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A HISTORY OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF CANADA: GENESIS OF A SYNTHESIS

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The process which led to writing of *A History of the Native People of Canada* involved four stages. First, there were the subtle influences of past interpersonal relationships and experiences that have compelled me during retirement to write such a synthesis. Second, a growing awareness of the need to inform a larger audience than just professional archaeologists of the findings of archaeological research led to the initiation of the Canadian Prehistory Series by the National Museum of Man. Third, my responsibility on the editorial board of Volume I of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* for the archaeological content of the Volume set in place much of the structure of the current three volume synthesis of the pre-European Native history of Canada as revealed by archaeological evidence. And, fourth, the specific requirements of *A History of the Native People of Canada* as a reference work intended for a wide audience had to be met.

A synthesis is a "Putting together of parts or elements to make up a complex whole" (The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary 1985:860), while genesis is derived from the Greek word for origin or creation. All syntheses encompass a number of variables that include the nature and the stage of development of a discipline, the scope of the synthesis and whether its intended audience is narrow or broad, and the individual inclinations of the author. Such a complex mix of interrelated factors assure that syntheses are more or less unique in character. Indeed, a synthesis is a very personal exercise whereby no two scholars addressing the same subject matter will produce identical products.

Only a small percentage of archaeologists are inclined to popularize their subject matter in order to reach audiences beyond that of other professionals. Why it is that just a handful of scholars from all disciplines take on what is generally a difficult but thankless task un-

doubtedly involves certain inherent personality traits moulded by the influences of particular people and situations. My family upbringing, for example, emphasized the importance of striving to contribute more to society than one received. Although I was not aware of it at the time, the influence of my teacher and long time friend, Dr. J. Norman Emerson, undoubtedly had much to do with preconditioning my attitudes regarding the importance of sharing archaeological knowledge with a broad spectrum of society. Norman Emerson's humanist orientation is apparent in his role as founder of the Ontario Archaeological Society, a society made up of amateurs and professionals working in cooperation and dedicated to the advancement of the interests of archaeology in the Province of Ontario. It is also apparent in his summer field excavations where interested organizations and people from local communities were encouraged to participate. This ranged from the participation of members of the Ontario and Quebec archaeological societies and local people from the City of Cornwall in the 1957 salvage excavation of the Ault Park site on the St. Lawrence River to the involvement of a large number of Ojibway children in the 1960 excavation of the Pic River site on the north shore of Lake Superior. Certainly my many years as a museum archaeologist made me aware of the interest of people in archaeology and the need to be sympathetic to their desire for information. Initially, however, my focus when I joined the National Museum of Canada in 1960 was on the production of technical articles and monographs. This was only natural as most syntheses are produced by older scholars who have been through a long school of professional maturation. Such technical reports, ill suited to even an interested public, however, are the foundation upon which any synthesis rests.

Before writing a synthesis a blunt question must be asked: Who needs it? There are a

number of answers to this question. Archaeology tends to be a parochial discipline in that most archaeologists focus their attention on a relatively restricted piece of geography or time period. In contrast, an archaeological synthesis requires a broad overview of the subject matter whether the synthesis applies to a province or to an entire country. A person writing a synthesis is forced to both generalize and to cast a broad comparative net. Generalizations, of course, expose the author to criticism, particularly when the toes of regional specialists are trod upon. As has been cogently noted, One of the problems confronting those who venture to bring together evidence from separate fields is that they are certain to offend those who prefer specialization within a limited and safer pasture" (Davidson 1988: xi). The process of writing a synthesis often challenges local archaeological interpretations that have gone unquestioned and can encourage people to view their subject matter from a broader perspective. A synthesis provides a teacher with a fine educational tool for the critical evaluation of students. It can also lead to unpublished evidence being made available if for no other reason than to correct statements made in the synthesis. At a pragmatic level, archaeologists need to inform a wide audience of what they are doing as in most cases their research funding depends upon the public. If people do not know what you are doing they are not likely to be too concerned with your funding problems, particularly during lean economic times when everyone is competing for shrinking resources. In terms of the expansion of knowledge it is necessary that the evidence from archaeology become incorporated with other disciplines such as history, geography, medicine, and the biological and earth sciences. With reference to history, for example, it is unacceptable that the 12,000 years of native human history in Canada prior to the arrival of the Europeans has been largely ignored simply because there are no pre-European written records. History based upon archaeological evidence has severe limitations but that is no reason for the record of past human behaviour to be ignored or rejected as irrelevant. An archaeological synthesis can also act as a reference work where a wide range of esoteric interests can be met. Such specific interests, for example, include native craftsmen learning for the first time that their

