

ALICE RAVENHILL:

Making Friends with the Powers That Be

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THE CANADIAN CAREER OF Alice Ravenhill (1859-1954) has puzzled researchers who ask why an elderly English immigrant with strong interests in public health, home economics, hygiene, and eugenics took on the cause of promoting the artistic talents and generally championing the situation of BC Aboriginal peoples.¹ Several recent articles attempt to unravel Alice Ravenhill's association with Aboriginal arts and crafts. Ronald Hawker, who includes a chapter on Ravenhill in his book *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61*, recognizes her as one of the founders of the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts (hereafter the Society) but insufficiently acknowledges her singular role in keeping it alive.² In her 2007 dissertation, Sarah de Leeuw finds Ravenhill's intense interest in Native art incompatible with the rest of her life: "The almost complete absence of Aboriginal peoples in [her] writings up until 1926 is strangely at odds with other aspects of her interests."³ In a more recent article, which follows the current vogue for including autobiographical details in one's non-fiction writing, de Leeuw claims many similarities between herself and Ravenhill that might explain their individual achievements; for example, they both experienced emotion, connectivity, and hap-

* I wish to acknowledge the editorial guidance and wisdom offered by Richard Mackie as well as comments from anonymous reviewers.

¹ Publications of the 1930s and 1940s customarily used the word "Indian." Aside from direct quotes, I have chosen to use "Aboriginal" where it is appropriate and does not result in awkward phrasing.

² Ronald Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 82-99. Among other small errors, Hawker refers to A.E. Pickford, a mainstay of the British Columbia Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, as "she." Throughout this article, I refer to the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts (which later became known as the BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society) by the less wieldy "the Society."

³ Sarah de Leeuw, "Artful Places: Creativity and Colonialism in British Columbia's 'Indian' Residential Schools" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2007), 102.



Figure 1. Ravenhill with various handicrafts (1941). Photographic print. *Source:* Alice Ravenhill fonds (Box 1, File 19, image 2). University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.

penstance.⁴ At the same time, de Leeuw suggests that Ravenhill's early allegiance with eugenics theory and her privileged position dominated her achievements in British Columbia.⁵ Scott Watson dismisses Ravenhill

⁴ Sarah de Leeuw, "Alice through the Looking Glass: Emotion, Personal Connection, and Reading Colonial Archives along the Grain," *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, 3 (2012): 273–81.

⁵ de Leeuw, "Alice through the Looking Glass," 276. An in-depth discussion of eugenics is beyond the limits of this article. See <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/> for information on influential Canadians such as Nellie McClung and Tommy Douglas (both of whom supported eugenics) and the stance of Peter Loughheed, which helped end compulsory sterilization in Alberta.

as an educator and eugenicist who transferred her unwanted attention from English hygiene to Aboriginal arts and crafts in British Columbia.⁶ In the most recent discussion of Ravenhill's work with Aboriginal arts and crafts, which appears in a 2013 issue of *BC Studies*, Lilynn Wan argues that Ravenhill's work, while outstanding, was neither unique nor carried out in isolation.⁷

Her career in British Columbia has therefore been painted with broad brushstrokes, while the important achievements of this remarkable woman have been reduced to a series of one-dimensional and partial portraits that examine the outcomes rather than the process of her personal development. In this article, I argue that her impressive career before coming to British Columbia gave her a network of contacts in British professional and social circles that served her well in her dealings with Canadian institutions like the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM) in Victoria and the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) in Ottawa. The men who staffed these institutions were more or less of her own professional background. Her own career in England and British Columbia showed her the value of adroit institutional networking. Ravenhill can be classed with a group of committed non-Native supporters of Aboriginal causes – lawyers, linguists, and ethnographers – men and women such as Arthur O'Meara, James Teit, and Amelia Paget, who defended Aboriginal cultural and political causes in various parts of Canada in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.⁸ Such committed and distinguished company provides an intellectual context within which to develop a layered picture of this complex woman.

Specifically, I explore the process by which Ravenhill completed *A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture: An Outline of the Arts and Crafts of the Indian Tribes of British Columbia* (1944), a publication that marks the pinnacle of her work. The circumstances of how Ravenhill wrote this book and brought it to fruition illustrates how she went about advancing Aboriginal arts and crafts in British Columbia. The story I relate is set largely between 1940 and 1944 – between the origin and publication of *A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture* – and draws from Ravenhill's extensive public and private correspondence (held at the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections; the British

⁶ Scott Watson, "The Modernist Past of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's Landscape Allegories," in *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations*, ed. L. Paul (Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1995), 64.

⁷ Lilynn Wan, "A Nation of Artists: Alice Ravenhill and the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts", *BC Studies* 178 (2013): 51-70.

⁸ See Celia Haig-Brown and David A. Nock, eds., *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

Columbia Archives; and Library and Archives Canada) as well as from her published memoirs and articles.⁹

Many of Ravenhill's predilections and preferences were set in her early life; from the age of eight she had, according to her mother, "taken the care of the world on her shoulders."¹⁰ When family finances prevented her from attending school after the age of seventeen, she carried on her own research – for example, dissecting snails, worms, and ox eyeballs in her bedroom and translating books into Braille.¹¹ When she was thirty, her family finally allowed her to take a newly offered National Health Diploma course through the Royal Sanitary Institute (one of the first four women to do so). Her foray into advanced education reflected a concurrent movement in British society for middle- and upper-class women to find employment other than women's traditional philanthropic work.¹²

Her exceptional career in England included, among other achievements, a teaching post at the University of London and becoming the first female Fellow of the Royal Sanitary Institute of London.¹³ She took on extensive roles in British health and educational movements between 1904 and 1910, belonging to the Sociological Society, the Eugenic Education Society, the John Howard Society, the Child Study Society, the Society for Physical Education and Improvement, the Froebel National Union (devoted to child development), and subcommittees on school hygiene working under the Royal Sanitary Institute. She lectured on topics such as hygiene, public health, and physical development in childhood and carried out investigations into health, child development, and moral training. She was appointed to report on school baths in Holland, on physical training systems in Sweden and Denmark, and on the teaching of domestic economy in convent schools in Ireland. She was also given a three-month assignment to investigate home economics in the United States. One large investigation carried out by Ravenhill – "Investigations into Hours of Sleep in School Children of Great Britain" – was presented at the First International Congress on School Hygiene in 1907 in London and was quoted as recently as 2012 in a paper that disputed whether or

⁹ On the genesis and publication of *Corner Stone*, see also Wan, "Nation of Artists," 55-56.

