

Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians, by Gilbert L. Wilson. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987. Pp. 129.

Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden is one of a series of reprinted books chosen by the Minnesota Historical Society Press for "their importance as enduring historical sources and their value as enjoyable accounts of life in the Upper Midwest." It was originally published in 1917 as *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians: An Indian Interpretation* by the University of Minnesota. The reprint edition includes a new introduction by anthropologist and ethnobotanist Jeffery R. Hanson, an authority on the Hidatsa Village Indians of the Upper Missouri region.

In his introduction Hanson describes *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden* as "a classic anthropological document on Indian agriculture" and as "one of the most detailed, in-depth accounts of aboriginal Native American agriculture ever published." Most of the information about Hidatsa agriculture was supplied by one person, Buffalo Bird Woman, known in Hidatsa as Maxidiwiac, a very knowledgeable gardener, who is thought to have been born about 1839. A secondary informant was Wolf Chief, Buffalo Bird Woman's brother. The information was collected and transcribed between 1912 and 1915 by Gilbert Wilson, an anthropologist at the University of Minnesota. Wilson explains in the foreword that he set out "to learn how much one Indian woman knew of agriculture; what she did as an agriculturist and what were her motives for doing; and what proportion of her thought and labor were given to her fields." With the exception of Wilson's short foreword, the book is a detailed first person account by Buffalo Bird Woman of Indian agriculture amongst the village Indians of the Upper Missouri. In the foreword Wilson says that he has "sincerely endeavoured to add to the narrative essentially nothing of his own."

Wilson chose his main informant well. Buffalo Bird Woman was able to provide him with detailed information on all aspects of Native agriculture. She described methods of land clearance, the yearly round of farming activities and the methods of planting, cultivation and storage. There are separate chapters on each of the major crops: corn, squash, beans, sunflowers and tobacco. Buffalo Bird Woman also describes the methods of construction of the major structures associated with agriculture, such as the watching stage, the cache pit and the drying stage. Essential Indian farming tools are also described in a separate chapter.

What Buffalo Bird Woman is describing is Native agriculture near its northern limit in the centre of North America. At the time of European contact the northern limit of Indian agriculture on the Great Plains was probably in North Dakota at the Knife River villages of the Hidatsa Indians. Buffalo Bird Woman was born in a village along the Knife River, but most of her life was spent at Like-a-fishhook, a village of seventy lodges established in 1845 close to the trading post of Fort Berthold, located about thirty miles upstream on the Missouri. There in the rich, wooded bottomlands along the Missouri, the Hidatsa, Mandan and Arikara cleared

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.

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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