

*Aboriginal Slavery on the
Northwest Coast of North America*

Leland Donald

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
379 pp. Illus., maps. us\$40 cloth.

BY CHRISTON I. ARCHER
University of Calgary

The early history of the Northwest Coast often presents historians and anthropologists with complex enigmas that make conclusions tenuous at best. One of the last remaining major ocean frontiers of European exploration, the Northwest Coast was a place where late eighteenth-century Russian, Spanish, British, American, and French voyagers and maritime fur traders encountered culturally advanced Indigenous coastal peoples who, in many respects, baffled and intrigued them. Anxious to open commerce, to gain access to iron and copper, firearms, textiles, and other trade goods, the Natives shared with Europeans a highly developed concept of private ownership. This extended from possession of real estate to access to fisheries, beaches, foreshore food resources, fresh water, grass, lumber, firewood, and even to intangible property such as songs and symbols. While Britain, Spain, and Russia competed for sovereignty, searched for a navigable Northwest Passage, and engaged in the trans-Pacific fur trade in sea otter pelts, the explorers and fur traders gathered data and artefacts, and sometimes kept detailed journals. Without much success, the visitors attempted to penetrate the mysteries of Northwest Coast societies; these societies presented one face to strangers and scrupulously withheld many

secrets about their culture and rituals. Despite the best work of Enlightenment scientists who accompanied Captain James Cook, the Comte de la Pérouse, Alejandro Malaspina, George Vancouver, and many others, even the most careful observers failed to answer perplexing questions. Part of the problem was that many observations occurred in the summer months, away from the winter village sites where annual ceremonial and ritual activities took place.

Following the maritime fur traders, Hudson's Bay Company men, missionaries, and, beginning in the 1880s, professional ethnographers and anthropologists such as Franz Boas arrived to undertake the difficult tasks of penetrating Native societies, learning languages, and posing answers to questions of critical importance concerning religion, social organization, ceremonial life, and ritual activities. As Leland Donald notes, however, the period between the end of the maritime fur trade and the arrival of the first anthropologists was an epoch of terrible demographic disasters and dislocations induced by disease epidemics that altered traditional Native cultures. Even with interviews of the oldest informants, there were gaps that living memory could not fill.

It is important to know that Donald came to his study of Northwest Coast

slavery from earlier research on slavery in Africa. While previous historians and anthropologists acknowledged the existence of slavery in Northwest Coast societies (and there is another recent study on the subject by Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown), no previous scholar has made Donald's claims about the critical importance of slavery as a central feature in Indigenous coastal cultures from Prince William Sound, Alaska, to the Columbia River in Oregon. Indeed, Donald anticipated that his conclusions would spark controversy and that some specialists might continue to downplay the importance of Aboriginal slavery. He argues that many ethnographers, from Franz Boas to Helen Codere and Philip Drucker, produced what became the orthodox view that slavery was relatively unimportant. Although a few scholars, such as Viola Garfield, dissented, the Native titleholders (chiefs) from the late nineteenth-century forward downplayed the significance of an institution that they recognized had become thoroughly unacceptable. Working with an enormous body of existing ethnographic, historical, and archaeological sources, Donald divides his book into four broad sections: an overview of Northwest Coast culture, a description of slavery during the first one-third of the nineteenth century, a study of the historical context of Northwest Coast slavery, and an examination of Northwest Coast slavery in perspective. While this approach tends to be repetitive, Donald illustrates his arguments from different points of view in order to build themes and conclusions concerning the ubiquity and central impact of slavery.

