HAND CRAFTED:
CREATING A MARKET FOR CANADA'S NORTHWEST COAST
NATIVE ARTS AND CRAFTS

By

LESLIE HEYMAN TEPPER
B.A., Duke University, 1968
M.A., Carleton University 1984

A Dissertation Submitted for a Research Degree,
Doctor of Philosophy,
Department of Museum Studies
The University of Leicester

2002
Abstract

Museum collections contain examples of Aboriginal Northwest Coast material culture that have been categorised as curios, artefacts, tourist art, arts and crafts, or art. This dissertation examines the emergence of Native Northwest Coast Aboriginal objects made for sale as “arts and crafts”. The discussion draws on the multidisciplinary field of material culture studies, on the theories of commodification and on the concept of the reinvention of culture.

At the end of the nineteenth century the British Arts and Crafts Movement called for a return to the values and practices of an earlier period of hand crafted objects. For the next half-century in North America government agents, missionaries and philanthropic societies encouraged the production of traditional Aboriginal functional objects as a form of arts and crafts. This activity was perceived as a means of economic self-sufficiency, and to promote feelings of self-identity and self-worth among Native producers. At the onset of World War II, various individuals, private organisations, and government departments worked to transform the producer and the marketplace through education and public policy. Change was to be accomplished by establishing new venues, new expectations of behaviour, and a new social relationship between the supplier and the consumer.

Today, a growing number of Native studio crafts people create objects of traditional material culture as a means of livelihood, and as participants in the revitalisation of Northwest Coast Aboriginal society. The term arts and crafts, however, has fallen into disuse and disfavour among Western scholars and Indigenous producers who associate the phrase with poor quality and low income. The term of choice today is art and artist.

This work suggests that the production of arts and crafts in British Columbia was an important transition stage in the development of the Native art market. The efforts by private individuals, philanthropic societies and government programs during the mid-20th century raised the value of the hand crafted object. The thesis also suggests that the concept inherent in the Arts and Crafts Movement of ‘doing good when doing craft’ is cyclical, reappearing as strategic policy during times of economic and social crisis on the Northwest Coast.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................................................. 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................................................................................................................. 3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................................................................. 5

PREFACE ...................................................................................................................................................................... 7

MAP ........................................................................................................................................................................... 12

SECTION ONE – THE RESEARCH QUESTION ........................................................................................................... 13

CHAPTER ONE – CRAFTING CATEGORIES .................................................................................................................. 14
  THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ............................................................................................................................... 15
  MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES ............................................................................................................................. 15
  THE STUDY OF NORTHWEST COAST ARTS AND CRAFTS ............................................................................... 19
  ART AND CRAFTS .................................................................................................................................................. 24

CHAPTER TWO – COLLECTING INFORMATION ....................................................................................................... 37
  WORKING WITH ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS .......................................................................................................... 38
  WORKING WITH INTERVIEWS ................................................................................................................................ 40
  THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE ....................................................................................................................................... 49

CHAPTER THREE - THE NORTHWEST COAST ......................................................................................................... 55
  BACKGROUND TO NORTHWEST COAST CULTURE STUDIES ........................................................................... 56
  AN ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW ............................................................................................................................ 59
  EUROPEAN CONTACT ........................................................................................................................................... 73

SECTION TWO – ARTS AND CRAFTS .......................................................................................................................... 85

CHAPTER FOUR – THE ‘ARTS AND CRAFTS’ MARKET 1900-1940 ............................................................................. 86
  THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT .................................................................................................................... 86
  PROMOTING NATIVE ARTEFACTS .......................................................................................................................... 90
  THE UNITED STATES EXPERIENCE ........................................................................................................................ 91
  THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE .............................................................................................................................. 99

  ALICE RAVENHILL - BRITISH COLUMBIA’S LADY BOUNTIFUL ............................................................................ 116
  CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY .................................................................................................................... 130

  FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN ARTS AND CRAFTS PRODUCTION .................................................................... 148
  PROVINCIAL PICTURE ........................................................................................................................................... 162
  CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................................................................... 167

SECTION THREE – ARTS AND CRAFTS TODAY ........................................................................................................ 169

CHAPTER SEVEN – THE CONTEMPORARY MARKETPLACE ..................................................................................... 170
  THE CONTEMPORARY PRODUCER ........................................................................................................................ 170
  THE DEALERS ......................................................................................................................................................... 187

CHAPTER EIGHT - DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................. 208
  THE FUTURE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS ....................................................................................................................... 213

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................................................ 215
APPENDICES............................................................................................................................................................ 234

APPENDIX 1. A MACHINE FOR MAKING AUTHENTICITY ................................................................. 235
APPENDIX 2. MAP SHOWING THE NORTHWEST COAST FROM THE OCEAN .............................. 236
APPENDIX 3. WOMEN’S KNITTING CIRCLE .................................................................................... 237
APPENDIX 4. SPINNING CIRCLE, METLAKATLA ............................................................................... 238
APPENDIX 5. SELLING CARVINGS AND BASKETS ........................................................................... 239
APPENDIX 6: CHILDREN SELLING ON THE RESERVE ................................................................. 240
APPENDIX 7: DISPLAY CANADIAN HANDICRAFT GUILD, 1905 ................................................... 241
APPENDIX 8: ALICE RAVENHILL ........................................................................................................ 242
APPENDIX 9: CRAFTS DISPLAY ST. MICHAELS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, ALERT BAY .... 243

TABLES

TABLE 1: SAMPLE BY TRIBAL AFFILIATION ......................................................................................... 50
TABLE 2: SAMPLE BY PRIMARY CRAFT MEDIUM .............................................................................. 51
TABLE 3: TAPE INTERVIEWS – DEALERS ............................................................................................. 54
TABLE 4: LANGUAGES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA .................................................................................. 65
TABLE 5: ARTS AND CRAFTS PARTICIPATION BY PROVINCE ......................................................... 159
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people who have helped make the past three years of research and writing an enjoyable experience.

Several archival collections were used in documenting the history of Native arts and crafts production in British Columbia. I would like to thank the staffs at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, the University of Victoria Library, Special Collections, and the University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections. Personnel at the Vancouver Library, Special Collections, the photographic collection at The New Westminster Library, and at the City of Vancouver Archives were very helpful. The professional librarians and archivists at the National Library of Canada and the National Archives of Canada made research and reading microfilm (almost) a pleasure.

New research projects create opportunities to meet new people. My interviews introduced me to crafts people and dealers who care deeply about the contemporary production and sale of traditional Northwest Coast material culture. Their insights and comments were thoughtful, reflective and creative. I am grateful to them for their time, patience and generosity of spirit.

I have enjoyed working with the lecturers, staff and students in the Department of Museum Studies, Leicester University. Barbara Lloyd, and other members of the Department’s support staff extended warm welcomes to new and returning students. Their helpful advice on completing forms and meeting deadlines eased the administrative requirements of the degree process. The annual Research Seminar Week was an opportunity to share ideas and experiences with museum colleagues and students from Scotland to Chile and from Greece to Taiwan. Papers presented by the Department’s academic staff offered interesting insights to their own research and the wider field of museum studies. Most importantly, I wish to thank Professor Susan Pearce who supervised my degree program. Her comments on this thesis and support throughout the process are greatly appreciated.
The Ph.D. program could not have been undertaken without the assistance of my Division Head, Dr. Andrea Laforet, who provided the opportunity and funding for archival and fieldwork research. Her steady encouragement over the years to further my education and experience has been of enormous benefit. I also appreciate the interest and financial support of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

I am fortunate to have a wonderful, supportive family. Always ready to listen, to help or to travel, they have joined in the adventure and eased the burden of work. The finished work is dedicated to my father. From my initial idea of going back to school, to the submission of the final text, he has provided unfailing support, guidance and love.
Preface

Doctoral theses often materialise from a student’s curiosity, imagination and occasionally, when there seems to be too many interesting questions, from desperation. This research project began with a number of observations and experiences on Canada’s Northwest Coast. Although I had been working as a museum curator in British Columbia for a number of years, my primary area of responsibility was the Native community of the Interior Plateau. This relatively small cultural area has historically eluded extensive ethnographic and archaeological investigation. Significant collections of Northern Plateau artefacts are found in only five museums in North America, and are primarily the results of one collector. A new position led to my sudden immersion into a multiplicity of Northwest Coast artefact collections, anthropological writings and political complexities. The study of Northwest Coast Native arts and crafts production provided an opening into new fieldwork and archival research. This preface is an opportunity to introduce the reader to the experiences that initiated the research. Five locations, all closely intertwined in time, though not necessarily in space, raised the question of arts and crafts commodification.

