

*“Keeping the Lakes’ Way”: Reburial and the
Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People*

Paula Pryce

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THE SINIXT (*sngaytskstx*), or Lakes people, an Aboriginal group of the Arrow Lakes region, were deemed “extinct” by the federal and provincial governments almost fifty years ago. This remains an unresolved chapter in the history of British Columbia’s First Nations. Like the author of this volume, we became intrigued by the question of why there are no Sinixt Indian reserves in British Columbia. The issue first came to our attention when a Sinixt elder from the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington State walked into our office in 1972 seeking information about his people’s history in British Columbia. Our personal voyage of discovery, which led us to dozens of archives throughout Canada and the United States, resulted in a lengthy and well-distributed report (*Lakes Indian Ethnography and History*) that we compiled on the subject in 1985 (on behalf of the British Columbia Heritage Conservation Branch), following a more general study (*Indian Land Use and Occupancy in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake Area of Washington State*) that we produced in 1984 on behalf of the Colville Confederated Tribes and the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

Paula Pryce spends the first three chapters of *Keeping the Lakes Way* revisiting the questions we addressed

in 1985. Although these chapters rely heavily upon the facts documented in our reports, Pryce nevertheless deviates from our analysis of Sinixt history when she hypothesizes that the isolated Slocan and Arrow Lakes provided a refuge where the Sinixt could live in peace in the mid-nineteenth century, away from the Plateau Indian wars of the 1850s, and that they had a “latent presence” north of the border until near the twentieth century. Pryce’s thesis (8) is complete conjecture. She does not present a single piece of evidence to support it.

If Pryce’s argument retains any plausibility, then it is only because there is very little documentation pertaining to this area between the 1840s and 1850s that could either prove or disprove her thesis. However, what is available does *not* support her position. Father De Smet’s 1842-8 map, for example, notes a Sinixt settlement on the west side of Upper Arrow Lake, which he noted as consisting of twenty families. This was the only settlement he recorded in traditional Sinixt territory. The map also indicates that De Smet had only a vague knowledge of the Slocan area, despite his discussions with his Sinixt converts. If large numbers of Sinixt were in the Slocan at this time, then De Smet would have obtained this information from his enthusiastic Sinixt

congregation and sought them out. The widely respected chief of the Lakes became a staunch Roman Catholic in the 1840s and surely would not have concealed from De Smet the existence of significant numbers of unbaptized members of his tribe.

By the early 1860s, an increasing number of miners, government officials, explorers, and trail builders were in the Arrow Lakes region. Some of them came across encampments of Sinixt people but received no information that significant numbers of Sinixt, or anyone else, were holed away in this region. Our reports cite several authoritative ethnohistoric references to the fact that the Sinixt people had largely migrated south. Pryce has chosen either to not refer to them or else to minimize their implications.

The irony is that, even given Pryce's obvious agenda, her concoction of an alternative history depicting the Sinixt as occupying their territories for longer than they did is entirely *unnecessary* to establishing a land claim. The documented evidence indicates that, while most of the Sinixt had relocated their winter villages into American territory by the 1870s, Sinixt people still continued to come north into their traditional territory each year, particularly to hunt and harvest berries. The fact that they continued to claim broad rights to land in the Arrow Lakes and elsewhere in the 1880s and 1890s is well documented. A few Sinixt people may have wintered regularly in the north, and additional small numbers (particularly a Sinixt family who were well known around Castlegar) appear to have wintered south of the border most years but to have spent much of the rest of the year in Canadian territory. If Pryce's intent was to show that the Sinixt traditionally lived in and used the Arrow Lakes region until

the early twentieth century, then she could have done so by sticking to the facts. It is the careful, critical, and comprehensive analysis of the ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and linguistic facts – not the construction of an alternative theory – that supports Sinixt claims to the Arrow Lakes and Slocan areas.

The *one* new ethnohistoric addition Pryce offers to supplement our research is, in fact, an error and, thus, merits examination. Although she acknowledges she has no linguistic training, Pryce concludes on pages 17–8 and in Appendix 1 that “*Chatth-noo-nick*” is a “plausible rendering” of Sinixt, and she suggests that Aaron Arrowsmith's 1814 map, which contains this term, is the first transcription of the name of these Aboriginal people. The first part of the term appears in the Spokane/Kalispel/Flathead word for “lake” but not in the language of the Sinixt people. This is significant, for it helps confirm Arrowsmith's error. Pryce (17) cites Barbara Belyea's (1994, xii) *Columbia Journals* as the authority for her statement that information on the 1814 Arrowsmith map “came largely from David Thompson,” thus implying that *Chatth-noo-nick* may have been included in the information from Thompson. But the word *Chatth-noo-nick* appears nowhere on David Thompson's 1813–4 map, and Belyea herself comments that “Arrowsmith may have obtained this information not from Thompson but from Joseph Howse, whose map of the upper Columbia, drawn in 1812, is now lost.” (295–7). Thus it is not correct to suggest that the information on the 1814 Arrowsmith map came from Thompson. In fact, the information came from several sources. The 1814 map identifies a large lake west of Flatbow (Kootenay) Lake as “*Chatth-*