¹⁰ Alice Ravenhill [AR] to F. Burling, 8 April 1941, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), add. mss. 1116, box 1.

¹¹ A. Ravenhill, *Alice Ravenhill: The Memoirs of an Educational Pioneer* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1951), 53.

¹² See R. Livesey, "The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops 1890-1906," *Women's History Review* 13, 2 (2004): 233-61.

¹³ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 143-51. An entire chapter of *Memoirs* details her extensive activities in health and education.

not the amount of sleep that children were getting affected their health.¹⁴ She investigated moral instruction and training in schools in 1908, and she researched the play interests of six thousand boys and girls in English elementary schools, presenting the results at the Child Study Society of Great Britain in 1910. Many of her papers were published, and she also published three books: *Eugenic Education for Women and Girls*; *Household Administration, Its Place in the Higher Education of Women*; and *Lessons in Practical Hygiene*.

It was therefore surprising and upsetting for Alice Ravenhill when, in 1911, her sister Edith asked her to accompany their brother Horace and his son Leslie to Shawnigan Lake on Vancouver Island. Leslie was twenty-two years old when he and his father attempted the homesteading life on the west coast. On his 1914 application for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Forces, Leslie indicated that he had already served in the 7th Cheshire Regiment in England and that his occupation was “bushwhacker.”¹⁵ Despite Ravenhill’s claims in her autobiography that her sister Edith had insisted they go to Canada to “make a home for their menfolk,”¹⁶ it is also possible that she had reached an impasse in her British career. The University of London had turned to a program that required Ravenhill to possess a university degree. A move to a far-off corner of the Empire might have seemed very attractive, and Ravenhill only intended to leave England for four or five years.¹⁷

Between 1911 and 1919, Ravenhill maintained her interest in health and home economics, serving as an organizer and writer for the British Columbia Women’s Institute (BCWI) and taking a short-lived home economics position at the State College of Utah in Logan. This last position proved to be “one of the greatest and most costly mistakes” of her life.¹⁸ In 1919 she returned ill and defeated to British Columbia and moved with her brother and sister to a house on Dallas Road in Victoria. She did not re-enter public life until 1925, when the BCWI asked her to help organize the Queen Alexandra Solarium, a home for children with

¹⁴ See J. Horne, “Let’s Not Lose Any Sleep,” *New Scientist* 215, 2876 (2012): 26–27.

¹⁵ This information comes from Leslie Ravenhill’s attestation papers: Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 150, acc. 1992-93/166, box 8108–42, available at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/>. He was killed on 24 April 1915 at the Battle of St. Julien, where chlorine gas was used for the first time in world history. See also “This Week in History 1915,” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 2014.

¹⁶ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 170.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197. Ravenhill could not cope with the demands of the position or the strong religious culture of the Mormons.

tuberculosis and other debilitating diseases, at Mill Bay.¹⁹ The BCWI next asked her to provide some guidance about adapting Aboriginal designs to the craft of hooked rugs.²⁰ This request inspired her to spend the next few years at the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM) researching designs, where she characterized her research method as “Dig, dig, dig.”²¹ The BCPM was then located in the Legislative Buildings, first in the basement and later in the East Wing and on the main floor. The director, Francis Kermode, gave Ravenhill open access to the large collection of artefacts.

By 1929, at the age of seventy, Ravenhill was ready to speak publicly on Aboriginal designs, thanks to the help of William A. (Willy or Billy) Newcombe, assistant ethnologist at the BCPM and a neighbour and friend of her brother Horace. By that time the BCWI was no longer interested in hooked rugs or Aboriginal designs. She spoke instead to the University Women’s Club and the Victoria and Island Arts and Crafts groups on the topic and continued to conduct research at the BCPM, where she received frequent guidance from Newcombe. Ravenhill, along with many other residents of Victoria, was outraged at Newcombe’s sudden firing in 1933. He and Kermode had become increasingly antagonistic towards each other, and their disagreements culminated in Kermode’s falsely accusing Newcombe of theft.²² Newcombe retreated to his house on Dallas Road and to his large private collection of BC Aboriginal artefacts. He also became Emily Carr’s handyman and picture-framer.²³

Ravenhill ultimately benefited from Newcombe’s dismissal by taking over his role as the BCPM’s Aboriginal art expert. When, in 1935, the museum received monies from the Carnegie Foundation for speakers on Native arts and crafts, she was the most knowledgeable person available. She consulted extensively with Newcombe regarding the Carnegie talk and drew on his expertise for other presentations in Victoria. She also borrowed what she called “not too valuable specimens” from him for

¹⁹ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 206. On the role of the solarium, see Megan J. Davies, “Competent Professionals and Modern Methods: State Medicine in British Columbia during the 1930s,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 76, 1 (2002): 56-83.

²⁰ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 209.

²¹ AR to Anthony Walsh [AW], 7 March 1940, University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections (hereafter UBC Special Collections), Alice Ravenhill Fonds, box 1, file 8. Ravenhill and Walsh had an extensive correspondence over the four years of Ravenhill’s greatest involvement with Aboriginal arts and crafts. They became good friends and confidants.

²² Peter Corley-Smith, *White Bears and Other Curiosities* (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1989), 81.

