

Wilson Duff (1925-1976): His Contributions to the Growth of Archaeology in British Columbia

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The death of Wilson Duff on 8 August 1976 at the age of 51 has deprived the native peoples of the Pacific Northwest of one of their true and most actively helpful non-Indian friends. The respect and affection which they felt for Wilson Duff became touchingly evident to all those who attended the simple memorial ceremony in the new University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. On this occasion, Indian representatives from the coast and the interior rose successively to pay tribute and to express their grief in eloquent words at the passing of "this good man."

Wilson Duff will be missed no less by his academic colleagues and other friends in British Columbia and elsewhere, and by the many students he taught at the University of British Columbia about Indian life and culture and the native peoples' present problems and aspirations. They mourn in his passing the loss of an inspiring teacher and of a scholar who delved beneath the surface appearance of things to search for the less obvious deeper meanings.

My personal sense of loss is especially deep because his tragic death terminates a long friendship and close co-operation on behalf of archaeology in British Columbia which began more than a quarter of a century ago. Since Dr. Michael Ames has recently published a very perceptive review of Wilson Duff's contributions to Northwest Coast Ethnology and Art (*BC Studies* 31:3-11) the present article will dwell mainly on Duff's contributions to the growth of archaeology in this province.

When Dr. Harry B. Hawthorn joined the UBC faculty in 1947 (the first anthropologist to be appointed to a university post in western Canada!) he observed with approval the program of rescue excavations which Dr. Philip Akrigg and I had started in 1945 in an effort to salvage as much information as possible from the rapidly vanishing archaeological sites in the city of Vancouver. In 1948, one year after his arrival, Dr. Hawthorn asked me to organize and direct a small-scale archaeological teaching project as part of his course on the Indians of British Columbia (*Anthropology* 401). Included in the project were lectures and field work

at the Marpole site, followed by laboratory analysis and the preparation of a report by each student. Naturally, success of this trial venture depended in large measure on the quality of the students who were to take part. As it turned out, they were the usual mix, ranging from very good to poor. Fortunately, one of the participants was a brilliant 23-year-old war veteran who had served as navigator in the Royal Canadian Air Force: Wilson Duff. The project quickly revealed his exceptional ability and character traits. Wilson's enthusiasm and cheering sense of humour even under adverse weather conditions, his perceptiveness, diligence, and versatility, his meticulous attention to detail, and not the least his willingness to help others and to serve beyond the call of duty were important factors in assuring the success of this trial project. As a direct consequence of this favourable outcome, Dr. Hawthorn recommended that UBC offer, beginning in the fall of 1949, a one-year course in the Archaeology of British Columbia (Anthropology 420), a course which, combining theory, method, and practice, has been presented on a regular basis ever since.

After obtaining a B.A. degree from UBC in the spring of 1949 Wilson Duff embarked without a break on a program of graduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Washington. Here, Dr. Erna Gunther, then head of the Department of Anthropology, had added archaeological studies to the curriculum in 1946, including an annual summer field school. Thus in the summer of 1949 Wilson, now a graduate student, joined the archaeological field-school project at the Whalen Farm site in the southwestern part of the Fraser delta. As director of this field-school, I was again fortunate in having Wilson as a stalwart participant in this my first large-scale teaching project. The same meritorious qualities which he had revealed at Marpole were again important in contributing to the success of this archaeological training school.

While the Whalen Farm project was in operation Wilson managed to slip away every weekend to visit Indian communities along the lower Fraser to gather ethnographic data on these riverine people. This research, which was continued later under the guidance of Dr. Gunther, formed the basis for Wilson Duff's M.A. thesis. He was awarded the Master's degree in anthropology in 1951. Even prior to this, Wilson had been appointed Curator of Anthropology at the British Columbia Provincial Museum, a position he held from 1950 to 1965.

Ever since my earliest teaching of archaeology I had stressed to my students that the cultural remains which lie buried in the ancient sites of British Columbia are part of the cultural heritage of all mankind, and that it is our duty not to let these non-renewable resources go to waste

through apathy and negligence. Our province is indeed fortunate that Wilson took this message seriously because it became the basis for many years of fruitful co-operation during which we evolved the procedures that made possible a sound and orderly development of archaeological research in British Columbia.

