

Indians at Work in BC Rolf Knight

The book covers up to 1930s

Commercial fishing and canning industry -strategically different from traditional subsistence fishing, gillnetting on river estuaries. Indigenous fishers first to install early gas engines in early 20th century. Knowledge of how to contract cannery boat and secure jobs. Canneries some of the most industrialized in Canada. Women worked.

Loggers, longshore, construction of every railroad in BC.

“Some historians have some to recognize that labour history is more than just a chronicle of labour unions; ,of confrontations with employers and unions/ instead they have delved into the day to day routines, the work and skills, the on-the-job social relations, as well as the home life budget, health and fraternal societies of those they are writing about. In short, they have looked at labour history as the social history of particular groups of working people.” Pg. 20

He uses wage work and independent producers as categories.

Anthropologists have over emphasized potlatch and ritual and POV of those who were in power vs slave classes and laborer. Few women recorded – lacuna because women were not present in ceremony (or had their OWN!!!).

Pg. 71 During the maritime period Indian chiefs in some locales (and at least one enterprising native women) began prostituting women slaves to the crews of trading vessels and later to the personnel of trading posts. We do not truly know what the economic, social and demographic consequences of Indian prostitution were. One would want to know approximately how much income these services brought in, who received that income, specific consequences were, and so forth.

Venereal diseases spread from sailors from New England to female slaves who then infected Haida and Tsimshian women “of good family” through their husbands. “Slavery enforced prostitution, and disease for the enslaved was acceptable until good families are affected. (Newton, 1973, 92-93).

By 1858 at the beginning of major European settlement no pristine Indian society remained in BC. Fur trade history. Still politically autonomous and in control of their territories.

Residential school curriculum – no vocational training for female students -training in running a home, needlework, agricultural chores (did not add to skills already in place in Indigenous communities). Preparation of foodstuffs – canning, pickling, root cellar storage. No traditional skills training.

Women’s Work in Subsistence Economy

Endless tasks that increased as men spent time in wage labour, subsistence food production, child care, housekeeping, etc. potato gardens, livestock

Most important women’s wage labour canneries, by 1870s – women also worked as seasonal harvest labour on commercial farms. Migration to hops farming Washington state. Women pursued “men’s” jobs – boat pullers, trapping, sealing, canoe steerers, pelt preparation.

Indigenous women did not seem to be employed in wage labour outside of canneries until war time industries in the 1940s. Marjorie Mitchell and Anne Franklin suggest that men revised, edited and

reduced the experiences into insignificance. Compounded by male anthropologists who have inquired of Indian men of the lives of Indian women.

“All pervasive is the chauvinism”

Female anthropologists who studied the west coast also did not address the “gender deletion”.og. 130

Margaret Blackman history of Florence Edenshaw Davidson Haida woman. 1982. Life focused on domestic matters. Sparrows – he worked as logger then a fisher, she learned fishing, then residential school, worked in canneries, gardening. Splint basketmaking and Cowichan sweater knitting.

Pg. 177 hardscrabble ranching Cariboo – Mary Augusta Tappage – see John Speare, the Days of Augusta – life on quarter section of scrub pine “ranch” in Soda Creek area. Daughter of red river Metis father and Shuswap mother. Father subscribed to newspapers, she was an avid reader. Married George Evans, Welsh and Shuswap, cleared land, worked on roads (husband). Husband and older son died in accidents. Younger son ran the ranch and she became a “granny” to local children. She wrote a book.

Page 182 women fished with their husbands, usually as boat pullers, sufficiently common that canneries said women would not receive advance pay. Crewed mosquito fleet of handline trolelrs, cod boats, halibut hunting canoes which took fish both for subsidence an sale into the 1930s. When engine powered gillnetters general in cannery fleets, wives and children common aboard Indian operated fishboats.

Pg 192 Chinese men and Indigenous women crucial to canneries. Japanese and other cannery workers partly replace Indigenous on the Fraser after the 1890s Indian cannery workers crucial to other regions.

Pg. 193 Indigenous segregated and did not work in harmony because from different linguistic groups. Chinese under contract to “China boss” male and separate bunkhouse. Japanese women appear in Fraser River canneries in 1910s.

Informal work – core of Indian women who repaired nets before and during fishing season. Additional women hired from families of contracted fishermen. Indian labour recruiters and Chinese contractors involved inhering a proportion of the Indian cannery labour force. Piece rate payment. Noth and central coasts Indian labour recruiters were important into the 1930s. Gave prices and rate, arranged fpr case advance.

Pg. 265 Casual Labour

Farm labour and harvest labour poorly paid.

“A few Indian women worked in small hotels and cafes around the province and others were washer women while a few occasionally worked as domestic labour – jobs which people stay away from if they have any choice”.

Fur trade society Jennifer Brown Strangers in Blood (1980) and Sylvia van Kirk Many Tender Ties (1980) Metis wives of fur post officers and trajectory of children. Importance of women’s labour around posts and on hunting-trapping expeditions.

Klondike Kutchin women employed as cooks and in laundering. Pg. 315

Native Brotherhood in the 1930s.