²³ See M. Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1979); and B. Hudson, “Victoria’s Gentle Servant of the Arts,” *Daily Colonist*, 6 September 1964, 3-6, B.C.A.

the purpose of illustrating various points.²⁴ Ravenhill was a modest woman and did not like the publicity generated by the Carnegie talk; indeed, she said that it had made her “squirm.”²⁵ However, this local notoriety did not stop her from embarking on a late career as an expert in BC Aboriginal art and ethnography. After Newcombe’s dismissal Ravenhill increasingly filled an expert role both at the cash-strapped museum and in Victoria’s intellectual life. In 1936, she noted that, while provision had been made in the BC curriculum for teaching about Aboriginal life, no information was available for teachers. She contacted the minister of education, Dr. George Weir, and convinced him to let her write a BC school textbook, for which she would draw frequently on Newcombe’s expertise.²⁶ The resulting compilation of her well-received talks was published by the King’s Printer in 1938 as *Native Tribes of British Columbia*.²⁷ Dr. Diamond Jenness, chief anthropologist of the National Museum in Ottawa, reviewed the book favourably for the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*. To Newcombe, Jenness commented that he hoped he had written the review “in a way that [would] not hurt the dear old lady.” He thought that, while she had made errors, Ravenhill deserved credit for her “courage and pertinacity.”²⁸

Ravenhill’s work on *Native Tribes*, along with her examination of Native designs and contact with Newcombe and the museum, expanded her personal understanding of what constituted authentic Aboriginal art. She started to design and make cushions, book bags, and rugs incorporating Aboriginal designs, and she sold them in Victoria shops. She depended on Newcombe for help with artistic integrity and authenticity. For example, when she designed and knitted a cushion for a friend in England, she asked Newcombe, “Might I use pale blue, deep cream and black without violating too reprehensively the canons of BC Indian art?”²⁹ Ravenhill was especially proud of a needlework design of a raven that she made for Queen Elizabeth (1900–2002), the consort of King George VI. She had obtained her original raven design from Newcombe; the

²⁴ AR to W.A. Newcombe, 26 April 1935, BCA, add. mss. 1077, AO1753, vol. 14, fol. 95.

²⁵ AR to Newcombe, 6 May 1935, BCA, add. mss. 1077, AO1753, vol. 14, fol. 95.

²⁶ AR to Newcombe, 26 November 1936, BCA, add. mss. 1077, AO1753, vol. 14, fol. 95.

²⁷ See Alice Ravenhill, *The Native Tribes of British Columbia* (Victoria: Charles Banfield, 1938). On this book’s genesis, see also Wan, “Nation of Artists,” 53–54.

²⁸ Jenness to Newcombe, 6 January 1939, BCA, add. mss. 1077, vol. 12, fol. 69. Jenness had been a house-guest at the Ravenhill home at Shawnigan Lake. For more information on Jenness, see Barnett Richling, *In Twilight and in Dawn: A Biography of Diamond Jenness* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

²⁹ AR to Newcombe, 4 February 1935, BCA, add. mss. 1077, AO1753, vol. 14, fol. 95.

issue of whether it was suitable for non-Native women to appropriate Aboriginal designs might never have occurred to her.³⁰

After the success of *Native Tribes of British Columbia*, Ravenhill continued to find items in the BCM that interested her, including manuscripts and transcripts of a large number of Aboriginal myths that had been collected by ethnographers such as James Teit of Spences Bridge and Willy's father, Dr. Charles Newcombe.³¹ In January 1939, she made contact with Anthony Walsh, a teacher at the Inkameep Day School, near Osoyoos, concerning the petroglyphs and rock paintings of the southern interior of British Columbia. The strong friendship that developed between Walsh and Ravenhill was pivotal to the development of her ideas about Aboriginal art.³² By December of that year, despite the outbreak of the Second World War, she had arranged a public event in Victoria at which Walsh was to read "The Tale of the Nativity," a story that he and his students had composed, using the South Okanagan as the setting for the ceremony of the birth of Christ. In January 1940, Ravenhill and Walsh founded the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts.³³

Ravenhill decried the prevailing attitudes of Victoria residents towards Aboriginal peoples. As she told a correspondent in 1941: "To be truthful, Victoria has not a spark of interest in our objects; get rid of these cumberers of the ground is the attitude."³⁴ Ravenhill's interest in social reform had begun in England many years before, starting with her National Health worker training in 1889. She and her fellow students spent three of their twelve months of study at lectures on anatomy and physiology, personal and domestic hygiene, and public and domestic

³⁰ For further discussion of appropriation, see James Young and Susan Haley, "Nothing Comes from Nowhere: Reflections on Cultural Appropriation as the Representation of Other Cultures," in J. Young and C.G. Brunk, (eds.), *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (Chichester, West Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 268-88. Young and Haley suggest that "calling something an example of subject appropriation is not a reason to think that it is morally objectionable" (288).

³¹ Ravenhill always referred to her collection of "legends" rather than the more appropriate myths. On Teit, see Wendy Wickwire, "'They Wanted Me to Help Them': James A. Teit and the Challenge of Ethnography in the Boasian Era," in Haig-Brown and Nock, *With Good Intentions*, 307-16. On C.F. Newcombe, see Kevin Neary, "NEWCOMBE, CHARLES FREDERIC," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, available at http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/newcombe_charles_frederic_15E.html.

³² On the relationship between Walsh and Ravenhill, see Wan, "Nation of Artists," 61-67.

³³ As previously mentioned, soon after its founding the name of this organization was changed to the BC Indian Arts and Welfare Society. On Walsh, see also Thomas Fleming, Lisa Smith, and Helen Raptis, "An Accidental Teacher: Anthony Walsh and the Aboriginal Day Schools at Six Mile Creek and Inkameep, British Columbia, 1929-1942," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 19, 1 (2007): 1-24.

³⁴ AR to Albert Millar, 10 May 1941, BCA, add. mss. III6, box 1.

sanitation. They also received training in first aid and dietetics.³⁵ The nine months that the women spent at the Chelsea Poor Law Infirmary had the potential to be life-changing.³⁶ “Most of the occupants were fairly rough diamonds,” Ravenhill recalled, “but we could but respect their courage under stupendous difficulties before humiliating themselves to accept Poor Law relief.”³⁷ Ravenhill was immediately assigned to a women’s ward devoted to cases of venereal disease. She noted various discrepancies at the Poor Law Infirmary, such as the nonchalance of the resident doctors and the reluctance of some residents to return to their own poverty-stricken homes. She later worked to end the exploitation of women employed in the British fish curing industry in the 1890s,³⁸ and she travelled throughout England lecturing in villages and towns on topics related to health improvement. No dilettante or social butterfly, she was a committed social reformer well before she came to Canada.