All observers of Northwest Coast history agreed that the Native peoples

were aggressive in defence of their territories and often extremely warlike in their relations with their neighbours. Most slaves – men, women, and children – were captured in wars and raids against neighbouring villages, and the aggressors made every effort to utilize surprise and stealth. Slaves might also be obtained through trade networks, as gifts from one owner to another, through common people enslaving themselves due to poverty or debt, and through chiefs enslaving orphans and other members of their own bands. Donald argues that the possession of slaves relieved chiefs from the drudgery of common labour and contributed to their wealth and prestige. Slaves could be killed by their owners for any reason, including ritual celebrations connected with funerals, whale hunts, new houses, and other sacrifices. In addition, Donald states that slaves were probably the source of human flesh consumed in cannibal performances. He establishes the existence of a well developed "aboriginal slave trade network" (139) and provides readers with tables and arrows to point out the directions of the trade. These tables are somewhat reminiscent of similar charts that describe African slave-trading patterns. One table illustrates the traffic in slaves for a southern region that Donald calls the Columbia River Slave Trade Network; it encompasses the coastal littoral from the Nuuchahnulth of Nootka Sound to the Shasta and Klamath of Oregon. The Northern Slave Trade Network extended from the Chugach of Prince William Sound southward to include the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Bella Bella, Nawitti, and other tribes, extending to Vancouver Island and even inland to Athapaskan groups.

What can one make of all these claims? What new evidence has Donald

produced through his research to back his views? While some of the author's conclusions are convincing, too much of this study is based upon supposition, sincere hopes, and repetitive narrative. In many sections Donald rakes over the same sources as have previous researchers and crunches figures that he admits are of "low confidence" (186) and that cannot be taken as conclusive. Readers will wonder if the results of this quantitative effort merit serious consideration or if the findings are more a case of "garbage in/garbage out." This point is crucial, since Donald uses this evidence to "suggest" that many Northwest Coast communities in the nineteenth century possessed enough slaves "to merit consideration as large-scale slave systems" (194). Even by combining detailed quantitative work, linguistic and archaeological evidence, and historical data, some aspects of Donald's analysis and conclusions do not bear careful scrutiny. For example, this reviewer wonders how so many slaves could have been controlled during the annual migration round of small bands from one seasonal village site to another.

In the historical record that commenced in 1774 with the Spanish voyage of Juan Pérez to the Queen Charlotte Islands and Nootka Sound and carried on through the period of Spanish activity and the maritime fur traders into the nineteenth century, researchers have a significant body of observer evidence upon which to establish the nature and prevalence of slavery. It should be noted that modern historians are careful to weigh European evidence and to acknowledge the chronic frustrations and difficulties of evaluating documentation concerning the Native peoples under observation. Misperceptions and contemporary

biases crowd the records of European visitors and have fostered numerous errors and popular legends. Enlightenment biases, misunderstandings caused by poor or non-existent language comprehension on both sides, and the negative propaganda of competing sea otter fur traders combined to spread rumours and to entrench premeditated lies. However, for all of their faults the historical sources are more comprehensive than is the linguistic and archaeological evidence about slave trading. Over the past few decades, British, Spanish, and American archives have been scoured by researchers looking for new documents, and it seems unlikely that there will be many major new discoveries.

Given the wealth of published sources available today, Donald's historical research is sometimes cursory and uncritical. Without actually working through the available primary sources, the author adopts a conclusion advocated by some eighteenth-century writers; that is, that the Natives practised not only ritual cannibalism, but also, quite possibly, gustatory, gastronomic, or epicurean anthropophagy. Such a view underscores the argument that some band chiefs traded for or engaged in war and raids to capture victims for cannibal feasts or ritual functions involving the consumption of human flesh. Donald accepts a story, discredited by most historians today, that vilified the Nootka Sound Mowachaht chief Maquinna, who was said to have fattened eleven children and then brutally killed and eaten them. This report originated with English fur traders such as John Meares – known to some contemporaries as "Liar Meares" – who published unsubstantiated tales that each moon Maquinna barbarously murdered and devoured a child slave raw, sharing the

reeking flesh with selected guests. Although other contemporary Native and European observers debunked these tales as outright lies, in some respects this general storyline appeared to predate later cannibal performances of the Kwakwaka'wakw *hamatsa*, as recorded by Boas and others. Donald also makes much of the dried trophy severed hands and skulls that were sometimes offered by the Natives as items of trade. While most historians and anthropologists today readily accept at least the possibility of ritual cannibalism, such as the tasting of blood or flesh of a fallen enemy or an executed captive, the more outrageous stories circulated among the competing fur traders and also recorded by some rather gullible Spanish observers who interviewed Europeans without actually visiting the Natives do not merit much attention. Indeed, more thoughtful English, Spanish, and other commentators who actually studied the question of indigenous anthropophagy dismissed the idea of gustatory cannibalism.