In his capacity as a civil servant in Victoria, Wilson learned of government plans for industrial development long before public announcements were made. Such foreknowledge made possible timely co-operative planning when proposed projects threatened the obliteration of potentially important archaeological remains. Thus Wilson informed me late in 1950 of the then Liberal government's intention to grant the Aluminum Company of Canada a licence to construct a dam in the gorge of the Nechako River for the creation of a huge power reservoir in Tweedsmuir Park for the Aluminum Company's Kemano-Kitimat project. The backed-up water would flood more than 400 miles of archaeologically unexplored lake and river margins. Hence, when the Alcan project was finally announced Wilson and I were ready with a joint brief to the B.C. government.

The brief pointed out (1) the potential threat to archaeological remains, (2) the consequent urgent need for an archaeological site survey to be carried out in the summer of 1951, and (3) the likely need for salvage excavations in the following summer. To our satisfaction, the government responded favourably with a grant of \$2,000 for the survey in 1951. Although wholly inadequate, the funds enabled Alan Bryan (now Professor of Anthropology, University of Alberta) and myself to conduct a hazardous reconnaissance in the course of which we located 130 sites, the majority and most important of these being in the eastern part of Tweedsmuir Park. The results were presented to the B.C. government in a comprehensive report. Once again, Wilson and I joined forces and worked out a detailed proposal for follow-up rescue excavations in 1952, and once again the government responded favourably and granted all of the requested funds of somewhat more than \$8,000. We also sought support from the Aluminum Company of Canada, and they too eventually contributed an additional \$5,000. These funds made it possible to mount the first large-scale archaeological rescue operation in the north-central interior of British Columbia. Although severely limited in time (the excavated sites were drowned by the rising waters of the reservoir shortly after our enforced departure in September 1952) our project produced data which still figure prominently in the gradually emerging culture history of northern interior British Columbia.

Aside from the scientific results obtained, the co-operation of Wilson and myself set a number of precedents and established several important points:

- (1) Archaeologists must be given sufficient lead-time to plan:
 - (a) adequate regional site surveys in threatened areas, and subsequently
 - (b) problem-oriented investigations at selected key sites.
- (2) Whenever the provincial government is involved in industrial and similar developments it has the moral obligation to provide funds for surveys to assess the archaeological resources in the affected areas and, if necessary, for follow-up salvage operations.
- (3) Private companies are similarly obligated.

Apparent also was the growing need for legislation to protect British Columbia's archaeological remains and for some kind of government agency to assume the responsibility of managing these resources. Throughout the 1950s Wilson and I gave numerous public lectures to service clubs and other organizations as well as over the radio, hammering away at these themes. The newspapers co-operated by frequently reporting on this campaign.

Wilson took other significant steps. Among his first acts as Curator of Anthropology at the Provincial Museum was to start publication of the important series *Anthropology in British Columbia* (1950-56), of which he himself was editor. Each number was to contain an annual survey of anthropological research in progress, completed or planned, and to provide an outlet for the publication of reports and articles. The publication added greatly to the growing interest in anthropology and archaeology in the Pacific Northwest and even initiated the first archaeological controversy in this area. It is a pity that financial constraints compelled its termination after seven years. Among the publications in this series were several of Duff's own contributions, one of the most important being "The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, B.C." (1952), a revised version of his Master's thesis. Aside from detailed ethnographic data, the work also incorporated the results of archaeological surveys along the lower Fraser, in the course of which Wilson relocated many sites that had been abandoned in protohistoric and historic times.

Although Wilson never carried out full-scale excavations himself he always maintained a keen interest in the results of such projects. Moreover, he had a sharp eye for unusual artifacts and their significance. Thus he spotted in an archaeological surface collection from the East Kootenays a Scottsbluff-Eden projectile point, the first Paleo-Indian find from British

Columbia (Duff and Borden, 1953). He also was ever fascinated by the more unique products of prehistoric craftsmen and artists. This interest is reflected in such articles as "An Unusual Burial at the Whalen Site" (1956a), "Unique Stone Artifacts from the Gulf Islands" (1956b), and "Stone Clubs from the Upper Skeena River" (1963). This fascination with ancient Indian art is especially shown in "Prehistoric Stone Sculpture of the Fraser Valley and Gulf of Georgia" (1956c), one of Duff's major contributions, and a study which presages his last important work, the penetrating interpretative essay in the catalogue which accompanied the stunning exhibition "Images: Stone: B.C. Thirty Centuries of Northwest Coast Indian Sculpture" (1975).