In other words, Ravenhill’s interests in Aboriginal peoples were in keeping with her past experiences in England. In the first annual report of the Society in 1940, Ravenhill outlined its main objective: to promote the revival of the latent gifts of art, drama, dance, and song, as well as certain handicrafts, for cultural, economic and ethical or constructive reasons.³⁹ She had formed her ideas about art from observing Anthony Walsh’s successes at the Inkameep Day School and from her research at the BCPM as well as from her background in child study in England. Specifically, she wanted: “[to] try and start mutual goodwill between ourselves and our fellow [Aboriginal] Canadians by assisting their economic position through some form of revival of their latent gifts, of arousing more interest in the cultural background we owe to them and of replacing caricatures of Indian art as souvenirs by better reproductions.”⁴⁰

Most notably, Ravenhill thought that Aboriginal peoples would regain their self-respect, which she assumed had vanished, through economic

³⁵ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 67.

³⁶ The Chelsea Poor Law Infirmary was part of the Chelsea Workhouse, opened in 1872 because many of the workhouse residents had health problems. Poor Laws in England had existed for centuries under the belief that poverty was inevitable. The 1834 Poor Law took the view that the poor were largely responsible for their own situation and that they could change their circumstances should they choose to do so. For more information, see <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Chelsea/> and <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/poorlaws/>.

³⁷ Ravenhill, *Memoirs*, 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁹ “First Annual Report of the Committee Concerned with the Revival of Indian Tribal Arts in British Columbia as a Contribution to Canadian Culture,” 2 December 1940, UBC Special Collections, Alice Ravenhill Fonds, box 1, file 8.

⁴⁰ AR to F. Burling, 8 April 1941, BCA, add. mss. 116, box 1. Frank Burling was an Indian agent in Hazelton. On the apparently latent artistry of Aboriginal British Columbians, see Wan, “Nation of Artists,” 59.

independence. Early on in her work at the BCPM, she had started to collect myths, sketches, and drawings that could be used to create saleable items. The exact point at which Ravenhill came upon the idea to develop a series of standard Aboriginal designs is not clear, but early 1940 seems most likely. A 1942 paper written by her under the auspices of the Society, "Suggestions on the Encouragement of Arts and Crafts in the Indian Schools of British Columbia," begins with the assertion: "Most Indian children do not have to be taught Art." She continues: "These children inherit from their forefathers keen observations, fertile imaginations, photographic memories, and noteworthy manual dexterities."⁴¹ Operating on the assumption that teachers would be non-Aboriginal, she suggests that they work towards gaining insight into the past cultures and family life of their students.

Ravenhill set up a meeting to discuss her idea with Captain Gerald Barry, the inspector of BC Indian Schools, in March of 1940. No artist herself, she brought Betty Campbell Newton along. Newton was the young and artistic daughter of Reginald Newton, the manager of the Windermere Hotel, where Alice, her sister Edith, and her brother Horace resided, having given up their house on Dallas Road. Ravenhill described the meeting to Anthony Walsh as "quaint." "[Captain Barry] knew nothing of my long work to arouse interest in Indian art or my study of the Tribes or the little book I prepared," she wrote Walsh. "So for an hour he talked, addressing himself entirely to Miss Newton."⁴² The matter of who was in charge was straightened out, and, by the end of the three-hour meeting, Ravenhill had thoroughly convinced Barry of her knowledge of Aboriginal arts and crafts and the need for some sort of visual reference for BC Indian schools. Ravenhill was firm in her belief that all Aboriginal peoples should be addressed separately: "To set a Salish man to carve after the method of the Haida or Tsimshian or a Nootkay [*sic*] woman to coil, and imbricate a Chilcotin basket, would be worse than [a] waste of time."⁴³ Ravenhill and Barry reached an informal agreement to produce a series of twenty large charts, depicting the various Aboriginal cultures of British Columbia. Ravenhill would

⁴¹ "Suggestions on the Encouragement of Arts and Crafts in the Indian Schools of British Columbia," October 1942, BCA, GR 0111, box 16, file 27.

⁴² AR to AW, n.d. [ca. March 1940], UBC Special Collections, Alice Ravenhill Fonds, box 1, file 8.

⁴³ AR to AW, 23 October 1940, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8. Such stylistic liberties in Aboriginal basketry had parallels in interwar carving commissions. Jean Barman describes the placing of four Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) totem poles in Stanley Park in 1924 in what was traditional Squamish (Coast Salish) territory. See Jean Barman, "Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver," *BC Studies* 155 (Autumn 2007): 26-28.

make the selection of the designs and Newton would draw them. A commission of one hundred dollars from the IAB would be split between the two. A handbook would be prepared to go along with the charts, but its ownership was not initially clarified.

Ravenhill embarked on her first dealings with the IAB, then housed under the Ministry of Mines and Resources in Ottawa.⁴⁴ In April, May, and June of 1940 Ravenhill wrote to local members of Parliament and senators from British Columbia asking them to write to the IAB to support the “charts project.” Each letter was tailored to the recipient. To Senator George Henry (Harry) Barnard, a political Conservative, she referred to her association with the Royal Family through her Raven needlework design: “I have since been in correspondence with the Queen.”⁴⁵ She did not include this sentence in her letter to Alan Chambers, Liberal member of Parliament for Nanaimo. Her campaign bore fruit. Both Chambers and Barnard wrote to Dr. Harold McGill, deputy superintendent of the IAB, promoting Ravenhill’s proposed project, and, at the end of June 1940, McGill announced that Ravenhill had been engaged to do the work.⁴⁶

Captain Barry had also supported the project. In a letter to Major D.M. MacKay, the Indian commissioner for British Columbia, Barry pointed out (1) the difficulties of having “authentic Indian designs” for children to use in schools and (2) the importance of having Ravenhill do the work. “[She] is very well known in Victoria,” wrote Barry in May 1940, “[and she] was an educational expert in the London schools, and is now 81 years of age ... I do not like asking for this money but Miss Ravenhill is very frail and I do not wish to lose her services. There are very few if any others who could do what is needed in this way.”⁴⁷ MacKay continued this theme in a subsequent letter to R.A. Hoey, director of industrial training for the IAB in Ottawa.⁴⁸ True to character, Ravenhill added

⁴⁴ In 1936, the Department of Indian Affairs had been renamed the Indian Affairs Branch, a name it retained until 1966. See “A History of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada,” available at <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1314977281262/1314977321448>.

