

*High Slack: Waddington's Gold Road and the Bute Inlet
Massacre of 1864*
Judith Williams

Vancouver: New Star, 1996. 119 pp. Illus., map. \$16 paper.

By KEN G. BREALEY, *University of British Columbia*

THE ONLY SUSTAINED military resistance to colonial authority west of the Rocky Mountains and north of the forty-ninth parallel, the so-called Chilcotin War of 1864, remains as palpable a memory for the Tsilhqot'in people as it is an almost incidental sidebar in the annals of most BC historical writing. This short, but engaging and attractive, book is a follow-up to the "High Slack" exhibition and symposium, *The Tsilhqot'in War of 1864 and the 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry*, held at the University of British Columbia in November 1994, and is an attempt to, as the author phrases it, "peel back the many layers of truth" that surrounded, and are still being contextualized by this significant, if somewhat shadowy, event.

Beginning with her own 1991 explorations of Toba and Bute Inlets, Judith Williams juxtaposes her impressions of the landscape with those recorded by Robert Homfray, who, in 1861 on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, first probed Bute Inlet as a possible brigade route to the Cariboo goldfields. Fast forwarding back to 1991, and supported, in large part, through interviews with elders of the Klahoose Band, she then attempts to encapsulate something of the otherwise undocumented Kwakwaka'wakw version of Homfray's journey before returning once again to a rather more nuanced recollection of her own retracing of Alfred Waddington's ill-fated pack road up the Homathko River canyon.

This takes Williams, both literally and figuratively, into the entangled events and places that constituted the Chilcotin War itself. Ordering the encounter into a series of spatial vignettes, Williams creates a kind of geographical *mise en scène* that evokes something of the performative drama that, in a certain sense, the conflict actually was. She concludes with an account of the surrender, trial, and execution of the five Tsilhqot'in chiefs, and although most of this is excavated from Matthew Begbie's trial notes and other colonial correspondence, the voices of the Tsilhqot'in still come through. It is only fitting, then, that the author punctuates the narrative by recalling some of the eloquent, and curative, testimonials on the war delivered by contemporary Tsilhqot'in chiefs and elders at the symposium that inspired the book.

Williams writes sensitively and with a minimum of academic jargon, and, while I was puzzled with the choice of certain archival photographs that, on the face of it, have nothing to do with the subject matter of the book, she has about the right touch of graphic support. By tacking back and forth between the Euro-Canadian and Tsilhqot'in worlds, and between past and present, the author successfully reveals some of the anxieties of the colonial project in British Columbia without losing sight of the fact that the war, far from being a mere anecdote on the colonial stage, was the "thin edge of the wedge" of the latent

violence that has always simmered just underneath the surface of the colonial enterprise more generally. I still cringe, however, at the use of the term "massacre" (especially in the title) to refer to Lha tse'sin's offensive against Brewster's road crew, and I thought that the map of the events of the war, which seems to be (whether accidentally or deliberately is not clear) a translation of Waddington's original 1864 *Sketch Map of the Chilcotin War*, would have benefitted from a little more attention to Tsilhqot'in geography, some of which has already been mapped out by the Tsilhqot'in people. That said, the

author does properly acknowledge that the asymmetries in emphasis that still permeate this contrapuntal story must be left for the Tsilhqot'in to redress themselves. Until that time, this book will stand nicely in its own right as a welcome complement to Terry Glavin's *Nemiah: The Unconquered Country* and, perhaps most important, as a desperately needed antidote to (and replacement of) Mel Rothenburger's one-sided, and ultimately racist, polemic *The Chilcotin War*, which, as the Tsilhqot'in have noted, still stocks far too many public school bookshelves throughout the BC Interior. I recommend *High Slack*.

Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History

Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds.

Peterborough: Broadview, 1996. 519 pp. Illus. \$29.95 paper.

By ROBIN RIDINGTON, *University of British Columbia*

READING BEYOND WORDS is a rich collection of twenty-one essays that explore how First Nations experience has been represented as well as misplaced in the texts that make up the substance of conventional history and ethnography. What unites the essays, Brown and Vibert explain in their introduction, "is that texts are not transparent." The facts they present "are socially constructed, moulded by the social and cultural forces in place when the texts were created, and by the later contexts in which they have been reread and reinterpreted" (pp. x-xi). A realistic understanding of texts about First Nations history thus requires an act of authorship on the part of the reader — a reading beyond the words themselves. While acknowledging a debt to postmodern discourse analysis,

these essays tend to business rather than to the arcana of postmodern literary theory. They and the reader are better off for it.

Following genre conventions similar to those of First Nations discourse, each of these essays tells a story. Together, the stories bring into focus a coherent whole that reflects a world of experience beyond the words captured in print. I found the book hard to put down once I had begun reading it, but I also took the liberty of initially sampling essays from each of the seven headings rather than reading it from cover to cover. Frieda Esay Klippenstein's reading of written and oral accounts documenting an encounter between James Douglas and Carrier Chief Kwah reads almost like a mystery story. Frederic W. Gleach makes a convincing case for