ancestors had made tools and ornaments from copper for 7,000 years before Europeans appeared on the scene and ornaments of silver for 2,000 years and that the working of copper and silver thus represent legitimate areas for native craft development or lawyers who need to check the evidence of a native band territorial land claim against the archaeological record. The main point is that all of the potential uses of an archaeological synthesis intended for a broad audience cannot be predicted.

The launching of the Canadian Prehistory Series by the National Museum of Man with the publication of *Ontario Prehistory* (Wright 1972) was followed by other regional volumes on *Newfoundland and Labrador Prehistory* (Tuck 1976), *Canadian Arctic Prehistory* (McGhee 1978), *Quebec Prehistory* (Wright 1979), *Maritime Provinces Prehistory* (Tuck 1984), *British Columbia Prehistory* (Fladmark 1986), and *Western Subarctic Prehistory* (Clark 1991) as well as the topical volumes consisting of *Six Chapters of Canada's Prehistory* (Wright 1976), *The Burial at L'Anse-Amour* (McGhee 1976), and *The Dig* (MacDonald and Inglis 1976). While a number of other regional syntheses were produced by provincial societies and agencies, such as in Saskatchewan (Epp and Dyck 1983), Southern Ontario (Ellis and Ferris 1990), and Alberta (Helgason 1987), the Canadian Prehistory Series had a particular influence on considerations relating to the writing of a national synthesis. This was mainly due to the fact that I was intimately associated with the Canadian Prehistory Series and was able to assess how the books were being received by the public. *Ontario Prehistory*, for example, went through three printings and became a best-seller. It became clear that a market existed for general works in Canadian archaeology. The uses to which the books have been put are of interest. *Ontario Prehistory*, which was never intended as an academic work, was used as an archaeology text at Simon Fraser University. When I asked "why?", the answer was that "there is nothing else". In a different instance the book played a role in preserving an important segment of the archaeological heritage. Thanks to the cooperation of the late Dr. William E. Taylor, Jr., then Director of the National Museum of Man, copies of *Ontario Prehistory* were sent to each Native band in the Province of Ontario with an enrollment of

50 or more people. A direct reaction to this institutional gesture of informing Native people of what archaeology was able to say about their ancestors was not expected but there were indirect responses. These included the Pic River Ojibway band's negotiations with the Federal Government regarding the ceding of land for a bridge right-of-way over the Pic River in order to provide public access to Pukaskwa National Park. The band insisted that their heritage be protected from disturbance, the referred to heritage being the pre-European sites at the mouth of the River and not the European trading posts as initially assumed by the white negotiators. When Indian and Northern Affairs officials asked where the sites the band wanted protected were located they were told to go talk to Jim Wright. One of these officials informed me of the foregoing events and also happened to mention that he noted a copy of Ontario *Prehistory* sitting on the negotiation table. If I had not been approached by Indian and Northern Affairs to provide the locations of the pre-European and early contact archaeological sites at the mouth of the Pic River I would never have learned of these developments. Undoubtedly J. Norman Emerson's involvement of the local people in the 1960 Pic River excavations and the distribution of the book Ontario Prehistory had paved the way for actions that would eventually preserve an important segment of the archaeological heritage. The foregoing event highlights the point that knowledge can be put to uses never entertained by the people who produce and disseminate the knowledge. If people are provided with information they will more often than not use it to good purpose but the information must first be made available in as comprehensible a form as possible. Such responses to the Canadian Prehistory Series convinced me of the need for archaeological information to be more widely distributed.