⁴⁵ AR to Senator Barnard, 7 May 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1

⁴⁶ Dr. Harold McGill was deputy superintendent from 1932 to 1944 serving under T.A. Crerar, minister of mines and resources in the Mackenzie King cabinet from 1936 to 1945. McGill was a medical doctor and purported golf chum of Conservative prime minister R.B. Bennett. McGill’s papers are held at the Glenbow Institute, Calgary, Alberta. See <http://www.glenbow.org/collections/search/findingAids/archhtm/mcgill.cfm>. For more about Crerar, see <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/thomas-alexander-crerar>.

⁴⁷ G. Barry to D.M. MacKay, 5 May 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁴⁸ D.M. MacKay to R.A. Hoey, 28 May 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1. Robert Hoey was a former Methodist minister and a federal MP from Manitoba for the Progressive Party from 1921 to 1925. His old friend T.A. Crerar brought him into the IAB after he was defeated in a provincial election in 1936. See R.S. Sheffield, *The Red Man’s on the Warpath: The Image of the “Indian” and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 190. Some more insider

Hoey to her list of influential correspondents. In June, she emphasized to him the economic potential of furthering Aboriginal arts and crafts: "Any step which might reduce the high cost of Indian relief seems worth consideration."⁴⁹ And, in a letter to Senator Barnard in the same month, she revealed her awareness of the difficulties of allotting the money in wartime: "Please do not brand me as blind to the many difficulties to be met or as utopian in my outlook."⁵⁰

Ravenhill was also very busy with other projects from her home base at the Windermere Hotel. She had taken on the publishing of *The Tale of the Nativity*, a booklet based on Anthony Walsh's presentation in Victoria the previous December. In June 1940, she organized an art exhibition in Victoria for Francis Jim Baptiste,⁵¹ one of Walsh's most skilled artists from the Inkameep Day School. She tried and failed to persuade Baptiste (soon to be known by his N'K'Mip name "Sis-Hu-Lk") to paint to order after the success of the exhibit, and she complained to Walsh: "the management of Francis's affairs plus 'The Tale' plus the Charts is overtaxing me."⁵² This did not deter her from contacting Noel Stewart, a teacher at St. George's Residential School in Lytton, in December about his gifted young artists and organizing a publication of their work, *Meet Mr. Coyote*.⁵³ She also found time to upbraid Francis Kermode of the BCPM about the choice of name for the replica First Nations village under construction on the museum grounds, complaining that it was rapidly becoming known as the "Potlatch Village," which she described scathingly as "an ignorant and wholly impossible designation, which would make Victoria authorities the laughing stock of any well-informed visitor."⁵⁴

The "Firm of Ravenhill and Newton" persevered through to the completion of the charts in January 1941.⁵⁵ Reactions to early viewings had been complimentary. As Ravenhill wrote to Anthony Walsh, Gerald

knowledge of the intertwined connections in the IAB might have helped Ravenhill's cause, attuned as she was to relationships.

⁴⁹ AR to Hoey, 12 June 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁵⁰ AR to Barnard, 12 June 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1. On wartime austerity, see also Wan, "Nation of Artists," 54.

⁵¹ Francis Baptiste's name has also been spelled Francois. See Lilynn Wan, "A Nation of Artists": Alice Ravenhill and the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts," *BC Studies* 178 (Summer 2013): 51-70.

⁵² AR to AW, 31 October 1940, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁵³ See M.L. de Zwart, "Meet Mr. Coyote," *British Columbia History* 44, 1 (2011): 18-21.

⁵⁴ AR to F. Kermode, 4 January 1941, UBC Special Collections, Alice Ravenhill Fonds, box 1, file 8. Kermode was justifiably insulted by Ravenhill's letter. The village, located by the current Royal BC Museum, was soon named "Thunderbird Village."

⁵⁵ AR to AW, 23 October 1940, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8. Thanks to R. Mackie for pointing out the word play on the English art supplies company, Winsor and Newton.

Barry was so impressed “that he rivalled the traditional lamb in meekness and almost painful realization that the hundred dollars I accepted for the Commission is almost an insult for work he values at many hundreds and feels should be at the British Museum or Ottawa.”⁵⁶ Plans were set in place to display the charts in Victoria before they were delivered to Major MacKay in Vancouver. Betty Newton’s father had offered a room at the Windermere Hotel for free for a chart display launch, and the date was set for 24 and 25 February. Ravenhill leapt at the chance to increase publicity for Sis-Hu-Lk and to make some money selling her own handicrafts at the display; however, a couple of days before the event, Reginald Newton decreed that commercial sales “would not be in good taste” at the display, and he would not let Ravenhill display anything other than the charts.⁵⁷ Both crushed and livid, she felt that Betty Newton had been behind the decision. She had already complained to Anthony Walsh that paying Betty Newton fifty dollars for what she called “merely copying designs” was too much.⁵⁸ (Walsh, who had also received Newton’s complaints, was probably glad to be in the South Okanagan, a few hundred kilometres away.)