That Donald has resurrected old stories circulated by the fur traders to advance his theories about slavery, without having added any new evidence, does nothing whatsoever to advance either historical or anthropological knowledge. Moreover, the impact is extremely negative for Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples today, whose memory record does not extend back to the eighteenth century. Donald states: "The eighteenth-century Mowachaht material is important because it suggests that cannibalism was a fully developed cultural practice at the time of the first European contact" (177). In fact, the evidence referred to was most certainly not Mowachaht but European, and the use of qualified suggestion does

little to modify the stigma of these stories or to place them in a proper perspective. As a result, readers of the present study who lack much background in Northwest Coast history may well adopt a calumny advanced by late eighteenth-century writers and dismissed by most modern historians.

There are other worrisome aspects of Donald's large-scale slave systems that require further examination. First, there were few eighteenth-century eyewitness reports of Natives engaged in activity that could be described as a major slave trade. During the 1780s and 1790s, fur traders and explorers in coastal waters were ubiquitous from Alaska to California. Although the traffic in human beings may well have increased dramatically in the first half of the nineteenth century, this took place at a time when the Indigenous cultures had begun to suffer major dislocations caused by epidemic diseases such as smallpox. Incidentally, despite the claims of some historians there is no evidence (as Donald argues) of the Spaniards introducing smallpox in 1775 at Bucareli Sound, Prince of Wales Island. Second, while the Spaniards did purchase Native women and children with the intention of using them later as translators and to save them from imagined cannibal banquets, there were few healthy Native men on offer. Frequently, the Spaniards stated that the Native children and women they purchased were captives taken in wars rather than slaves. The Spaniards wrote quite a bit on this topic because there were some concerns among senior Spanish officials in New Spain that marine officers, soldiers, and seamen might have purchased Indigenous women and children with the intention of reducing them to peonage or even slavery. Investigations satisfied officials that this

was not the case. In a word, most Spanish officers acted with high motives in mind and had no intentions, as Donald intimates, of becoming slave owners.

Despite its controversial aspects and flaws, Donald's book is bound to be of interest to specialists in Northwest Coast history. They can decide for themselves the importance and place of Aboriginal slavery; the existence or non-existence of cannibalism; and whether or not, as a statement on the dust jacket proclaims, the book

will be a classic. Everyone will agree that there were slaves in pre- and post-contact Native Northwest Coast communities. Few will discount the possibility of at least some ritual cannibalism connected with warfare or other ceremonies. Throughout his book, Donald employs a methodology and approach to studying slavery that will serve as the basis for future discussion and debate among historians and anthropologists. Aboriginal writers and researchers in many fields will have more to say on this subject.

*The Pleasure of the Crown:
Anthropology, Law and First Nations*

Dara Culhane

Burnaby: Talon, 1998. 406 pp. \$24.95 paper.

BY JOANNE DRAKE-TERRY, *Lillooet, BC*

The *Pleasure of the Crown* invites readers to feast on an array of unorganized information about the role of anthropologists as expert witnesses, their testimony in *Delgamuukw v. The Supreme Court of British Columbia*, and First Nations legal battles to have their Aboriginal title and rights recognized. Unfortunately, Talon decided to call Dara Culhane's musings a "history of the Aboriginal title issue in British Columbia," which it is not.

The author's manuscript was in press on 11 December 1997 when the Supreme Court of Canada rendered judgment in *Delgamuukw v. The Queen*. The court decided seven major issues and ordered a new trial. Talon's

failure to halt publication of *The Pleasure of the Crown* until Culhane's opinions could be weighed against the ruling of the Supreme Court is unfathomable. For example, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the strength of the oral history evidence of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en chiefs and elders. Yet their testimony was largely ignored in *The Pleasure of the Crown*. Culhane chose instead to elevate the importance of "expert witnesses" in page after page of her book. As one instance, the testimony and credentials of Crown anthropologist Sheila Robinson are referenced on at least seventy-five pages.

Culhane's commitment to a particular position prevents her from

seeing the whole picture. It is revealed in the oral evidence of Yagalahl – Dora Wilson – and cited in *The Pleasure of the Crown*. To what purpose, one might ask?