Much of the physical structure of the volumes currently under production was determined during the work on Volume I of the Historical Atlas of Canada (Harris and Matthews 1987). The requirement to map the pre-European Native history of a country as environmentally and physiographically diverse as Canada posed major challenges. In any archaeological classificatory scheme the variables of time and culture content must be kept separate. This was achieved in the *Atlas* by

applying five absolute time periods across the entire country: Period I (10,000-8,000 BC); Period II (8,000-4,000 BC); Period III (4,000-1,000 BC); Period IV (1,000 BC-AD 500); and Period V (AD 500-European contact). Discrete cultures based upon the patterning of archaeological evidence were designated by distinct names, although it was recognized that such "cultures" would have been composed of many independent societies. The geographical distributions of the individual cultures were then mapped to provide the dimension of space and culture content. Fourteen of the seventy maps in Volume I of the *Atlas* were dedicated to pre-European or early European contact archaeological evidence. The maps were compiled by a number of scholars and consisted of the following: The Fluted Point People, 9500-8200 BC; Southern Ontario, 8600 BC; The Plano People, 8500-6000 BC; four cultural sequence maps covering Periods II to V; Peopling the Arctic; The Coast Tsimshian, ca 1750; Bison Hunters of the Plains; Iroquoian Agricultural Settlement; Prehistoric Trade; Cosmology; and Population and Subsistence. It was decided that the majority of the maps would cover all of Canada in order to provide the broadest possible scope to the archaeological phenomenon being mapped. Faced with the responsibility for the archaeological content of the maps I decided that the most pragmatic way to proceed was to have drafts of most of the maps put together at the Archaeological Survey of Canada where I could exploit the expertise and close collaboration of my colleagues in the Survey. Such a centralized procedure permitted face-to-face consultation between nine archaeologists and a physical anthropologist whose collective expertise spanned the country. The draft maps would then be distributed to selected scholars across the country who were encouraged to draw information directly on the draft maps and provide critical comment and suggestions. These data could then be used to create an improved product. The process of distributing progressively refined maps was repeated a number of times and was probably the only effective way to accommodate my editorial responsibilities including the meeting of production schedules (for details of this procedure see Wright [1986]). While an attempt was made to maintain as broad a consultation process as possible with archaeologists ac-

ross the country, time constraints placed limitations on such desirable dialogue. It was with some personal trepidation, therefore, that I awaited the evaluation of archaeologists of the final product. After all, attempting to condense masses of archaeological evidence, frequently of an equivocal nature, into single maps covering the entire country or large segments thereof had never been done before. While a few congratulatory letters were received from individuals across the country it appeared that either archaeologists did not know what to make of such an exercise or were keeping critical comment to themselves or, even worse, were indifferent. The archaeology plates in Volume I of the *Atlas*, for example, were never reviewed in an archaeological journal that I am aware of. As time passed, however, I noted that the *Atlas* maps were being referenced in archaeological journals suggesting their acceptance by some as useful syntheses.

The *Historical Atlas of Canada* was enthusiastically received by a broad national and international scholarly audience (Piternick 1993; 1994). This was gratifying as one of my personal reasons for participating in the Historical Atlas of Canada Project was to see that the pre-European archaeology of Canada received appropriate coverage and that the evidence would then be available to a much wider range of disciplines and individuals. Paradoxically, I learned after I had joined the editorial board of Volume I that if it had not been mainly for the efforts of two other board members, Conrad E. Heidenreich of York University and Bruce G. Trigger of McGill University, I would not likely have been invited to join the board to take on the specific responsibility for the archaeological content. An early query was even raised of whether archaeology could really contribute much to the *Atlas*. The foregoing is not repeated here as a bit of gossip but to emphasize the regrettable intellectual gap that still exists between history based upon documentary evidence and history based upon archaeological evidence. This gap can only be closed by information and the increasing realization of both historians and archaeologists that they have the same goals even if they are achieved by quite different methods.