In a side project, Ravenhill had decided to make copies of the charts available to libraries, universities, and colleges, and arranged with Gus Maves, a Victoria photographer, to make Panchromatic photos of them. She would put up the initial money and then recoup her expenses from expected sales. Maves wanted Newton to colour the photos, which upset Ravenhill even more. Ravenhill expressed her dismay at being unable to close the whole episode with Newton: “It has made me feel smudged and is unique in a long life,” she told Walsh.⁵⁹ This statement, coming from a woman who had lived through many disappointments (including her father cancelling her engagement three days before the wedding), might say more about Ravenhill’s aging years than the actual situation. For her part, Newton thought Ravenhill had been a “good sport” about the debacle of the display and had forgotten her disappointment. While Ravenhill remained gracious in her acknowledgment of Newton’s work, she chose to demote her description of Newton from a “person with thorough artistic training and gifts”⁶⁰ to “faithful copyist.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ AR to AW, 22 November 1940, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁵⁷ Betty Newton to Anthony Walsh, n.d., UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁵⁸ AR to AW, 24 February 1941, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ AR to AW, n.d., UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁶¹ AR to McGill, 5 March 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

The charts display brought Ravenhill into contact with Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott, whom she described charitably as “for many years Head of the Indian Affairs Office at Ottawa, a charming, polished old gentleman, who loves the Indians.”⁶² Whether Scott was that charming or merely a port in a windy storm is impossible to tell. No doubt Ravenhill filed her contact with Scott away for such time as she might be able to use it to further her cause.

At first the purpose of the charts was undefined. G. Clifford Carl, acting director of the BCPM, asked whether they were intended to be distributed wholesale or whether they would be better made up as lantern slides for public lectures.⁶³ Ravenhill pursued her original idea of having copies distributed to all of the Indian residential and day schools in British Columbia. The role of the handbook that she had prepared to go along with the charts was still undefined. Its thirty-three thousand words corresponded exactly to the items on the charts. Only three copies existed, and Ravenhill had paid ten dollars each to have them typed. She kept one copy for herself, gave one to Gerald Barry, and sent one (which she intended to eventually go to Ottawa) to Major MacKay in Vancouver.

Gerald Barry had already asked Ravenhill not to mention the handbook to the IAB. He foresaw using it himself to give little talks “to promote the revival of true Indian art” as a retirement activity in the near future.⁶⁴ Ravenhill, on the other hand, wanted to ensure that the handbook was published as part of her whole endeavour to increase the visibility and economic viability of Aboriginal arts and crafts. Once again she enlisted support from well-known individuals to further her cause, beginning with Sir Michael Sadler, one of the best-known educationists in Britain.⁶⁵ The two had become acquainted when Ravenhill worked for the West Riding Education Committee in Leeds some forty years previously. The extent to which Sadler supported Ravenhill’s work is evident in the message he sent to Peter Sandiford, another well-known educationist who, in 1940, held an academic position at the University

⁶² AR to AW, 31 March 1941, UBC Special Collections, Alice Ravenhill Fonds, box 1, file 8. For more about Scott and the controversy that surrounds his tenure as deputy superintendent of IAB (1913-32), see E. Brian Titley, *Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986). See also Mark Abley, *Conversations with a Dead Man: The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013).

⁶³ G. Clifford Carl to AR, 21 February 1941, BCA, GR 011, box 16, file 27.

⁶⁴ Gerald Barry to AR, 24 February 1941, BCA, add. mss. 1116, box 1.

⁶⁵ See J.H. Higginson, “Michael Ernest Sadler (1861-1943),” *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 24, 3/4 (1994): 455-69, available at <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/sadlere.pdf>.

of Toronto. "If the way opens," wrote Sadler, "you might suggest to the Head of the office of Indian Affairs at Ottawa an inquiry into the advisability of encouraging the artistic side of education in schools for Indians in British Columbia. Miss Alice Ravenhill ... has interested herself in the matter and is not a CRANK."⁶⁶

Ravenhill sent the first annual report of the Society to Sandiford, who responded by agreeing with her stance on Aboriginal education: "You are quite right in insisting the education given to the Indian should take his environment and historical background into account."⁶⁷ In January 1941, Ravenhill told Sandiford that the attitude in British Columbia towards Aboriginal peoples was one of "contempt." The result of this, she continued: "is a painful inferiority complex and mental deterioration among its objects. Yet they possessed great qualities before the coming of Europeans broke up their very complex social and religious organization and crushed their high level of artistic skills, which should have been preserved as a background of Canadian culture."⁶⁸

Sandiford forwarded Sadler's letter to Dr. McGill in Ottawa, stating that anything that could be done to strengthen Ravenhill's position would be "greatly appreciated by all Miss Ravenhill's friends."⁶⁹ McGill's response seems to indicate that the IAB substantially failed to understand her cause: he dismissed Ravenhill's references as "altogether too pessimistic and scarcely justified by conditions on Indian reserves in BC." He pointed out that the IAB had just opened the Alberni Residential School at a cost of \$170,000.⁷⁰ In his view, this proved that the branch was working to improve learning conditions, and he declined to address any of Ravenhill's concerns about art and culture.

Despite all of the support that Ravenhill gained for the handbook, events over the next few months precluded any likelihood of the IAB's publishing the book. McGill had made the mistake of telling Ravenhill that the Honourable Thomas Crerar, the minister for Indian affairs (as well as for mines and resources) might discuss the charts with the National Art Gallery or National Museum.⁷¹ Ravenhill seized upon the idea and immediately wrote to Ottawa suggesting that the handbook be

⁶⁶ M. Sadler to P. Sandiford, 16 December 1940, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1 (upper case in original).

⁶⁷ P. Sandiford to AR, 6 February 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁶⁸ AR to P. Sandiford, 31 January 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁶⁹ P. Sandiford to H.W. McGill, 24 February 1941, LAC, vol. 7919, RG 10, file 41203-1.

⁷⁰ McGill to Sandiford, 1 March 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁷¹ McGill to AR, 7 April, 1941, LAC, RG 10, file 41203-1. T.A. Crerar was minister of mines and resources in the Mackenzie King cabinet from 1936 to 1945. He represented Manitoba in the cabinet.

discussed as well. To speed up the process, she sent her own copy of the handbook to McGill, but when she received no acknowledgment of its arrival, she started peppering R.A. Hoey (director of industrial training for the IAB) with letters in an attempt to locate it. Finally, Hoey asked MacKay (in Vancouver) to help find the missing copy: "I must express regret that I had to trouble you in respect to this matter, but I could see no other way of discouraging Miss Ravenhill in her anxiousness to correspond constantly with the Department."⁷² Strangely, the missing copy turned up on Ravenhill's desk shortly thereafter. Had Gerald Barry managed to sneak it in?