Locations
1. The Airport
Passengers arriving at Vancouver’s International Airport enter a terminal building that prominently features Northwest Coast art and artefacts. Totem poles, sculptures and engraved wooden panels stand at the major entrances. Framed prints by well-known Native artists line the corridors leading to the baggage claim areas and decorate walls at departure lounges. Museum-style exhibit cases display masks, rattles and other objects of traditional material culture borrowed from national and provincial collections. Retail stores offer a wide range of objects decorated with Northwest Coast Aboriginal designs. They include low-cost souvenirs and gifts, such as mass-produced trinkets or T-shirts, and expensive works of art. At one terminal entrance, pride of place is given to a massive bronze cast of Haida artist Bill Reid’s
Haida Gwaii, a sculptured canoe crowded with mythological creatures embarking on their own voyage.

Decorative objects displayed in this airport have tenuous links to the traditional material culture that inspired their creation. The huge Salish blanket displayed on the wall is not meant to be worn. The carved posts do not support the building. Throughout the terminal, Northwest Coast imagery appears on glass, paper and metal, materials that are far removed from the traditional cultural environment of the Native crafts person.

Walking from the arrival gate to the car park, the tourist passes through an airport terminal, an art exhibit, an ethnographic collection, and a marketplace. In each context, information on the object is limited to a simple text label. The story of the Native people who made this material culture, their history, and their role in contemporary life is completely absent.

2. The Potlatch
Objects similar to those shown in the terminal building can be seen at a Northwest Coast Native celebration or potlatch. Here carved house posts may actually support the structure of the long house and totem poles may be seen in a nearby cemetery. Participants at potlatch may wear headdresses that signify family rights and privileges, and masks are used in performances. Chiefs carry raven rattles, and men shake dance rattles as they accompany dancers moving around the fire. Men, women and children wear ornate Chilkat and button blankets. Framed prints and paintings are distributed to honour particular guests, who will hang them on the walls of their houses or offices.

After the feast is over, the blankets, masks and rattles are taken home by their owners and stored in closets, boxes or drawers. Sometimes they are displayed in the family living areas, along with other heirlooms of basketry, tools and family

---

1 The thesis follows the Canadian practice of using Native, rather than Indian, American Indian, or Native American to refer to the Indigenous people of British Columbia.
2 Information about the artists is available on the airport’s web site, but access to these pages is not provided in the terminal.
memorabilia. Silkscreen prints and drawings of Northwest Coast themes and imagery often decorate the home. All of these objects are reminders of a culture that is shared with the larger Native community in the feast house, at canoe festivals and at other cultural or political gatherings.

3. The Treaty Table
In meeting rooms along the British Columbia coast, First Nation chiefs and their representatives, as well as non-Native lawyers, negotiators and cultural workers discuss the ownership and disposition of Northwest Coast material culture. These objects, consisting of masks and rattles, blankets and totem poles, are held by museums, historic sites, and private collectors. Once made for sale or use by members of the Native community, they have now become objects of contention. Such artefacts are caught between the desire to maintain and represent Canadian historical identity and the revitalisation of a First Nation’s social fabric.

4. The Shop
Shops and galleries, replete with Northwest Coast imagery on handmade and mass-produced items can be found in British Columbia’s major tourist areas. The creator of such hand crafted objects may be: a direct descendant of a Northwest Coast Native family; a member of some other First Nations group; a European who has been declared “Native” by the Native community; or a non-Native artist who makes and sells traditional-style Northwest Coast objects. All of these producers create carvings, jewellery and silkscreen prints that draw up the same symbolic forms and subjects. The tourist, who is unable to find precisely the right object, can purchase a ‘do-it-yourself’ kit consisting of pre-cut wooden forms or pieces of cloth. These packages come with detailed instructions and sample images of wolf, thunderbird or killer whale, which allow the purchasers to design their own Northwest Coast wall plaque or clothing.

5. The Museum
Canada’s national museum, located in Quebec, holds in its collection several thousand Northwest Coast objects. These artefacts are carefully placed on racks of metal shelving, and protected by layers of Styrofoam, acid-free paper, and specially treated mounts. Humidity and temperature in the collection areas are rigidly
maintained within a narrow range and well-trained conservators regularly monitor storeroom conditions. Only a few privileged individuals have access to these rooms, which are constantly guarded by cameras, locking devices and alarms.

A small number of artefacts leave the storerooms. Some of them have travelled the world in exhibitions. They have been repeatedly filmed and videotaped for publicity purposes and educational programs. Professional and amateur photographers have recorded them as black and white images, transparencies, and slides. X-ray and infrared films have exposed the artefacts’ hidden designs and structural weaknesses. Such photographs have been digitised, scanned, video disked, and posted on the World-Wide Web and illustrate catalogues, coffee table books, glossy magazines and scholarly journals. Their repeated public appearances have made them Northwest Coast icons, authenticating other objects that are sold in stores, galleries and at auction through Sotheby’s and E-Bay.

Coming to a Question
Northwest Coast objects are made for sale, for use in ceremony and ritual and preserved as examples of the past. As inexpensive souvenirs they are considered “kitsch”. The more expensive items of clothing and household ornaments decorated with Northwest Coast designs are considered appropriate gifts. Wealthy travellers can purchase an original carving or print as an example of fine art. The forerunners of such objects can be found in museums. Masks, spoons, baskets and jewellery were made for sale as souvenirs to previous generations of tourists and traders. Inside the museum walls such objects were once considered to be the last examples of a rapidly disappearing culture. They are now objects for research and exhibition.

For Native artists, such objects of material culture allow them to create, to explore and to expand the traditional Northwest Coast forms. For the Native user, such objects convey a personal heritage and cultural identity. They are not considered simply items of aesthetic value, nor as souvenirs. They are linked to stories, histories and social obligations. The right to make and use certain crests is confined to specific families and may be part of complex reciprocal obligations between certain moieties or clans.
As objects of possible repatriation, such materials carry profound emotional appeal for Native people. These museum artefacts have entered a new stage in their life cycle. They are not for sale and are no longer useful for day-to-day activities. They have become symbols of the past - a means of touching an ancestral way of life. These objects exist simultaneously in two cultural systems, and as such are constantly changing their symbolic meaning and cultural importance. Totem poles, posts and carvings convey different messages in the Native and non-Native worlds. Masks, rattles and other ritual items are a symbolic witness as well as a contemporary statement.

Museums, treaty tables, community activities, galleries, stores and studios are all venues concerned with objects of traditional Northwest Coast material culture. The diversity of these locations raises many questions. Who produced the objects that fill the storerooms, souvenir shops and galleries? How do the producers and retailers regard the commodification of traditional material culture? What is the relevance of Northwest Coast museum collections to objects made for sale? Answers might be found in academic studies on Northwest Coast art. Insight can be gained from discussions with Native people, shop owners and dealers. Better understanding might also be obtained by studying the production of material for sale. Researching these objects, not as fine art, nor as souvenirs or artefacts, but as they were once considered “arts and crafts”, might reveal new relationships and a better understanding of contemporary Northwest Coast Native culture.
SECTION ONE – THE RESEARCH QUESTION
Chapter One – Crafting Categories

“To tamper with categories is to tamper with power”
(John Perreault 2002: 75).

This thesis is concerned with past and present production of material culture items made for sale by an Aboriginal community. It follows one thread through the fabric of Northwest Coast material culture by separating out the strand considered arts and crafts from the nearby threads labelled art, artefact and souvenir that bind it in place. Objects that began as functional items in a web of indigenous social meaning were renamed to the Western category of arts and crafts. They now fit the contemporary Western category of studio crafts. The transition from one Western category to the next was accomplished and accompanied by a series of shifts in political, economic and social realms. These changes were sometimes enabled by the actions of capable people who used their political power, economic resources, and creativity to shift old perceptions of value into an appealing object for a new marketplace. Some of these enablers are Native crafts people who continue to carry forward and to build on the traditional form, function and associated meanings of the objects. Others are non-Native people who have acted to reposition the value of Northwest Coast Native commodities for many different reasons, including a desire for social justice, economic equality and an appreciation for handmade objects.

