



Reclaiming History: Ledger Drawings by the Assiniboine Artist Hongeeyeesa, by Valerie Robertson. Calgary: Glenbow, 1993. Pp. 95.

Reclaiming History has essays in both of Canada's official languages, English and French, with additional written Assiniboine descriptions included in captions beneath some forty-four drawings originally done on ledger paper. The featured artist here is Assiniboine ledger painter Hongeeyeesa who lived in southeastern Saskatchewan from roughly the 1860s until his death circa 1927. John Haywahe (Hongeeyeesa's grandson) from the Carry the Kettle First Nations (Assiniboine) Reserve narrates the ledger drawings. Because of his drawing ability Hongeeyeesa became known as "Artist" and his family also carried the name. I find that at once ironic and humorous. In the same situation today they would be known as Indian artists. There is a map of the area in question on page 16 which is helpful for those who do not know where the Assiniboine Reserve is located.

As well as the Glenbow, collaborating with Robertson (in addition to Haywahe) was Charlotte Hanbixie, an Assiniboine herself. They all did a fine job in documenting and bringing to light this important piece of traditional Assiniboine history. Robertson had to do some detective work before pen could be put to paper to describe Hongeeyeesa, since he had been all but forgotten by the local people. She also wrote an essay on ledger drawings in the Fall 1992 issue of *Prairie Forum* for those who crave more information.

To her credit Robertson lets the drawings in *Reclaiming History* speak for themselves via Haywahe. Somewhat disconcertingly, however, I found her intrusion into historical fact revealing and falling short of reality, since she gets bogged down in that old modernist rhetorical trap of describing Plains Indians of that period as "nomads." There were no nomads among Plains Indians, at least not in the true sense of the word, just as there was no word for "wilderness" in their many languages. They certainly do not describe themselves in this way today, and that is what is important here. Like the word "wilderness," "nomads" existed only in the white man's imagination. The Great Plains was their home.

The study and documentation of this genre, known in Native art history as ledger art, is taking place with greater frequency across Native North America, with the concomitant conclusions being published in attractive books such as this — a welcome trend indeed. Ledger art, in conjunction with winter count robes, inform Native historians of critical periods in the history of Native North America, a history which has the great distinction of being overlooked by non-Indian scholars who prefer the written word over that of iconographic descriptions as evidence of historical fact. Pictographs, petroglyphs and the ethnographically described "mnemonic" devices of early Plains Indian artists are simply off bounds to Western

historians who generally leave that territory to ethnographic and archaeological translation and curiosity, sadly enough. Hopefully, one day there may be a definitive book written and published exclusively on the ledger and winter count artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Buffalo Meat, Zotom, Silverhorn, Wolf Carrier, Bull Head, Calf Child, and now Hongeeyeesa, among many other Plains Indian ledger and winter count artists, should be household names by now, at least in the Native art world, but they are not. For Native art history, and Native history generally, it is good that private institutions such as the Glenbow take an interest in and sponsor such studies.

Hongeeyeesa's ledger art gives us an excellent account of what happened in his people's history during the late 1800s and I find that fascinating. As buffalo robes became scarce in that era, the only functional resource available to Plains Indian artists with which to record their histories was the Indian agent's ledger book. Dr. O.C. Edwards, an Indian Department physician in Regina, acquired the forty-four drawings from Hongeeyeesa between 1882 and 1901 and they came into the Glenbow's collection in 1985 from E.S. Gardiner, a grandson of Dr. Edwards.

Charlotte Nahbixie writes an honest essay on the history of the Cypress Hills and what it meant to her people in that era. The Native perspective in history is a plus here and adds a dimension to the book, since Nahbixie had personal access to knowledgeable Assiniboine historians who have their own unique stories to tell, in their own ways. Could a non-Indian have picked up on what the notorious colonial permit system meant to Indian people, for instance, which was such a hindrance to Indian progress during those years? What non-Indian would have bothered to mention that the permit system has never been removed from the Indian Act? Other non-Indian authors who have written about the history of Saskatchewan Indians during this period omit this important fact, perhaps out of a sense of guilt. Nahbixie writes that the church and government residential school system meant to "civilize" the "savage" was not all that it was cracked up to be. She describes the establishment of such schools as a concerted government move to "depose" Native leaders in order to destabilize Indian societies and government, to overcome Native resistance to the taking of their lands and resources. Such history is largely missing from non-Indian historical accounts of Canadian history.

Alfred Young Man
Native American Studies Department
University of Lethbridge



Hired Hands: Labour and the Development of Prairie Agriculture, 1880-1930, by Cecilia Danysk. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995. Pp. 231.

Essential to the development of agriculture on the Canadian Plains was the role and contribution of hired farm labour. It is of note that, until