Ravenhill's letter-writing campaign created enough disturbance that she was granted an unexpected visit from Dr. McGill on his western tour in August 1941. He was accompanied by Major MacKay from Vancouver and by R.H. Moore, the Cowichan Indian agent from Duncan. With no prior notice, they descended upon her at the Windermere Hotel. Ravenhill described the meeting in a letter to Anthony Walsh: "They sat in a row in the sunroom with me confronting the trio as if a prisoner before his judges."⁷³ She fretted about having had no time to collect anything from her room that might further her agenda of advancing Aboriginal arts and crafts in British Columbia. McGill's face was expressionless for the entire forty-five-minute audience, and Ravenhill found him intensely official, not speaking more than four words. At one point, as Ravenhill gave her usual spiel regarding the need to appoint someone to be in charge of tribal arts, MacKay whispered to her: "You must show evidence!" Although the charts and handbook project had provoked the visit, she spent most of the time promoting the work of the Society.

While Ravenhill thought that her continued efforts would result in the publication of the handbook, the IAB officials did not feel the same way. When she requested that the charts be reprinted and that the handbook be published in September 1941, Hoey replied with a list of IAB financial commitments in central Canada. This list included such things as a reconstruction of the Church of the Mohawks and the birthplace of Pauline Johnson in Brantford, Ontario. It also mentioned cuts that had been required by the war effort; for example, the terms of Indian day schools had been reduced from ten months to nine.⁷⁴ In a missive to MacKay that was intended to set the matter to rest, Hoey

⁷² Hoey to MacKay, 19 May 1941, LAC, RG 10, file 41203-1.

⁷³ AR to AW, 23 August 1941, UBC Special Collections, box 1, file 8.

⁷⁴ Hoey to AR, 15 September 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

complained about the large number of letters that the IAB had received from Ravenhill while also conceding that the many visitors to the Indian Affairs Branch who had seen the charts “were appreciative in their remarks concerning their beauty and artistic worth.” Hoey ended the letter by stating that he was “frankly of the opinion that this [was] a very inopportune time to ask for the funds necessary to either print the handbook or reproduce the charts.”⁷⁵ From then on, Ravenhill gave up contacting IAB about publishing the handbook.

She managed to write an excerpted version for the Hudson’s Bay Company’s magazine *The Beaver* in 1942 that included many sketches from the charts project – without acknowledging Betty Newton’s work in any way. Ravenhill did, however, credit Harlan I. Smith of the National Museum at Ottawa with being the first to voice the idea that “early Indian arts of Canada might well serve as a suitable starting point for manufacturers in the production of distinctive Canadian designs.”⁷⁶ She outlined in considerable detail the characteristics of Pacific Coast art and blamed the tourism industry for the fact that this impressive artistic tradition had deteriorated to the level of producing cheap replicas. In this article, Ravenhill also outlines an initiative she had started with the Style and Design Board of the Manchester Cotton Manufacturers Association. She had gone to extraordinary lengths to prepare samples of “Native” designs that the Cotton Board had requested from dominions and colonies of the British Empire, drawing from the charts that Betty Newton had sketched, and supplying ideas for adapting the designs to summer fabrics, cushions, embroidery on costumes, curtains, and so on with everything labelled and credited to various artists.⁷⁷ James Cleveland-Belle, director of style and design, acknowledged Ravenhill’s samples with appreciation, noting the benefits of seeing specimens of work from other countries.⁷⁸ Nothing further came of her effort.

Although she completed the charts and handbook in 1941 (within a year of receiving the commission), Ravenhill did not find a publisher until 1944, when BCMP director Clifford Carl championed it. Published as the RBCM’s Occasional Paper Number 5, *A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture: An Outline of the Arts and Crafts of the Indian Tribes of British Columbia* consisted of 103 pages of text and twenty illustrative plates, introduced with a foreword by Carl, who had succeeded Kermode as museum director in 1942 after two years of serving as acting director.

⁷⁵ Hoey to MacKay, 15 September 1941, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

⁷⁶ Alice Ravenhill, “Pacific Coast Art,” *The Beaver*, September 1942, 4-9.

⁷⁷ AR to Noel Stewart [NS], 15 December 1941, BCA, add. mss. 1116, box 1.

⁷⁸ J. Cleveland Belle to AR, 18 March 1942, LAC, RG 10, vol. 7919, file 41203-1.

While describing Aboriginal art as “primitive,” Ravenhill was careful to define her use of this term: “The word popularly carries the idea of that which is crude and imperfect: whereas in modern parlance the meaning is restricted to that period of a people’s existence before methodical records were made or preserved.”⁷⁹ Ravenhill had made a concerted effort to give as much information as possible. For example, the forty-five-page section on mythical beings and crests is a compilation of information from five different tribal groups. She referenced her sources diligently and attributed a large number of them to Willy Newcombe, who had allowed Betty Newton to sketch items from his personal collection. Ravenhill also provided contemporary references. For example, in discussing D’Sonoqua – the wild woman of the woods – she drew on Emily Carr’s vivid word pictures in *Klee Wyck* (1941). As Hawker notes, the handbook was unique for its time for including women’s handicrafts as well as men’s arts and crafts.⁸⁰

While it is not known to what extent her publications were used in Indian residential and day schools, Ravenhill’s books had a powerful influence in certain quarters. The most eloquent testimonial for *A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture* came from Bill Reid, who credited its illustrations with being a powerful influence on his beginning efforts as a Haida artist.⁸¹ Phil Nuytten, a noted BC scientist and entrepreneur of Métis background who has been formally adopted into the Kwakwaka’wakw nation, credits Ravenhill’s *Native Tribes* with inspiring his lifelong interest in Aboriginal culture.⁸²

Questions remain about the influence of Ravenhill’s books. Was the initial premise – to preserve the arts and handicrafts of a so-called dying race – faulty? Did her codification of such designs box in or limit contemporary Aboriginal designs? In a 1948 speech to the First Conference on BC Native Affairs held at UBC, Ellen Neel, a renowned Kwakwaka’wakw sculptor, suggested that Aboriginal peoples had just as much right as everyone else to be creative and to diverge from old and ancient designs: “To me [the idea that] native art is a dead art and that efforts should be confined to preservation of the old work ... is one of the

⁷⁹ Alice Ravenhill, *A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture: An Outline of the Arts and Crafts of the Indian Tribes of British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: King’s Printer, 1944), 1.