The dissertation has three sections. The three introductory chapters comprise the first portion and present the research project. These chapters discuss the relevant theoretical and methodological literature and provide a brief history of the Northwest Coast. Studies of ethnic arts and the growth of tourist arts in colonial and post-colonial societies are of particular concern to this research. The methodology involved semistructured interviews, as well as participant observation. The first section concludes with an overview of traditional Northwest Coast material culture before European contact, and the development of the early stages of a wage based economy.
The second section of this thesis describes the impact of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the commodification of Northwest Coast material culture. One of the most important influences in the development of British Columbia’s arts and crafts market was the work of Alice Ravenhill and her Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts. Federal and provincial government programs became involved with the art and arts and crafts markets during the last half of the 20th century.

The final section discusses contemporary Northwest Coast art and crafts production and marketing and is based on interviews with Native crafts people and retailers. Such interviews may offer a better understanding of the attitudes of past producers. The experiences and expectations of historic artists and crafts people are not well represented in the archival record. Perhaps they may become more visible through the words of their descendants.

**Theoretical Background**

This paper is concerned with objects found in museum collections and in current production in British Columbia’s Native communities. It begins, therefore, with a review of recent work in the field of material culture studies, followed by a discussion of Appadurai’s theory of commodification and Mauze’s argument for the ‘reinvention of tradition’. The concluding portion of the chapter discusses the changing definitions of craft, art, and tourist art. The growth in the tourist art market and increased academic interest in ethnic fine art has produced an extensive literature on the role of producers, purchasers and middlemen. This study is set within a theoretical matrix of material culture studies in general, and within art, craft and tourist art studies in particular.

**Material Culture Studies**

“The return of material culture to the pages of anthropological text in this post-structural, post-processual age corresponds it seems to me, to a movement from the distant to the concrete and more than anything else, a movement from the cool elegance of the cerebrum to the hot passion of the
hand. However defined, the outstanding attribute of material culture, that which separates it from language, kinship and myth is that it is material, shaped and grasped by the hand” (Richardson 1987: iii).

After a long absence of research interest, material culture studies has recently been revived as a topic of interest for many anthropologists and social observers (Reynolds 1987:1). Interest in North American material culture began with the early explorers and traders who travelled to the New World and brought back ethnographic objects. These rarities joined the natural history specimens displayed in the Cabinets of Curiosities of the 16th and 17th centuries (Pearce 1995). During the next two centuries, the material culture of Aboriginal populations in North America fascinated European explorers and collectors. Native people became trading partners, war allies and, in some cases, enemies or slaves. At the same time their clothing, ornaments, weapons and objects of everyday and ritual use became trade items, war booty, and souvenirs of travel (King 1999). The relationship between First Nations and Europeans shifted over time, as the ratio of European to Native populations widened. The threat of Indian attacks receded as Native communities were decimated by disease, starvation, and forced relocation to reserve lands. The newly established North American nations, (i.e. the United States and Canada), became prosperous. At the end of the 19th century, World Fairs and Expositions, particularly in the United States, celebrated a ‘coming of age’. Exhibits of “primitive” Aboriginal artefacts served as a visible counterpoint to the “modern” industrial products on display. The material culture of the early inhabitants of North America also provided an historical setting for the original European settlers. “By adopting Native peoples as their ‘ancestors’, a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) bourgeoisie could increase its self-construction as ‘American’ while simultaneously perpetuating the alienation of foreign-born laborers” (Cohodas 1997:12).

The increasing interest in World Fairs and expositions marked the beginning of a period of collecting and study by scholars and scientists (Cole 1985). The artefacts gathered for these public celebrations became the basis for new museums in Chicago, Washington, New York and to a lesser extent in Ottawa. Throughout the 1890s, the staff of these new museums, and the amateur ethnographers associated
with them, began to establish extensive collections. Material culture studies focused on evolutionary theories, and later, on cross-cultural studies of cultural diffusion. By the 1930s, emphasis in anthropology had shifted away from collecting and analysis of artefacts to the study of other elements of culture, such as language, psychology, kinship and social organisation. Anthropologists, such as Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, left museum positions to teach in universities. Although fieldwork continued to be the main methodology for the study of mankind, the acquisition and analysis of objects were no longer considered essential to understanding ‘primitive’ societies. Relegated to a “second-class status” (Nason 1987:32), some material culture research still continued during the middle years of the 20th century, especially by anthropologists working as museum curators.

The rebirth of material culture studies began in the 1970s and 1980s with the recognition that “social worlds were as much constituted by materiality as the other way around” (Miller 1998:3). Two streams of critical analysis led to a new understanding of the cultural underpinning of the production and uses of everyday materials. Semiotic analysis could be applied to objects in ways that were similar to the study of myths and other textual forms (Barthes 1990; McCraken 1987). Secondly, scholars came to understand that in modern society the consumption of objects functioned within a social context (Bourdieu 1984; Appadurai 1986). Contemporary research questions ask, “how objects are experienced, what needs other than functional ones they answer, what mental structures are interwoven with - and contradict - their functional structures, or what cultural, infracultural or transcultural system underpins their directly experienced everydayness” (Baudrillard 1996:4).

Material culture studies offer a fresh approach for the analysis of familiar objects and for the understanding of contemporary society. In keeping with post-modern commitment to pluralism, multiple narratives and the crossing of boundaries, the new approach to material culture studies called for interdisciplinary analysis (Kingery 1996). The discipline did not attempt to establish a uniform set of analytical constructs or methodologies such as those found in anthropology.
archaeology, folk culture, history, or art history. Instead, such studies attempt to avoid becoming a traditional academic discipline.

"Unlike language we cannot hope even to enumerate the types and varieties within which the object world might be categorised and we are soon aware that any attempt imposes various arbitrary classifications over what is actually an endless creative and hybrid world. This problem of unordered diversity is perhaps one of the main stumbling blocks in the formation of material culture studies as against linguistics, but it also offers a huge potential if we try to consider what it might offer academic analytical concerns" (Miller 1998:6).

The study of objects, which cross academic boundaries also cross cultural boundaries. Material culture studies is attractive to museum anthropologists since it may offer alternative responses to current political and social pressures. Renewed interest in museum collections by third and fourth world communities has raised questions about the purpose and uses of material culture (Vergo 1989; Pearce 1992, 1994). Museums are now urged to involve First Nation representatives in developing exhibits. In Canada the pressure by the Lubacon Lake Cree for a boycott of the exhibition, *The Spirit Sings* opened new topics for academic discourse on the roles of museums and exhibits (Harrison 1993; Ames 1990). Case studies of museum practices illustrate the new understanding of multiple paradigms for exhibit storylines and artefact interpretation (Laforet 1993; Proceedings 1996). As Thomas notes:

"In some areas, entanglement with colonising agents of various kinds has gone on for hundreds of years and has prompted a distinctive indigenous historical consciousness in which local customs and solidarity are explicitly contrasted with the inequality characteristic of relations with outsiders. But such contacts are not only historically crucial - they also energise a new way of thinking about material culture" (Thomas 1991:4).

Discussions about traditional material culture between curators and the Native holders of cultural knowledge move between Western and Aboriginal paradigms. In the exchange of trade goods or tourist arts, objects left one system of meaning for

---

3 The *Spirit Sings*, an ethnographic exhibition sponsored in part by The Shell Oil Company, opened in Calgary, Alberta as part of the 15th Olympic Games. The Lubacon Lake Cree, which were in dispute with the oil company over drilling rights on reserve lands, asked the international museum community to withdraw their artefact loans from the exhibition.
another. However, discussions at the treaty table, or for exhibit development, must
finish on a common ground of shared understanding if they are to be successful.

The Study of Northwest Coast Arts and Crafts
The study of historic and contemporary production of Northwest Coast arts and
crafts could be drawn from a wealth of possible theoretical constructs, insights and
speculation found in the academic disciplines of history, economics, or art history.
Two central themes have been chosen for this study: the first is based on the
commodification of arts and crafts and the other is concerned with the reinvention of
culture.

Commodification

“I propose that the commodity situation in the social life of any ‘thing’ be
defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future)
for some other thing is its socially relevant feature” (Appadurai 1986:13).