noo-nick or Ear-bobs L.” However, Alexander Henry makes references to the “Kullyspell or Earbob” Indians, both in his 1810-1 journal and also in a vocabulary of “Flat Head.” The reference is clearly to the Kalispel, or Pend d’Oreille, who were frequently perceived as one people in the early 1800s. The “Ear-bobs” became known more commonly by the French term “pend’oreilles,” which translates as “ear-drops,” or “ear-bobs,” hence the tribal designation “Pend d’Oreille.” *Chatth-noo-nick*, thus, is not the name for the Arrow Lakes, and it is certainly not another transcription for “Sinixt.” The cartographer, Arrowsmith, simply made a mistake, and Pryce follows suit. Moreover, Arrowsmith’s 1818 map corrects his 1814 map’s error by removing the words “*Chatth-noo-nick* or Ear-bobs L.” from the Arrow Lakes.

In summarizing Sinixt ethnography, Pryce gets into further trouble: the following few examples are illustrative but, unfortunately, by no means exhaustive. Twice she misquotes archaeologist Gordon Mohs’s citation of W.W. Elmendorf and states that “the Sinixt are a matrilineal people who generally followed an endogamous matrilocal marriage pattern” and that “well into the nineteenth century, polygyny was relatively common” (26). First, Mohs notes that Elmendorf recorded that the Lakes had preferential matrilocal residency patterns but made no reference at all to the Lakes being a matrilineal society. “Matrilocal” and “matrilineal” are not synonyms. Second, Mohs, citing Elmendorf, does not say that polygyny was “relatively common.” He says: “there was also a tendency towards monogamy, although polygyny was not uncommon,” which has a rather different emphasis. In other places (30), the ambiguity that Pryce attributes to the ethnographic

data is manufactured by her re-arrangement of the record.

Pryce’s entire analysis seems to serve only to reinforce her false thesis that sloppy ethnographers and stiff-necked bureaucrats cross-pollinated to erase the Sinixt people from the historical map. It is her view that “anthropologists have made a greater contribution to the obscurity than to the knowledge of the Sinixt” (7-8). She proceeds to say that “much of the more comprehensive writing on this subject has been left to moulder unpublished” (8) and that, consequently, anthropologists are responsible for governments’ lack of knowledge and, ultimately, their decisions. On page 22 she is more direct, noting: “At least part of this confusion has arisen as a result of sporadic and patchy ethnographic fieldwork among Arrow Lakes people. No major work or comprehensive ethnography has been written on the Sinixt. However, James Teit, Verne Ray, William Elmendorf, Randy Bouchard, and Dorothy Kennedy have done limited fieldwork, the latter three without publishing their results.”

Pryce’s summary both inaccurately denigrates the existing anthropological literature on the Sinixt and *greatly overstates* her role in drawing together the “dispersed references” that she claims to present. While the existing literature on the Sinixt is limited, much of it is of high quality, including the work of James Teit (1930), Verne Ray (1936), and W.W. Elmendorf (1935-6). If the anthropological literature had no impact on government policy makers who did not read it, then this is hardly the fault of the ethnographers involved.

Pryce’s contention that we and the late Bill Elmendorf undertook only “limited” ethnographic fieldwork and that this work was “sporadic and

patchy" are, in our opinion, inaccurate and unfair. Elmendorf undertook ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork among the Sinixt in September 1935 and August-September 1936. The source of Elmendorf's Lakes information was a woman who was born in the mid-1860s, more than thirty years before the birth dates of the oldest Sinixt people we interviewed in the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, Elmendorf was able to obtain information that was no longer known to the people we interviewed, although the Sinixt elders with whom we conducted extensive field interviews between 1975 and 1985 were recognized as the most traditionally knowledgeable people available. As a result of these interviews we produced the two book-length studies Pryce relied upon (as well as an ethnobotanical monograph and several articles). Perhaps Pryce believes that a written work has to be published in order to be comprehensive.

Pryce's thesis in the second half of *Keeping the Lake Ways* is that the Sinixt's "social memory" of the area is accompanied by "ideas of prophecy, destruction, and resurrection" (10, 98) that have motivated their concerns about repatriation and reburial of

skeletal remains. After presenting a review of the more common sources on the Prophet Dance movement, Pryce extends the discussion with a summary of Fentress and Wickham's (1992) social memory thesis, followed by Bakhtin's (1981) ideas on chronotopes. Chapter 5 then applies these concepts to what Pryce observed and heard during her visits to the Sinixt people's Vallican encampment. Though Pryce finds that a relationship with the Prophet Dance is indirect, persisting only in a "discursive field," she argues more convincingly that Vallican serves as a "space where time and people come together" (112); that is, as a chronotope. Despite the severe limitations of Pryce's book, this approach makes a significant contribution.

Some say you can judge a book by its cover. The back cover of *Keeping the Lakes Way* displays an 1861 photograph of Sinyakwateen depot. But it is *not* located "near Hudson's Bay Company Fort Shepherd," as the caption states, nor is the term a rendering of "Sinixt," as Pryce states on page 150; rather, Sinyakwateen depot was located about seventy-five miles to the southeast, in Kalispel territory, where the Pend d'Oreille River flows out from Lake Pend d'Oreille.