Although the involvement with the archaeology plates of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* had a significant influence on some aspects of

how the volumes of *A History of the Native People of Canada* were approached, the creation of maps is quite a different exercise from producing a major reference work. For one thing, the space constraint demanded by the maps was no longer a problem. Also, an attempt could be made to rectify certain weaknesses that had been incorporated in the *Atlas* maps. In the *Atlas*, for example, radiocarbon dates had been translated into calendar years by subtracting the radiocarbon date from AD 1950 to arrive at BC or AD or years ago statements. AD 1950 represents the cut-off year for radiocarbon dating due to atmospheric contamination by atomic weapon testing. The radiocarbon dating of tree rings that had been previously dated by counting the annual tree ring wood growth following a method called dendrochronology indicated that there had been major fluctuations through time in the production of atmospheric Carbon 14 and, as a result, radiocarbon years were not entirely equivalent to calendar years and must be adjusted using calibration tables. Calibration ranges were determined by comparing the relationship of the radiocarbon dates to the absolute dates derived from dendrochronology. All dates later than 7,240 years, the maximum time depth of tree ring dating, have in the current volumes been calibrated to allow for fluctuations in the production of Carbon 14 through time. As the volumes are intended for a general readership it was imperative that the radiocarbon dates be translated into calendric terms (for further discussion of this matter see Wright [1995:91]). Changes to the names of cultures used in the *Atlas* were also necessary in order to establish a cultural classificatory system appropriate to an entire country rather than parts of a country. Such changes meant that long-established regional culture names were replaced with new names that better accommodated a national perspective and, on occasion, logic — a necessary action, but one that is likely to be greeted with hostility from some quarters. Archaeological cultures in Canada correlate with major environmental-physiographic zones such as the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence or the Plains. The modified classification system also accommodated cultural continuity when it transcended a number of time periods by the use of the adjectives early, middle, and late or when a geographical split occurred in one of the time

periods. For example, while Early Shield culture is described for Period II and Middle Shield culture for Period III, in Period IV significant technological change made it necessary to establish a Late Eastern Shield culture and a Late Western Shield culture. Only time will tell to what extent the new culture names and even the absolute time periods will be accepted, rejected or modified by Canadian archaeologists. Such name changes, however, had no effect upon the cultural distributions provided in the Atlas plates.

From the very beginning the volumes of *A History of the Native People of Canada* were conceived of as a reference work. As space was not a significant problem it was decided to produce three richly illustrated and heavily referenced volumes. Volume I, covering the 9,000 years involved in Periods I, II, and III, for example, has 564 pages, a chart, seven tables, fourteen colour plates, twenty-one black and white plates, three maps, and fifty-six figures (Wright 1995). It is anticipated that Volume II (1,000 BC-AD 500) and Volume III (AD 500-European contact) will be of approximately the same size and illustrative content. Each culture is described relative to one of the absolute time periods with treatment of the individual cultures advancing from east to west to north and then back to east again to initiate the next time period. For ease of reference, each culture is described under the following captions: precis; cultural origins and descendants; technology; subsistence; settlement patterns; cosmology; external relationships; human biology; inferences on society; and limitations in the evidence. Although an index is lacking in the hard copy the volumes are also being produced on diskettes and CD-ROM where the word search function will serve the purpose of an index. Colour plates only appear in colour in the electronic formats. The diskettes and CD-ROM can be used to print hard copies of illustrations or text and to cut and paste pertinent sections into another document. Hyperlinks have been included to facilitate movement throughout the text. Even the hard copy was produced electronically by the docutech method but, as it turned out, this procedure has limitations as well as advantages relative to traditional photo-offset printing. The word "cascade", for example, no longer conjures a pastoral image of a waterfall but rather the abject terror of having text and illustrative materials running

out of control with devastating affect on publication format.

This outline of the historical sequence of events leading to the work on the present volumes has been both personal and self-centred but, as was mentioned at the beginning of the article, the process of producing a synthesis is very much a personal matter. It is a given, however, that the writing of such volumes is totally dependant upon the archaeological publications of past and present generations of researchers. It has been convenient to write this article from a personal standpoint but, like many words, "personal" has a number of nuances. Thus, I see no contradiction in the observation that

"Writing such a synthesis is not as much a personal endeavour as a participation in a process contributed to by generations of scholars. The subject matter can be compared to an ever-changing kaleidoscope of interplay between developing regional cultural traditions and the cross-cutting influences of technological and intellectual diffusion. Like history based upon written documents, however, archaeologically based history should be rewritten every generation lest it becomes a series of anecdotes" (Wright 1995:7).

And, with reference to the ultimate goal of the current synthesis, "Only through greater public understanding and appreciation will the rich archaeological heritage left by the ancestors of the native people of Canada be recognized as an essential part of our national heritage, to be cherished and respected" (Wright 1995:21).

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