Commodity theory invites analysis of the process of exchange between individuals
and groups. It goes beyond the economic context to focus on the wider social and
cultural framework in which the exchange takes place. Objects are recognised as
moving into and out of the marketplace, either temporarily or permanently. They
may be utilised, consumed or considered too valuable or sacred for further exchange.
Such an approach is particularly useful for the analysis of Northwest Coast arts and
crafts. This type of material culture is exchanged across multiple social contexts. It is
found as everyday household objects, as museum artefacts, and as works of art. As
objects produced in one culture, they reflect the symbolic system of that society. At
the same time they must also fulfil the cultural needs of the consuming society.

Commodity theory also suggests objects can be studied at any stage from production
to consumption - an approach pertinent to this research which focuses on the maker,
the middleman and, to some extent, the user. Finally, Appadurai’s concept of
‘restricted material’, or ‘enclaved objects’, offers useful insights to categories of
objects made for use in the potlatch or confined to museum storerooms. He notes:
“Though commodities, by virtue of their exchange destinies and mutual
commensurability, tend to dissolve the links between persons and things, such a
tendency is always balanced by a countertendency, in all societies, to restrict, control, and channel exchange” (Appadurai 1986:24).

The usefulness of commodity theory to the understanding of Northwest Coast arts and crafts can be briefly tested by looking at the applicability of Kopytoff’s categories (1986) to the observed phenomenon noted in the preface to this paper. Objects on view for the visitor at the airport in Vancouver can be divided into three categories of commodities. The masks and rattles shown in display cases are generally associated with museums and can no longer be considered within the normal realm of commodity. These items would be considered by Kopytoff as sacred objects. The masks, prints and weavings for sale in the airport shops are works of art, and though possibly for sale, lie within the reach of only a very few buyers. These would be categorised by Kopytoff as singularised objects. Other objects, termed souvenirs, lie within the category of the common. Between the common and the singular are commodities whose differing values remain to be negotiated. The ability of a complex society to ‘give everything a price’ leads to a uniformity of commodities and to the inevitable subsequent growth of private or small group valuation to make things unique” (Kopytoff 1986:80). On entering a store containing mass produced objects, such as souvenirs, consumers often search for singularities within their ‘price range’. Arts and craft objects fill this gap.

“Hand-crafted objects prove either that you can buy what few can afford or that you have the time (that is, money) to make things for the pleasure of making them. Or you have been able to afford to travel where people still habitually make things by hand or where they make them for tourists to buy - and such places are definitively elsewhere; it again presupposes money to get there from here” (Visser 1994:14).

The commodity offered for sale at the airport shop is made even more singular by two additional effects. First the affordable object is given close association through their physical presence at the airport to the unattainable artefacts and expensive works of art. (Museums follow a similar practice to promote the sale of replicas and reproductions in their gift shops.) Secondly, British Columbia has had several advertising campaigns touting the province as a “super, natural” place to visit. Accompanying the textual message are evocative images of landscapes. Tourists are thus meant to feel they are visiting a supernatural, spiritual, or sacred place. To bring
home an object associated with such an journey moves the experience from just a pleasant memory, to the sensation of having taken part in a religious pilgrimage and to have come into contact with places and objects of cultural sacredness (MacCannel 1976; Kopytoff 1986:81).

Although Appadurai does not emphasise the role of arts and crafts in his article, he does briefly discuss tourist art in his exegesis of commodity theory. Tourist arts, like artefacts, and Aboriginal arts and crafts, are objects that have been diverted from their original purpose, or in the vocabulary of commodity theory have been diverted from their ‘exchange destinies’. Such works raise questions about authenticity, taste and the politics of consumer-producer relations. As well, Appadurai notes the complexity of the topic, not only in the range of commodities under study, but also in the multiple relationships between the producer, middleman and consumer. He believes these objects constitute “a special commodity traffic, in which the group identities of producers are tokens for the status politics of consumers” (Appadurai 1986:47).

Even the complicated process described by Appadurai, fails to reflect the complexity of the reality facing the Aboriginal studio crafts person working today on the Northwest Coast. These producers are both within and external to the dominant society. In some cases, particularly if they are economically successful, the artist may remain both inside and external to their own cultural group. They often work within a fragmented cultural heritage that in some communities has been completely lost. What does remain, however, may be present only in the partial and quickly disappearing memories of elders, in museum collections or vaguely reflected in the cultural activities of neighbouring groups. Since contemporary crafts people are using traditional motifs when creating traditional objects, they are responsible for helping to recreate the community’s cultural heritage. The demand for authentic objects comes, not only from external and often distant consumers, but is also local and essential to the process of revitalisation of their personal identity, and that of their communities. At the same time, they must move the tradition forward by offering forms and images that reflect contemporary Native experience.
"Continuity and change go hand in hand with the continual invention and reproduction of cultural meaning" (Geertz 1997:193).

Although early theorists would have liked to place cultures along an evolutionary line, comparing one static group to another, the process of continuous social adaptation is now generally accepted. Anthropologists and historians have recently understood that the flow of tradition is not unidirectional, i.e. moving only forward in time. Symbolic imagery and ritual activities may also be developed in the present and imposed upon the past. Societies have adopted new ‘historical traditions’ that, while enhancing their past, also serve to revitalise their present identity (Hobsbawn 1983).

The idea of what constitutes a ‘traditional’ practice or belief is being redefined. The usual definition refers to ideas or activities that have been handed down from one generation to the next. The older the traditional practice, the greater is its prestige. However, some ‘traditional’ practices have been found to be of recent origin. The definition of ‘traditional’ now includes cases of ‘retroprojection’ (Pouillon 1997:17), in which a contemporary action, belief, or created object is considered ‘traditional’ when it is supported or validated by the actions of earlier generations. A “...tradition’s effectiveness and reality stem from the feeling that it is natural and self-evident for those on whom it is exerted” (Pouillon 1997:19).  

The recent increase of potlatch ceremonies, canoe festivals and the expanding art market on the Northwest Coast has attracted the attention of anthropologists interested in the concept of ‘reinvention’. Harkin in his study of the Waglisla, describes the efforts of one man to revitalise cultural activities by means of building

---

4 The re-evaluation of the idea of ‘tradition’ has been particularly difficult for some anthropologists to accept. Following in the steps of early 19th century ‘salvage ethnography’, tradition is supposed to be something that must be recorded before it disappears. Mauze argues that graduate students in particular are like tourists, in that they set out to discover and experience a traditional culture for analysis. They are confused and dismayed to find modern, often urban, components in their “primitive” subject matter (Mauze 1997:2). The idea of ‘reinvented tradition’ has also proven
a traditional canoe. Such events offered the community unexpected political opportunities, social alliances and even established new ritual activities in ceremonial settings. Harkin notes that new or artificial ‘traditions’ are considered ‘authentic’ if they are able to affect people emotionally and to motivate them. Such ‘traditions’ are based on the use of key cultural symbols.

“To be effective, constructed symbols must be drawn out of a fairly limited repertoire. We must contest the use of the term ‘invention’ implying as it does creation *ex nihilo*. It seems clear rather that this phenomenon involves the selection and ritual framing of latent symbols, which are already present within the culture” (Harkin 1997:98).

This is particularly relevant for Northwest Coast artists and crafts people who have a limited range of images and forms to draw upon to represent their heritage. They have, moreover, self-imposed even greater limitations by using only those images to which they have inherited rights. These limitations work together to expand and strengthen the ‘inherited’ and the ‘invented’ elements in traditional culture.

Although Harkin has focused primarily on political issues and social mobilisation of the local community, the papers by Feest and King, in the same volume, describe the reinvention of tradition and the relationship with the wider community through the art and tourist art markets. The value of collecting art in western society is, to some extent, based on the rarity of the object (Alsop 1982), an idea similar to Kopytoff’s singularity. “Such collecting not only results in the disjunction of form and function of art and crafts; but it leads to the preservation of visual forms under artificial circumstances such as museums” (Feest 1997:66). Other objects have found a market through tourism, which combines rarity, (the long distances needed to travel to obtain the object) with the satisfaction of “framing and freezing of history, enabling white tourists to experience, and in that sense, consume cultures” (King 1997:81). The authors argue that the Native artist/crafts person has had to draw upon traditions which, although historically accurate, may no longer be important for the present-day cultural communities. Artists and craftsmen are thus forced to invent tradition through their own creative desire or by market forces.

unpopular among some Native activists and certain academics (Hanson 1997).
Northwest Coast material culture has been produced to sell to collectors, museums and tourists for some two hundred years. During that period of time the exchange of objects has been shaped and reshaped by economic, social, political and cultural forces. The terminology for the reinvention of culture has come into scholarly discussion only in the past twenty years. Most of the academic papers on this subject refer to the last quarter of the 20th century or draw upon recent fieldwork experiences. However, the reinvention of tradition relating to the production and consumption of articles made for sale, can be equally applied to various objects such as Pueblo pottery made for tourists in 1890; replicas of Plateau artefacts made for the collector James Teit in 1915; or paintings and sculptures made for the Santa Fe Indian Art Market in the past year. The following quote describes the context of all these changing ‘presents’ and ‘pasts’ over the last century.