During the 1950s vandalism by amateurs continued. It was even still possible for amateurs and indeed for professional archaeologists from across the border to invade British Columbia and without so much as "by your leave" engage in their nefarious activities and then return with their pilfered loot. But worse yet was the continuing large-scale destruction of uninvestigated ancient sites through industrial development, road construction, power reservoirs, urban expansion, farming, the lumber industry, and so on. However, gradually the sustained public campaign by Wilson and myself for legislation to protect British Columbia's archaeological resources, combined with growing public pressure, was beginning to have its impact on the politicians in Victoria of that time. A measure of the wide interest which this campaign generated is the fact that reports of it appeared in newspapers across the nation and elsewhere, including the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *New York Times*. As a result, in 1959, after consulting with me, Wilson was able to sit down with the legal advisors of the provincial government and work out the draft of British Columbia's first *Archaeological and Historic Sites Protection Act*, which was passed by the B.C. Legislature in 1960.

Among the main provisions of this Act was that it prohibited the disturbance of any archaeological site located on Crown land without a duly authorized *Permit* by the Minister in charge of the administration of the Act. Contravention of any provision of the Act could upon conviction result in a fine of up to \$500 or imprisonment for six months or both. There was, furthermore, a rather weak provision indicating that "a person" undertaking commercial, industrial or other activity that would threaten destruction of archaeological or historic sites might be requested by the Minister "to provide for adequate investigation, recording, and salvage of archaeological or historic objects." A major weakness of this provision was that it applied only to *known* sites and thus did not provide

for surveys in archaeologically unexplored areas prior to the start of potentially destructive activities.

Finally, the Act also made provision for the establishment by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council of an Archaeological Sites Advisory Board (ASAB) charged with advising the Minister on all matters pertaining to the Act. The membership of the board was to comprise the Director of the Provincial Museum or his representative (Wilson Duff), the Provincial Archivist (W. E. Ireland), and "a representative from the appropriate department of the University of British Columbia" (C. E. Borden). Also included was the Deputy Provincial Secretary (L. J. Wallace). Soon it seemed advisable to add two others: R. Lane, Victoria, and A. C. Milliken of Yale, both representative of the lay public. Wilson Duff acted as the first Chairman of ASAB from 1960 to 1966, when he resigned from the chairmanship although he continued as an active member of the board until his death. In 1965 Duff accepted an appointment as Associate Professor of Anthropology at UBC. Promotion to Full Professor followed in 1971.

In order to call public attention to the Archaeological Sites Protection Act and to explain its purpose and the operation of the Archaeological Sites Advisory Board, Duff in collaboration with colleagues prepared a brochure entitled "Preserving British Columbia's Prehistory" (1961). Recalling an earlier statement that "the surest guarantee for the preservation of monuments and works of the past rests in the respect and affection felt for them by the people themselves" (UNESCO, 1956), Wilson wrote in the introduction to the brochure:

Now is the time to set the ground rules for the proper conservation of our archaeological heritage, and it was for that purpose that the present brochure was prepared. Our aim is broader than just to explain the workings of the new Act. . . . What is just as important is the education of the people themselves to the satisfaction they may derive from contemplating and cherishing the records left behind by the other people who lived in their localities through all the past centuries.

The cover of the brochure bore the reproduction of a photograph taken by Wilson Duff in 1949 of work in progress during the archaeological field-school project at the Whalen Farm site.

The permit system specified by the Act and establishment of ASAB made it possible to exert a considerable measure of control over the rapidly expanding archaeological research activities in the province and to curb some of the abuses that had been common earlier. But archaeological

atrocities were still being committed, government departments and Crown corporations being among the worst offenders.