We are a poor people with rich resources. That is why the province and the federal government are running scared. And that is why they wouldn't deal with us ... They had huge mounds of money to pay their lawyers and they had a lot of lawyers ... It was unbelievable, the amount of people that they had working with them. (150)

My 370th day and there has been no document produced or given that the Province or the federal government own this land. (263)

Indeed, elders are not the only ones who question why the Crown is still holding First Nations hostage, demanding ransom/proof of Aboriginal title and its surrender before First Nations are allowed to benefit from lands and resources the Crown itself cannot prove entitlement to. Is it even logical for First Nations to seek justice through litigation if the following bizarre rule of law applies?

The law creates reality that is real because it has been created by the law. Hence, regardless of what might actually exist "on the ground," under the doctrine of legal positivism, the Crown creates and extinguishes Aboriginal title and rights "at its pleasure." (66)

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Aboriginal title is an Aboriginal right recognized and affirmed in Section 35(1) of the Constitution Act,

1982. The importance of First Nations struggles in the political arena are revealed in the court ruling. If "some British Columbia Indians" had not mounted an international campaign to halt repatriation of the Constitution, then there would have been no Section 35(1) written into the Constitution Act, 1982. Calling it a "limited victory won by Aboriginal peoples in the Constitution debates," Culhane relegates this and decades of political struggle to a few pages of text in her book.

Culhane also displays an extreme bias in favour of certain First Nations and leaders. Those who choose to litigate are referred to as a "well-schooled, "indigenous elite," and they are usually identified by name (i.e., Nishga), whereas First Nations political leaders and their constituents are commonly cited as "some Indians, "delegations," "various groups," "the Aboriginal movement," and so on. Referencing the published accounts of "expert" historian Paul Tennant and disregarding the accounts of First Nations leaders such as the late Grand Chief George Manuel, Chief David Ahenikew, and many others may have tilted the author's worldview.

What does the future hold for BC First Nations? In Culhane's opinion, the appeal decision in the Supreme Court of Canada case of *Delgamuukw v. The Queen* strengthens the position of First Nations in the BC Treaty Process. She seems blithely unaware that the majority of BC First Nations (formerly called Indian Bands) stayed away from the treaty table, refusing to comply with the demand for extinguishment of Aboriginal title. The Supreme Court ruling validated this position. It found that the province has no jurisdiction to extinguish Aboriginal title.

Either the federal government will begin to negotiate in good faith with the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en and other First Nations or it will be forced

into litigation once again. For First Nations peoples who are struggling to survive "on the ground" the future is, it seems, still quite shaky!

*Paldi Remembered:
50 Years in the Life of a
Vancouver Island Logging Town*

Joan Mayo

Duncan: Paldi History Committee, 1997.

129 pp. Illus., maps. \$25 paper.

(Paldi History Committee,

6001 Paldi Road, RR 2, Duncan, BC, V9L 1N9)

BY SARJEET SINGH JAGPAL, *Vancouver*

At the beginning of this century about 5,000 East Indian men arrived in Canada from the Punjab province in northern India. Virtually all of them were Sikhs who came to British Columbia to do labouring jobs on railway construction, in lumber mills, and in forestry. Being uneducated but physically and spiritually strong they were prepared to work hard in this cold and hostile land and return to India with their savings. Only a few of these men had an education, and they soon recognized the economic opportunities open to them in the forest industry. These men were visionaries and were vital to the economic success of the entire group. *Paldi Remembered* is the story of Mayo Singh, a legend among Canadian Sikhs who became a successful businessman and community leader.

The author, Joan Mayo, Mayo Singh's daughter-in-law, describes him as "a small man, no more than 5'3" in height and, more importantly, not

cut out for hard labour." So he became the "wheeler-dealer" for his people. They supplied the physical labour and he the business acumen, as both these qualities would be needed to succeed in the lumber business.

Mayo Singh gets his start in business in 1912 by operating a potato farm, with thirty-five employees. It failed due to a poor market. Undaunted, he went on to buy a failing lumbermill, and his thirty-five employees became shareholders in Cheam Lumber Company, near Chilliwack. They then went on to buy the Marcum Lumber Company, near New Westminster, mainly for its timber holdings. This search for timber led Mayo Singh to Vancouver Island and brought onto the scene two other educated countrymen: Kapoor Singh, who was summoned from Ontario to become the lumber company's bookkeeper and shareholder, and Rahim, a lawyer, to be their business advisor.