“Tradition is used to justify the present through remembering the past. It interprets the past according to the needs of the present. Thus the past is continually reassessed and reconstructed depending on the course of events... From this point of view, tradition does not appear as a corpus of statements handed down unchanged from one generation to the next. It is a succession of answers to questions about the present and consequently it takes on the status of an always correct answer to the question asked” (Mauze 1997:7).

Art and Crafts

“The exotic object may variously be labelled trophy or talisman, relic or specimen, rarity or trade sample, souvenir or kitsch, art or craft” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3).

“In the homogenised world of commodities, an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context (Kopytoff 1986:90).

The application of the phrase ‘arts and crafts’ is fluid and changes according to circumstances and time periods. The term has been used variously to denote certain types of objects, such as those sold at a “Christmas Arts and Crafts Sale”. It is also used to discuss the historical Arts and Crafts Movement, founded by William Morris; or to refer to a set of activities, for example the Department of Indian Affairs Arts and Crafts Program. Sometimes the term has been divided and defined in ways
that make a clear distinction between the higher status of 'art' and the lower status
are annoyed when they are called crafts people rather than artists because of the
implied lower prestige and income associated with craft activity. Other scholars,
particularly art historians, have used arts and crafts interchangeably (Penny 1992;
Jonaitis 1998). By combining the traditional crafts of basket making or clothing and
adornment with accepted art forms of two-dimensional representations, the status of
artefacts is raised to the same consideration given to an art form. As James Clifford
has noted "...the highest compliment our culture can pay to another is to name its
objects as 'art'" (quoted in Phillips 1993:9).

The issue of what is art, what is craft, and what is meant by the term "arts and crafts"
has important implications for this study of material culture. In most non-western
societies, the work of the craftsman and the artist is the same. The artistic and
functional success of a woven basket, clay pot, glass container or gold ornament is
dependent on the skill and the aesthetic sense of the producer. In Western society
however, the work of the artist has been separated from that of the craftsman. The
differences are perceived as that of the higher, more aesthetic activities of the artist
as contrasted with the practical skills of the craftsman. To understand the
components of Northwest Coast arts and crafts over time and in different regions, it
is important to have a clear understanding of the Western concept of arts and crafts.
These terms have directed the activities of missionaries, Indian agents and
philanthropic societies during the 19th century and continue to influence the market
place today. The understanding of these terms by contemporary First Nations is
based in part on the Western context, and in part on traditional cultural teachings.
The remainder of this chapter focuses on the writings of researchers in the field of
crafts, art, tourist arts, and arts and crafts.

---

5 Recent studies have also pointed out that objects currently identified as crafts,
rather than art, are those items made by women, outsiders or by people of colour.
"...the histories of all the crafts can be seen to be the history of the other" (Cabeen
quoted in Plattner 1996:207)
Crafts

“General definitions of ‘craft’, ‘technology’ or ‘design’ tend to be pretty hopeless, in the same way that definitions of art tend to be. To be of any real use definitions should not proceed through generalities, but, like the legal system, evolve through case law by taking account of previous examples and the judgement of connoisseurs” (Dormer 1997:5).

Originally the meaning of the word “craft” referred to strength or power (Oxford Universal Dictionary 1955:415) and was associated particularly with magic and the occult as in the term “witchcraft”. Such negative connotations continue to the present day usage as in the word “crafty” with its overtones of cunning and deceitfulness. Although the term appeared in the Middle Ages to refer to members of a tradesmen’s union or guild, it was not closely linked with any particular aspect of hand manufacture. Greenhalgh states that the words ‘crafts’ and ‘craftsmen’ were not widely used until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, “when both became powerful signifiers in advanced debates in the visual arts and relatively common in institutional circles” (Greenhalgh 1997:23). The debate over arts and crafts continues today, as producers, curators and gallery owners attempt to identify the significant differences distinguishing crafts people from designers and artists. Some working definitions focus on the specific need for an object to be made by hand, using materials, techniques and formats from pre-industrial production (Metcalf 1997:71). Definitions also emphasise the functionality of the object. For purposes of identifying the Northwest Coast craft production, the following definition will serve:

“Craft objects originate in function, and function often emerges from spiritual or ritual imperatives; they evidence the maker’s respect, even reverence, for materials, process, and techniques; and they have been created by trained professionals or individuals who are carrying on traditions transmitted from their elders. The artist is aware of the historical continuum of craft, either within the ethnic or national community or from the larger mainstream, and is often committed to extending and expanding that continuum in inventive ways. We still cling to the ideal that a single artist designs, executes and signs the work, while allowing that, in some cases, the artist carefully supervises production in a small workshop” (Pardon 1994:23).

Historic Context of Crafts

In Western culture the separation of the work of the artist from that of the craftsman began in the Renaissance when specialised knowledge of architecture, anatomy, geometry, arithmetic and perspective brought privileged status to the designer or
artist. The distinction was institutionally codified during the Enlightenment, when painters and sculptors abandoned their guilds and joined newly formed artistic Academies. Fine art was distinguished from other creative endeavours by being limited to the activities of painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry and music (M'Closkey 1994; Greenhalgh 1997).

“...The concept of the artist as a unique, outstanding individual developed in contrast to the view that the anonymous craftsperson, using only technical ability, executed designs specified by someone else. Hence fine art became primarily an intellectual exercise, whereas the essence of craft production resided in the technical excellence of the completed piece” (M'Closkey 1994:60).

The distinction between “mental” and “manual” labour was further solidified with the advent of the industrial revolution. By the end of the 19th century, fine art was thought to encompass painting and sculpture only, which “coincides with the birth of modern capitalism and emergence of art as a commodity and speculative asset” (M'Closkey 1994:60). Craft production was relegated to the periphery of ‘modern’ life and was associated with workers in remote communities, immigrant folk artists, women’s homemaking activities and Native people. Away from the large cities, in the mountains and poor, rural communities, crafts people continued to produce items for everyday use. Immigrants brought their own folk art traditions, which were added to the ‘melting pot’ or ‘cultural mosaic’ of North American identity. Women continued to pursue craft activities, usually those pastimes associated with homemaking. However the relegation of craft production away from urban, industrial centres did not mean a lack of interest in craft activities. An entire building, for example, was dedicated to the display of women’s crafts at the 1893 Columbia World Exposition (Smith and Lucie-Smith 1986:26). During this time period, William Morris’ Arts and Crafts movement began in England and spread quickly to Europe and North America. It was also in this period that Indian crafts, particularly pottery, weaving and jewellery from the Southwest were popular tourist items and considered fashionable decorations for the home. Efforts to help Native people develop economic self-sufficiency through arts and crafts were also being initiated.

---

6 This was the same fair where Franz Boas brought a troupe of Kwagiuthl performers to perform.
In the early years of the 20th century, crafts and industrial design were recognised as areas of formal study, and became part of university curricula. Emphasis on the handmade object and individual production was encouraged, particularly during the depression years by government grants, programs and policies. Nevertheless, craft continued to be perceived as a separate activity from art. The Bauhaus School, the Woodcraft Folk movement and Women’s Institutes, which were all active during the middle part of the century, emphasised process and production, rather than intellectual exploration and aesthetic challenge.

In the past few years, craft production integrated an artistic element once again into the conception and production of the object. This impetus came from two sources: post-modern attitudes and a new generation of crafts people who have been trained in the fine arts. Interest in other cultures and art forms provided opportunities for crafts people to appreciate different aesthetic traditions. The post-modernist emphasis on crossing boundaries and combining unrelated things, allowed the crafts worker to view an object such as a chair simultaneously as “an object to sit on, as a decorative item that may be part of the larger scheme, and as a sculpture” (Lucie-Smith 1986:38). Crafts people who had received training as artists, and artists who have been trained to work with craft materials and techniques reduced the distinction between art and craft. Major movements in contemporary art, such as abstract expressionism or “pop” art have been expressed through wood, glass, fabric and other traditional craft media.

