Fortunately, the texts are recorded in a manner which is sensitive to the dialectics of the grandmothers speaking.

The texts are extremely useful for those who speak Cree or who have a working knowledge of the language. Wolfart's essay at the end of the book (pp. 351-406) articulates some of the linguistic peculiarities of the texts. However, *kôhkomînawak otâcimowiniwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words*, would have benefitted from two additions. First, a glossary at the back of the book, which Ahenakew and Wolfart have included in other publications, would have greatly increased the utility of the book. Second, an essay by a Cree woman at the end of the book would have helped situate the texts within a socio-cultural context. While this omission is unfortunate, the texts create the possibility for this happening in the future.

kôhkomînawak otâcimowiniwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words is an important contribution to Aboriginal history. The domestic sphere of Cree people has often been ignored, and has, perhaps, an even greater effect upon our daily lives than the public life which has already been amply recorded. The texts also serve to function as sources for the revitalization of the Cree language. The efforts of

Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart help Cree culture to make a paradigm shift from oral performance to written text. Such a transformation is necessary in order for Cree culture to perpetuate itself; however, this change is also done with a great deal of sincerity and personal connection to the storytellers.

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Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength, edited by Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk. Manitoba Studies in Native History, Volume IX. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996. 204 pp., photographs, index.

Historically, little effort has been made to bridge the gulf between the academy and Aboriginal communities. Generally, academics study a wide range of historical and contemporary social phenomena from distant ivory towers, while community-based workers slug it out at the "front lines." In the fall of 1989 the University of Lethbridge Native Studies Department attempted to help bridge this gap by hosting a conference entitled "The National Symposium on Aboriginal Women of Canada: Past, Present and Future." The objectives of the conference were threefold: to provide a forum in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women scholars, community-activists and other front-line workers would "share ideas, information, experiences, and strategies"; to encourage more research on various aspects of Aboriginal women's lives; and to publish a collection of readings "for students, researchers, and other interested groups, encompassing various theoretical issues" (vii, 4). Over the course of four days participants attended formal paper presentation panels, "experiential and problem-solving" workshops, and a variety of cultural events.

By many standards the conference was an overwhelming success — it attracted participants and presenters from diverse backgrounds, a wide range of academic and community issues were discussed, and the dialogue was candid. On more sensitive topics such as representation, appropriation, voice, authority and truths, the dialogue was often tense and lively.

The thirteen articles in *Women of the First Nations* were selected to reflect the conference's commitment to diversity and the range of approaches and topics ongoing in Aboriginal Women's Studies. Four of the articles were written by Aboriginal scholars, writers and community workers, nine were written by non-Aboriginal academics, and the introduction was a collaborative effort from the co-editors, Dr. Christine Miller, Department of Native Studies, and Dr. Patricia Chuchryk, Department of Sociology, both at the University of Lethbridge.

The collection is opened, as was the conference, by a moving keynote address from Jeanette Armstrong, Okanagan writer and Director of the En'owkin International School of Writing. Armstrong's presentation set the tone both for the conference discussions and for this collection of essays by providing a forthright encapsulation of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and by focusing on issues and concerns most pressing to contemporary Indigenous women. She stresses that Aboriginal women historically resisted colonial intrusions and still struggle with dignity to maintain balance and continuity with the past. She closed with a passionate encouragement to Aboriginal women to continue rebuilding and healing their communities and to remain true and strong to traditional values.