They then built their first mill in 1918 near Duncan, later named Paldi. This becomes the centre of Mayo Singh's business empire. The business did well, the other partners were bought out, and Kapoor Singh remained his sole partner. A community formed around the mill, and it had a schoolhouse, a temple, and separate living areas and bunkhouses for the Japanese, Chinese, White, and East Indian workers. Mayo relates many stories of community harmony. There are so many of these stories of compassion between the nationalities it would seem that there was little evidence of racial prejudice in the workplace in 1918. But down the road, in the town of Duncan, the situation differs. Even Mayo Singh could not get a room in a hotel or get a haircut at the White barbershop.

The lumber business continued to do well despite several mill fires, and Mayo Singh's empire grew. In 1925 he returned to India to get married; he returned with his wife Bishan Kaur, and his family life began. There are many interesting stories of temple events, children growing up, neighbours, business associates, and com-

munity characters. I especially enjoyed the story of his Rolls Royce, which he had modified to ride the rails so that he could inspect his logging operations.

The good use of photographs helps to tell the story of Paldi as well. Many are very rare and have never been seen outside the Mayo family. The International Woodworkers of America Local 1-80 in Duncan could make good use of the work and mill photos by adding them to their collection. The school photos add yet another dimension to this story, bringing in a sense of future growth.

But this growth did not last, and today the town of Paldi is deserted. The story of its decline is not presented with the same clarity as is its growth. Perhaps being a member of the family makes it difficult to write about these events. The chronology is confusing in Chapters 34, 35, and 36, which deal with events during the war years. Mayo's temple stories are very interesting, as are her insights into the lives of the women in this very unique Vancouver Island community. This book is a significant addition to the history of local communities in British Columbia.

*A Woman of Influence:
Evlyn Fenwick Farris*

Sylvie McClean

Victoria: Sono Nis, 1997. 288 pp. Illus. \$22.95 paper.

BY SUSAN JOHNSTON
University of Victoria

Sylvie McClean often uses the word “unshakeable” to describe Evlyn Fenwick Farris, who was, she argues, “for a time, the most influential woman in British Columbia” (12). In this well-researched biography, McClean focuses on Farris’s influence on the development of the province. Accordingly, McClean describes the events in Farris’s youth that influenced her belief system and the years between 1905 and 1942, when Farris actively worked towards her political and social goals. Born in 1878, Evlyn Fenwick Keirstead was raised in Nova Scotia, the daughter of a Baptist minister who left parish work to take the Chair of Moral Philosophy and English Literature at Acadia College. Following the death of her brothers and mother in 1890, her father raised Farris alone. He taught her to rely on reason rather than emotion, to believe deeply in the Baptist faith, and to look to education to provide her with the skills needed to contribute to society. From the age of twelve, Farris was included in her father’s professional and private life. Arguably, he was the foremost influence in the development of her social and political conscience. Farris attended Horton Collegial Academy, then moved to Acadia College where she received her BA and MA. At Acadia she was influenced not only by her father, but also by the wife of the

college president. From this woman Farris learned about a woman’s duty to her family, to society, and to God.

Like most well-educated middle-class women at the turn of the century, Farris embraced maternal feminism, with its belief in complementary but different roles for men and women. McClean argues that her strong belief system led Farris to influence society in general rather than to work towards gaining personal power. Having introduced the social, religious, and political context within which Farris operated, McClean concentrates on the years when Farris acted in the public sphere. Farris was instrumental in founding the University Women’s Club of Vancouver and the Women’s Liberal Association, and, most important, she promoted and worked to establish the University of British Columbia. For thirty years, Farris served on the university senate and board of governors and lobbied the provincial government and various organizations for support. In all her public work, Farris insisted that men and women should work together. As McClean points out, Farris never believed in women’s rights for their own sake. She supported suffrage as a way to enable women to play their own special role within Canadian society. In 1942, Farris retired from the public world of university and political

affairs. While McClean's narrative ends here, Farris lived on for another thirty years as a wife, mother, and grandmother.