Some scholars believe that they can discover something unique through the study and writing of texts that focus only on craft. It is irrelevant whether the discussion is concerned with the production potter, the studio crafts person, or the artist/crafts person. Their commonality lies in exploring the constraints of traditional craft materials and techniques. The process of creativity is often described as a process of self-realisation or self-transformation (Halpin 1994a: 167).

“People most often find coherence and clarification of their values through what they actually do. Thus in the craft disciplines, one finds practitioners with a profound understanding of what they are and what they stand for” (Dormer 1997:222).
The study of craft, its history, its creative practitioners, and especially the objects themselves appear to be subjects for a study of material culture. Multiple writers acknowledge the semiotic potential of craft objects and the importance of the systems of human relationships required to create them. In the study of traditional Northwest Coast material culture made for sale, the study of craft is integral to the analysis of arts and crafts.

Art

The Western categories of “art” usually include objects that have been variously classified as ethnic, tribal or folk arts. ‘Art’ (capitalised and in the singular form), and artefacts. Although the value of such objects has always moved them in and out of various market categories, this re-categorisation has been constantly reviewed in the past quarter century. Handmade objects have been defined as ethnographic artefacts, craft, ‘primitive’ art, and fine art. Much of this reclassification can be attributed to the work of a small group of ethnologists and art historians and to the establishment of a “new” art history.

Ethnographic objects contained in “cabinets of curiosities” in the 16th and 17th centuries were rarely perceived by their owners as objects of art. Art was limited to the five categories of creative endeavour defined by the National Academies, with particular emphasis on painting and sculpture. Fine art offered intellectual and emotional rewards, which was a shared European heritage based on classical traditions. Objects acquired through trade and travel from far away lands were often considered grotesque and primitive. As scientific interest in other societies grew along with the building of colonial empires, such objects were seen as evidence of earlier, less civilised races. The indigenous societies found in North America were considered to be on the verge of extinction. In the 19th century, artefacts moved from cabinets of curiosities to museums of natural history and there, for the most part, they have remained.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, avant-garde European artists, such as Picasso, were among the first to separate sculptural pieces from their cultural context
and presented them as a new art form. Just as Morris viewed folk art and hand crafts as an antidote to a heavily industrialised society, primitive art offered an exciting new contrast to the stultifying bourgeois culture of Europe (Barzin 1959:455). The ties between modern art and primitive art continued through the first part of the century as museums and galleries, such as the Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Canada hosted special exhibitions (Errington 1998:65). The opening of the Museum of Primitive Art in New York in 1957 formally recognised the work of Indigenous peoples as art and legitimised its value for collectors. However, few, if any, Aboriginal works of art became part of the permanent collections of the important fine art galleries at that time (Pitman 1996). By the 1980s some anthropologists and art historians questioned the removal of objects from their cultural context and challenged their display within a Western system of art appreciation. A 1984 exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art entitled "'Primitivism' in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" juxtaposed Aboriginal and Western art pieces in an attempt to demonstrate a universal sense of aesthetics. This show and the resulting controversy brought into focus a new set of issues that has continued into the present decade (Clifford 1998: Price 1989; Errington 1998).

"Put simply defenders of the decontextualization and aestheticization of the objects of other cultures were ranged against those who argue that such a process appropriates objects into a discourse that is about Western art rather that a cultural understanding of non-western objects and their creators. At the same time, the classical representational modes of the ethnological display have been the subject of equally profound criticism, both academic and artistic, for their employment of a mythic "ethnographic present" with clear links to cultural evolutionism and racism" (Berlo 1992:35).

A Concern with Art and Authenticity

"My position is that artifacts themselves are mute and meaningless. Their meanings are created by the categories they fall into and the social practices that produce and reproduce those categories" (Errington 1998).

In re-evaluating the place of art and artefacts, there has also been an analysis of other products made by Aboriginal peoples. Tourist art (to be discussed in the next

7 For a good introduction and overview see Morphy (1995). Although his emphasis is on Australian Aboriginal art, much of the information also applies to Northwest
section), kitsch, ethnic or tribal arts, crafts, and reproductions have all been analysed with reference to their value. The concern as to which objects belong in art museums has spread to collectors wondering about the validity of purchasing certain items of art. Following the Second World War, greater travel and work abroad brought an increase in collecting the art of the “other”. As well, acquisitions of works of art became a form of investment and an assertion of high social status. The rising prices of art and the increased prestige of ownership, impelled buyers to clarify what was of value.

Clifford has authored “A Machine for Making Authenticity” (1988:224), in which he describes four categories related to art and culture along a vertical and a horizontal axis (see Appendix 1). Art and culture are listed on opposing sides of the vertical axis. Masterpieces and their associated art museums and the art market are aligned on the art side. On the culture side are artefacts, and their associated museums of crafts, folk art and ethnographic artefacts. The purely commercial material is placed on the lower half of the horizontal axis. On the art side are inventions and “fakes”, and on the cultural side are listed tourist arts and curios. Objects can move between these zones, depending on their changes in either rarity or in fashion. Clifford notes, “It is important to stress the historicity of this art-culture system. It has not reached its final form: the positions and values assigned to collectable artifacts have changed and will continue to do so” (Clifford 1988:226).

Although Clifford’s model is useful for organising the various categories of art, craft, design and kitsch, the movement of objects from one category to another does not resolve the debate. Some scholars attempt to place non-western art within the framework of Western understanding of aesthetics and social organisation (Layton 1991; Blocker 1994). Others suggest that the definition of art and authenticity is an issue of power and authority (Graburn 1999:352). It seems possible that the solution to the problem lays “not in the properties of the object itself, but in the very process of collection, which inscribes, at the moment of acquisition, the character and qualities that are associated with the object in both individual and collective

Coast and other Indigenous groups.
memories” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:19). Perhaps the answer lies not only in the mind of the consumer and the academic, but in the mind of the maker of the object as well. The absence of the maker’s voice in this debate has been one impetus for the present research project. The reasons that artists choose to make and sell certain objects, and how they classify those items according to Western and Native categories can add useful narratives to the debate.

The shifting categories of fine and primitive art, artefact and craft, and the question of what is authentic, has profound implications for Northwest Coast producers who continue to carve masks and rattles, weave baskets or make clothing and jewellery in traditional and innovative styles. With little or no effort of their own, crafts people have seen their annual income changed by thousands of dollars, and their status in their local and national communities rise or fall. The producer has little influence on the sorting of objects into Western-made categories. He or she is, however, affected by the demand for certain items and the increasing aesthetic standards that need to be met. The circumstances that surround the production of art in pluralistic societies have been explored by ethnologists and art historians and are reflected in the scholarly literature regarding tourist art.

Tourist Arts
Tourist art has become a remarkably fruitful subject for analysis in material culture studies. It has drawn case studies from almost every country in the world, and used populations varying from independent post-colonial nation states in Africa to minority populations of Aboriginal communities in remote areas of the Canadian Arctic. Researchers have posed questions regarding cultural change, symbolic communication, gender studies, and self-identity (Graburn 1976; Jules-Rosette 1984; Steiner 1994; Lee 1999; Berlo 1999). Studies of the adoption and adaptation of new materials, techniques and aesthetic forms have explored issues of maintaining tradition and accepting innovation (Kaufman 1976; Hoover 1993). The complex alliances between the craftsman/producer, the middleman and the consumer all reflect relationships of power and control that are played out on various political and cultural stages (King 1997; Cohodas 1999; Batkin 1998; 1999). Analyses of the exchanging of objects as art, artefacts, or souvenirs during different historical
periods provide insight into the practices of Western galleries, museums, tourism and markets (Jonaitis 1999; Graburn 1976).

What is Tourist Art?

“I consider the category ‘tourist art’ to represent a paradigmatic form of mass-produced art and argue that its authenticity and cultural rationality flow from the qualities it shares with other mass-produced objects and commodities throughout industrial and post-industrial history” (Steiner 1999:89).