The revised Act of 1972 corrected certain of these weaknesses, and the appointment in the same year of a full-time Provincial Archaeologist (B. O. Simonsen) made possible a stricter enforcement of its provisions. Thanks also to the generous co-operation of the provincial government, the budget available to ASAB was greatly increased and in addition augmented by funds from various government departments and Crown corporations whenever their activities threatened to obliterate archaeological resources. As a result the Provincial Archaeologist was able to expand his staff and to exercise ASAB's responsibilities more effectively. The province was divided into several large areas, and each ASAB staff archaeologist was made responsible for overseeing one of these areas. Site surveys, started earlier to make as complete an inventory of archaeological resources as possible, were continued. It is a large undertaking and still far from complete. Although many regions have not even been touched the inventory now approaches a total of 10,000 sites in British Columbia. Foreknowledge of what kind of archaeological resources are present in various localities facilitates the organizing of problem-oriented projects whenever this becomes necessary and the estimating of funds required to carry them out.

Over the years, the membership of ASAB was considerably increased. The addition of R. Sutherland (Archaeological Society of British Columbia) reflected the public sector's growing concern in the province's cultural heritage. D. H. Mitchell was appointed as the representative from the University of Victoria, and after Simon Fraser University opened its gates R. L. Carlson became the delegate of that institution. When Duff joined the UBC faculty D. Abbott took over as representative of the Provincial Museum, and in 1967, after Wilson's resignation from the chair, C. E. Borden was appointed chairman of the board. A most significant development was the appointment to ASAB of two delegates, Della Kew and Ardyth Cooper, who represent the interests of B.C. Indians. The native peoples were becoming increasingly concerned with the activities of those who were delving into their cultural past and who were recovering artifacts and other data over which they wished to have some control.

Wilson Duff continued to attend ASAB meetings, where his wise counsel was often decisive in reaching important decisions. On his extended travels through British Columbia Wilson had gained the confidence of many Indian groups. One important result was his recording, editing and

publishing as a Memoir in the *Anthropology in British Columbia* series of the "Histories, Territories and Laws of the Kitwanooc" (1959).

Wilson also became increasingly concerned with ethics in anthropological field work by ethnologists, linguists, and archaeologists and in 1969, on the occasion of the 22nd Annual Northwest Anthropological Conference, he arranged a symposium on this topic. In his introductory remarks as chairman of the symposium he stressed:

The main concern, perhaps, is that our work among [the Indians] should not do them any harm, and if possible should do them some good. We should observe the ethical responsibility to work among them only with their consent, more than that, with their informed consent, so that they understand our purpose and also the implications of the work we are doing. [*Northwest Anthropological Research Notes*, vol. 3, no. 2: 171].

The three main speakers invited by Duff to contribute to the symposium were W. Suttles on ethnology, B. Efrat on linguistics, and C. Borden on archaeology. Participants included B. Lane, L. Thompson and R. Greengo.

It was only natural that Wilson should also become deeply involved in the complex problems of Indian land claims and that he was, perhaps more than anyone, aware of the unfair and frequently dishonest ways Indians had been dealt with. Closely related to the problem of Indian land claims was the controversial motion regarding the disposition of archaeological materials recovered in the course of field work which Wilson introduced at the 18th ASAB meeting in April 1973. The motion suggests that:

This Board advise the Minister that in its opinion all unexcavated remains in this Province should be considered as part of the aboriginal title to the lands of British Columbia, which remain unextinguished, and should henceforth be so considered for the purpose of the administration of the Act.

Although the board passed this motion after lengthy discussion, the members recognized that they could neither establish the rights of ownership nor take a position on aboriginal issues as they would be in effect advising the government on matters which would have to be established by a court of law. Nevertheless, the board adopted the policy that until the question of land claims was settled no institution or other party was entitled to claim permanent ownership of artifacts recovered in the course of archaeological investigations in the Province of British Columbia. Henceforth, they can only hold such materials in trust for whatever Indian band claims aboriginal title to the land on which particular sites are located. According to another related policy decision reached by the board

under Wilson's influence, a permit to proceed with a proposed archaeological project can be granted only after written consent has been obtained from the Indian band claiming title to the land on which the site to be investigated is located.

There were many facets to Wilson Duff's life and character, and his contributions are equally numerous and varied. Michael Ames (1976) has emphasized Wilson's contributions to the growing appreciation and understanding of Northwest Coast Indian art. My concern has been to convey some notion of the significant influence Wilson has had on efforts to assure that British Columbia's archaeological resources are protected and that the growth of archaeological studies proceeds in an orderly manner, not only without harm to but for the benefit of the Indian peoples in this province. The impact of his contributions will be felt long into the future.

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