A strength of this biography is its integration of the religious, political, and social contexts. The sections on the modernist Baptists are particularly useful. McClean addresses the biases of many middle-class Canadians, including Farris, and demonstrates just how contradictory and complex any individual's belief system and behaviour can be. While McClean does not dwell on the anti-Asian prejudice or the class bias of her subject, she raises these issues and does not attempt to play down the effects of racism or elitism on Farris's behaviour.

McClean writes in a rather dispassionate style, which makes it difficult for the reader to care about Farris and masks the effect she had on people. While McClean takes a good look at

Farris's beliefs and achievements, she is less successful in uncovering how other people saw this woman. Farris had little in common with most of Vancouver's moral reformers and first-wave women's movement activists. Nor did most of the men in the Liberal party seem to like either her or her "influence" on policy. While McClean argues that Farris's influence faded as her ideas and beliefs became dated, her early personal influence on party politics is possibly overstated, particularly given the lack of personal and official support for many of her ideas. These criticisms aside, McClean fills a gap in BC women's history. Her portrait of Farris as a "warts and all" maternal feminist whose influence moved beyond her family into the political culture of British Columbia is an interesting and useful reminder that much of the political history of this province's women remains to be written.

*The Gentle Anarchist.
A Life of George Woodcock*

Douglas Fetherling

Vancouver/Toronto and Seattle: Douglas and McIntyre/
University of Washington Press, 1998. 244 pp. \$35 cloth.

BY IVAN AVAKUMOVIC
University of British Columbia

The West Coast has always attracted men and women in search of a more stimulating environment. The belief that life would be better West of the Rockies brought to our shores many who still had to make their mark in society as well as those who were already fairly well known in other parts of the world.

Among the latter, George Woodcock is by far the most famous. A native of Winnipeg who spent his formative years in England, he emigrated to Vancouver Island in 1949 and stayed in British Columbia until his death. The decades he lived in Vancouver were years of tremendous intellectual growth and visibility that extended well beyond Canada.

Woodcock became Canada's most illustrious man of letters. The tremendous range of his publications and his nurturing of those who assumed an increasingly important role in the study of Canadian literature ensured him a very prominent place in the firmament of Canadian intellectual life in the second half of the twentieth century.

Success, however, came at a very heavy price. A highly disciplined approach to work left little time for relaxation, light amusement, and the kind of reflection that might have led to truly revolutionary breakthroughs in those areas in which he was particularly interested and qualified. Financial pressure imposed upon him a certain amount of hack work at the expense of the writing that he and his admirers hoped that he would undertake. Friction and misunderstandings at the University of British Columbia imposed additional restrictions on his creative work and provided yet another example of how myopic university administrators and envious colleagues complicate the life of very gifted and highly productive scholars.

Douglas Fetherling, the author of the first major biography of Woodcock, has produced a convincing portrait of an individual whose life in British Columbia started on a farm near Sooke and who died forty-five odd years later amidst a great deal of adulation from the literati.

Fetherling was helped in his task by his experience as a writer of some distinction as well as by gaining access

to Woodcock's correspondence at Queen's University, Kingston, and through fairly lengthy conversations with Woodcock in the evening of his life. Considerable evidence shows that Woodcock was eager for Fetherling to write the biography. However, Woodcock's wife Inge, and several of his closest collaborators in Vancouver, either declined to be interviewed for the project or were not asked.

The result is a study that will be of great use to those interested in assessing the impact that Woodcock made in Canada and the English-speaking world through his major contributions to our understanding of anarchism; sophisticated travel books; and numerous studies on Canadian and English literature, history, and politics. Ironically, the weakest parts of the biography are the sections devoted to Woodcock's work as editor of UBC's journal of *Canadian Literature* and the lack of proper assessment of a wide range of Canadian writers who figure in Woodcock's writings, correspondence, and conversations. References to the "gentle anarchist" ignore the fact that Woodcock held very strong views about fellow writers and often did not share the prevalent estimates of the work of this or that poet or novelist.

Notwithstanding these concerns, Fetherling's biography of Woodcock has much to offer. The prose is clear, the story flows easily, and a great deal of pertinent information is made available about a modest man who contributed so much to our understanding of Canada and of the outside world.