“Jules-Rosette rejects the ‘conveyor-belt fallacy’ that assumes that tourist art is mass produced. She challenges the view that tourist art is less than, or even separate from, elite art and traditional art. ...Tourist art, argues Jules-Rosette, is not merely a set of simplified messages derived from some richer and more elaborate code, but it consists of performances and displays that are part of a creative process that enjoys an authentic existence” (Peacock 1984: ix).

Tourist art is part of a complex, fluctuating matrix of cultural contact and social change that makes the subject matter and the participants difficult to identify. At one time foreign objects brought to European markets were materials that had a function only in the producing country. Once out of context, they assumed various new categories as objects of curiosity, research, status, souvenir, and an avant-garde challenge to the status quo. As consumer pressure built for more objects to meet these new European categories, the culture of the producing community was affected. “There is no doubt that the exchange of art at the boundary zone of cultures creates not only representations of culture, embodied in art, but also culture itself, as producers invent and reinvent themselves and their societies in the form of marketable traditions” (Shildkrout 1999:204). The changing culture of both the producing and the consuming societies, (independently, and as they affected each other), add to the complexity of the study.

Further confusion comes from the perspectives of the researchers. For example, the writings of Jules-Rossette and Steiner are two scholars who have worked in the field of African art. Steiner’s research has been primarily among dealers who act as middlemen between crafts people and shop owners. Jules-Rosette has focused on the artist. Steiner talks about the large, international market for African art, the storerooms and warehouses of sculptures waiting to be sold or shipped. He is
interested in the complex relationships among large families and tribal networks linked with the producing villages of artists (Steiner 1994). From his perspective, tourist art looks like mass-produced items. On the other hand, Jules-Rossette’s work with individual artists and the cottage level production of arts and crafts reflects the artist’s struggle to survive economically and to meet the local as well as the international demands of the consumer. Each perspective offers useful insights into a complex process of creativity and commodification.

Attempts to define tourist art further confuse the issue. Early in the development of the field, Graburn identified seven types of art objects found within the “arts of acculturation”:

1. Extinction - products which already have (or have almost), disappeared
2. Traditional or functional fine arts – objects which continue to fulfil traditional needs in the community although they may be influenced by contact
3. Commercial fine arts - items made for sale, but which still maintain the traditional forms and aesthetics of the functional arts
4. Souvenirs – (also called tourist arts or airport art). objects in which the profit motive overrides aesthetic standards
5. Reintegrated arts - a new synthesis of traditional and European art
6. Assimilated fine arts - in which the producer has assimilated the art form of the colonising society
7. Popular arts - objects which have assimilated the art form of the colonising or dominant society but which are more aligned to the realm of popular culture than the higher status of fine art (Graburn 1976:5-8).

In reviewing his initial work, Graburn (1999:344) noted that later refinements by himself and other scholars further classified the chief characteristics of tourist art. These forms now fell into two categories reflecting the bipolar divisions of craft/artefact and art.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft/Artefact/Culture</th>
<th>Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/internal</td>
<td>National/external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Hybrid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graburn (1999:344) also noted that recent work suggests such divisions are not as clear-cut, relevant or as useful as originally perceived. Items of arts and crafts may be both functional inside the community, and made to sell to the local market and to external buyers. The object may be both traditional and innovative, combining established design with creative new forms. Even the distinction of the anonymous craft creator versus the named artist is no longer applicable. Although many items of carving, weaving or clothing are now labelled with the artist’s name, they still remain almost anonymous to the general tourist who perceives them only as examples of Northwest Coast art. Graburn’s seven definitions listed above are also subject to shifts since commercial and functional fine arts are often indistinguishable. The categories and definitions have become so overlapping as to be confusing and not particularly useful for contemporary research.

Perhaps the difficulty in defining tourist art lies in the broad spectrum of cultures to which it is being applied. The nature of tourist art has also changed over time as consumers have altered their interest and relationships with the producing societies. Tourist art at the end of the 19th century was created under circumstances different than those being produced a hundred years later. The demands of the consumer affect large, self-governing communities quite differently than minority populations living in urban or remote villages. Graburn’s early work and that of his colleagues viewed tourist art as the work of ‘traditional’ people producing for ‘modern’ consumers. In a post-modern society where art and culture categories are less clear-cut or relevant, tourist art may be seen as the work of modern people producing traditional arts for modern consumers.

Despite a recent proliferation of publications, Graburn noted that the study of tourist arts has not attracted wide attention. “The world of scholarship had unfortunately avoided the analysis of arts embedded in culturally plural contexts, many of which had for some time been part of a ‘World Art System’” (Graburn 1999:343). Although some topics have been extensively analysed, others remain unexplored. King argued that tourist art has not been studied in the context of the history of
tourism, nor in the context of the Native economies. Researchers also need to understand tourist arts as a symbol mediating between the Native and non-Native worlds, and explore the growth of regional tourism (King 1997:84). Another area of tourist art that has been ignored is the moral and ethical dilemma associated with its colonial past and the resultant unequal power relationship. Appadurai stated that “the diversion of commodities from their customary paths always carries a risky and morally ambiguous aura” (Appadurai 1986:27). This, however, is rarely reflected in scholarly writing. King’s comments are more direct: “Tourism can be seen in a sense as a final insult at the end of the process of colonisation and souvenir arts are the symbol of this insult. Yet the developing interest in souvenir arts chooses to invert this reality and, as a consummate fiction, raises these arts to a new status” (King 1997:84).

Studying Northwest Coast Arts and Crafts

“Indeed, in looking at the social life of commodities in any given society or period, part of the anthropological challenge is to define the relevant and customary paths so that the logic of diversions can properly, and relationally, be understood” (Appadurai 1986:29).

The “social life” of Aboriginal craft, art, and arts and crafts as commodities on the Northwest Coast offers a shifting, often overlapping series of “paths”. The singular path of arts and crafts covers some two hundred years, from its emergence out of traditional material culture to its submergence in the current category of art. Its divergence from “customary paths” is the story of a social movement half a world away, of the determination of an elderly woman, and of the individual actions of Indian agents, missionaries and dealers. The story tells of the uses (and occasionally the abuses) of power by bureaucrats, academics and institutions. It also includes the efforts by those who had little power to create change, but who still tried to divert the commodity from its customary paths. This study of the “social life” of arts and crafts is drawn from archives of correspondence, government reports and oral history. The final narrative voices are those of Native crafts people and the dealers who sell these objects as commodities in today’s marketplace.
Chapter Two – Collecting Information

“Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note – and often makes note – of some things to the exclusion of others” (Wolcott 1994:4).

Researchers studying material culture today are confronted with new theoretical, methodological and ethical problems. Objects made and used in particular societies (the traditional focus of material culture studies) are no longer limited to the local resources, the technical expertise and cultural iconography of an isolated community. The globalisation of culture and the growth of a trans-national economy bring into question not only the nature of contemporary culture, but also the traditional methods of studying it. (Amit 2000; Robbins and Bamford 1997). As Clifford notes:

“The ‘field’ in sociocultural anthropology has been constituted by a ‘historically specific range of distances, boundaries, and modes of travel’ ... These are changing, as the geography of distance and difference alters in postcolonial/neocolonial situations, as power relations of research are reconfigured, as new technologies of transport and communication are deployed, and as ‘natives’ are recognized for their specific worldly experiences and histories of dwelling and traveling...” (Clifford 1997:190).

Ethical issues regarding access to data and its uses have been raised in regard to past anthropological practices. Questions concerning the ownership of information and the right of publication are now important considerations for researchers developing their methodology. Although Wolcott (1994:4) has stated that everything may have the potential to be data, yet in a postcolonial, postmodern, postcommunity and postexoticist world, practical, ethical, and theoretical considerations will ultimately shape the methodology and the information itself.

Although the epistemology of social science research is being re-examined, the need to continue collecting and analysing data (by means of surveys, fieldwork or laboratory testing) is still recognised as a valid enterprise (Flinn et al., 1998; Gupta 1999). Recent publications offer guidance in regard to the processes of quantitative and qualitative research (Bernard 1994; Silverman 1997; Wolcott 1994). Quantitative research is often considered to have limited applicability (appropriate
to the testing of hypotheses), whereas, qualitative research, (when properly crafted), provides a viable methodology for ethnographic inquiry (Kirk 1986; Atkinson 1992).

This chapter describes the research techniques and resources used for my study of historic and contemporary production and sale of Northwest Coast Native arts and craft. Archival collections have provided information for historical analysis. Interviews in a fieldwork setting collected data for the study of contemporary arts and crafts. Each of these data resources required different research skills with different strengths and weaknesses.