⁸⁰ Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts*, 85.

⁸¹ Doris Shadbolt, *Bill Reid* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988), 96. On Reid’s debt to Ravenhill, see Wan, “Nation of Artists,” 51–52, 70.

⁸² This information appeared in an *Antiques Roadshow* interview available at http://aolsvc.pbs.aol.com/wgbh/pages/roadshow/series/highlights/2002/indianapolis/indianapolis_follow3.html. For Nuytten’s link with Ravenhill, see Phil Nuytten, “Money from the Sea,” *National Geographic* 183, 1 (1993): 109–17.



Figure 2. Ravenhill with four Aboriginal girls (195-). Photographic print. *Source:* Alice Ravenhill fonds (Box 1, File 19, image 4). University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, Canada.

great fallacies where the art of my people is concerned.”⁸³ For her part, Ravenhill thought her charts would provide accurate templates for less gifted artists while encouraging the spontaneity of more capable artists. She wanted to encourage authenticity and to get rid of poor quality tourist souvenirs. At the same time, she wanted accurate and authentic First Nations designs to be mass-produced on a commercial basis. What is most remarkable about her career is that she embarked on her campaign to publicize and preserve Aboriginal arts and crafts when she was well past retirement age; she quit only when she became physically incapacitated at the age of eighty-four. She and her sister moved to the Aged and Infirm Women’s Home in Victoria in 1944, where she was bedridden for the last ten years of her life.⁸⁴ A frequent visitor noted that Ravenhill “would often be so wrapped up in an idea that she talked on

⁸³ “Report of Conference on Native Indian Affairs at Acadia Camp,” University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1-3 April 1948, BCA, BCIAWS Papers, add. mss. 2720.

⁸⁴ Between 1944 and 1954, Ravenhill published her *Memoirs*, wrote several briefs on Aboriginal affairs, and finally published her treasured legends as *Folklore of the Far West*. UBC awarded her an honorary doctorate in 1948.

that to the exclusion of the matter she had asked one to come to see her about.”⁸⁵ The relentlessness of her letter-writing campaigns showed an admirable commitment to her ideals, and her ability to garner support can only be attributed to considerable political know-how.

Ravenhill had a distinctive way of working with the establishment to achieve what she thought was right. Her accomplishments demonstrate her adroit networking, which she conducted with a curious mixture of humility (she apologized for everything she did) and hubris (she did not hesitate to offer sharp opinions). She advised John Laurie, later renowned for his work with Aboriginal peoples in Alberta, to “first make friends with the powers that be.”⁸⁶

The paradoxes and contradictions of Ravenhill’s career are combined in her 1942 article “Canadians All,” which appears in *The BC Teacher*. While revealing herself as a fair-minded and conscientious individual who believed in equality for all people, she also censured Aboriginal people for what she saw as their indolence and moral weakness. She took umbrage at “Canadians All,” a CBC series that was broadcast in the winter of 1941-42 and that featured the national songs and dances of various European countries. Offended by the absence of Canadian Native music, Ravenhill wrote to the director of public information and asked when selections of “Canadian Tribal music” (as she put it) would be played. “Promptly came a courteous reply that the idea of including such songs had not suggested itself and expressing regret that the series permitted no additions.”⁸⁷ In her article, Ravenhill relates how this reply led her to “furiously think” about this oversight. She describes the many skilful qualities and historical achievements of Aboriginal peoples and predicts: “Canada will in time come to be proud of her prehistoric culture, hitherto overlooked, and will perceive that these aboriginal occupants of her Dominion had and have gifts to contribute to her enrichment.”⁸⁸ She believed that a renaissance in Aboriginal arts and crafts would arouse traditional artistic skills and result in profitable outlets in commercial and industrial lines, and she reiterated her strong belief in the economic

⁸⁵ C. Black, “Alice Ravenhill, D.Sc.,” BCA, Charlotte Black Fonds, add mss 165. Black was the director of home economics at UBC and often visited Ravenhill at the Home for Aged and Infirm Women in Victoria (now Rose Manor). She described Ravenhill’s appearance at the Canadian Home Economics Association banquet in Victoria in 1941: “a delightful ‘lady’ in her black taffeta dress with lace at the neck, and a black velvet ribbon about her throat, her hair white, short and curled.”

⁸⁶ AR to John Laurie, 15 September 1941, BCA, add. mss. III6, box 1.

⁸⁷ Alice Ravenhill, “Canadians All,” *The BC Teacher: Official Organ of the BC Teachers’ Federation*, 21, 5 (1942): 219-23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

value of Native art. Not satisfied with these generous compliments and astute predictions, however, Ravenhill then goes on to make comments describing “snags” in the Native temperament – comments that would now be considered racist and deeply offensive. The “native temperament,” she writes, “alternates periods of work with lapses into irritating indolence.”

In “Canadians All,” we see Alice Ravenhill’s characteristic combination of a commitment to social reform; a pride in the ancient artistic traditions of her adopted land; an impressive ability to navigate institutional and personal networks through letter-writing; and an ability to reach a wide audience through her writing. We also see her prescience, generosity, and determination as well as her strong and austere – and somewhat Victorian – work ethic. To understand her remarkable lifework, we must realize that these contradictory qualities existed simultaneously in this impressive figure in British Columbia’s intellectual life.