**Working with Archival Collections**

“An artifact is the product of a particular historical context - of particular makers using particular tools in a particular place at a particular time. Absent a time machine, it is impossible for the analyst to retrieve that historical context in its totality, its affective as well as factual dimensions. Thus history in the sense of recapturing as well as recording the past is necessarily false” (Prown 1996:25).

Prown’s warning about research based on material culture resources can be equally well applied to archival materials. Documents preserved in large archival collections are often erratically acquired and frequently incomplete. Personal or business documents deposited in public archives may be edited to reveal only the positive aspects of a person’s life or activities. Federal, provincial and municipal archives frequently emphasise the contributions and history of the country’s dominant population. Such collections, for example, may preserve the speeches of elected officials or the correspondence of bureaucrats, but lack equivalent contributions from minority or Indigenous communities. To some extent, the failure to include Native records may reflect the preference by many First Nation historians to maintain traditional knowledge in its oral form, rather than in a written format. Native people possessing such information are often suspicious of government agencies (such as archives or museums), or fear that community stories or histories will be published without their consultation or consent. Despite these limitations, however, careful research in archival collections, together with contemporary interviews, have provided sufficient data for analysis of the history and development of the Native arts and crafts market in British Columbia.
Archives have provided extensive information on the efforts by individuals and government agencies to develop an arts and crafts market for Native products. Research in federal, provincial and municipal archives have uncovered relevant diaries, correspondence, newspaper articles and annual reports. For example, information on the B.C. Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts and its founder, Alice Ravenhill, is stored in several different locations. Much of the correspondence between Ravenhill and her colleague, Anthony Walsh, is in the collection of the University of British Columbia Library. Additional Ravenhill correspondence is available in the Department of Indian Affairs Record Books and files housed at the Public Archives of Canada. Records of the Society’s early activities, including correspondence, newspaper articles and minutes of meetings are stored in the British Columbia Provincial Archives. Later correspondence and documentation from the Society (renamed. The B.C. Society for Indian Arts and Welfare) were deposited at the University of Victoria Library. Unfortunately, these major fonds lack complete copies of the various minutes of meetings as well as annual presidential reports. Some of the missing reports were located in the Vancouver City Library Special Collections. Newspaper clippings and miscellaneous information on Alice Ravenhill and her Society are on file at the Vancouver City Archives. Other government reports on programs to promote Native arts and crafts are available in provincial and federal archives and in the departmental library of Indian and Northern Affairs.

It should also be noted that published volumes and unpublished texts, (including theses, dissertations, articles, books and government reports), on the Northwest Coast provided a substantial source of research information for this study. Extensive ethnographic, archaeological and art history research has been, and continues to be, conducted on Northwest Coast cultures. Specific ethnographic problems such as slavery, cannibalism, and competitive feasting frequently include examples from Northwest Coast culture for cross-cultural analysis. Historians have researched every period of British Columbian history from European contact, through British and Canadian colonial practices, to contemporary treaty negotiations. A new body of literature (intended primarily for the tourist and the art markets), documents historic
and contemporary architecture, totem poles, carving, weaving, print making and other art forms. Research for land claims, oral testimony for court cases, and documentation for treaty issues are all recent additions to this Northwest Coast body of knowledge. The references cited in the paper’s bibliography reflect only a small portion of this literature.

**Working with Interviews**

“Key informant interviewing is an integral part of ethnographic research. Good informants are people who you can talk to easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you” (Bernard 1994:166).

In his guide to research methods in anthropology, Bernard describes different interview techniques. Informal interviewing is practised when a fieldworker is engaged in participant observation and makes general notes of his or her observations at the end of the day. An unstructured interview is a long conversation between a researcher and an informant. A structured interview involves asking the same questions to all informants, and limiting the possible responses to quantifiable answers. Bernard’s preferred format is called semistructured interviewing and is used when there is only one opportunity to talk with an informant. “It has much of the free-wheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, and requires all the same skills, but semistructured interviewing is based on the use of an interview guide” (Bernard 1994:209). Such a guide is a list of questions and topics that are asked in a set order.

The information sought for this research project was primarily personal history. For example, how did the individuals become involved with craft production? Why were they selling traditional forms of Northwest Coast material culture? Who were their teachers and what were the important influences in their lives? Responses to these questions were often given in the form of stories, reminiscences and general comments. Such information is difficult to include into a structured questionnaire. In addition, the opportunity for follow-up meetings was limited, and as much information as possible had to be acquired during the initial interview. Such restrictions of time and access to the field suggested the need for an interview guide.
Thus, the methodology chosen for this research was the semistructured interview technique.

Information was sought primarily from two groups, craft producers and marketers. Each group required a separate interview guide. However, some crafts people were also sellers, who market their own work to wholesale outlets, or manage their own stores or galleries. In such cases the interview questions on craftsmanship and marketing were combined. Before beginning the project, sample interviews were conducted with a Native carver, a weaver, a gallery owner, a craft curator and a museum shop manager. These early discussions helped to determine the questions for the interview guides.

Guide for Interviewing Crafts People

A. Biographical Background
1. Can you start by telling me your name and where you are from? (i.e. name, community, birth date, family ties, early history)
2. Where did you grow up? What schooling did you have?
3. How did you learn to carve (weave, print...)?
4. Who were your teachers, your associates?
5. What are the main influences on your work?
6. What medium(a) do you work in and why?
7. How much time do you spend working in your studio? Do you teach? Do you consider yourself a professional, full time artist/crafts person?

B. Role of art/craft (art/artefact) in the community
1. What is the difference between art and craft?
2. Is your work being used in the community?
3. Are other people's work being used in the community? How? When?
4. Who are the artists you most admire and why?
5. What makes an artist/crafts person's work traditional? What makes it innovative? Is this innovation appropriate or right? Why?
C. The role of the market

1. Do you sell your work? How?

2. What role does the gallery owner play in marketing your work?

3. Should artists/crafts people form a co-op or have the tribal council become involved in helping you sell your work?

4. What do you think about the items produced by non-native artist/crafts people?

5. What is the role of the museum in relation to your work and to that of other contemporary crafts people?

Guide for Interviewing Marketing People

A. Store and owner background –

1. Can you start by telling me your name and where you are from? (i.e. name, community, birth date, family ties, early history)

2. When did you establish this store? Are other members of your family involved?

3. How did you learn to market Northwest coast materials?

4. Whose work do you sell? How do you select the artists?

5. What medium(s) do you sell and why?

B. Role of art/craft (art/artefact) in the community.

1. What is the difference between art and craft?

2. Do you sell mostly to the Native community or to outsiders?

3. Who are the artists you most admire and why?

4. What makes an artist/crafts person’s work traditional? What makes it innovative? Is this innovation appropriate or right? Why?

C. The role of the market

1. What role do you as the gallery owner play in marketing an artist’s work?

2. Do you feel responsible in helping a young artist improve their work? What do you do to help?
3. Should artists/crafts people form a co-op or have the tribal council become involved in helping you sell your work?

4. What do you think about the items produced by non-native artist/crafts people?

5. What is the role of the museum in relation to your work and to that of other galleries selling Northwest coast work?

Identifying the Interview Sample

Research surveys are usually administered to a defined population sample that has been identified according to certain characteristics of age, gender, income or place of residence. Unfortunately, Northwest Coast craft producers do not readily fall within such easily identifiable categories. For example:

Age – Craft producers of all ages have been able to find a successful niche in the market. Young artists often take advantage of family connections. A growing number of older people are producing art and craft as a second or third career following the recent decline in the local fishing and forestry economies.

Gender - Men and women are both involved in craft production. Women are mainly engaged in weaving, sewing or knitting. Men work more often as carvers in wood, stone or precious metals, and as print makers. However, these realms are not exclusive to either gender.

Tribal affiliation – Some crafts people identify themselves as a member of one particular Native nation, but many others feel they are members of two or more cultural groups. Intermarriage has been a long-standing tradition on the Northwest coast. In the past, high-ranking families used marriage as a way to forge political and economic alliances with their neighbours. Marriage outside the Native community began with the arrival of European traders and settlers.

Residence – A respondent’s place of residence as an identifying characteristic has limited value. People move easily between urban and rural areas, and between cities. Some artists maintain residences in the city as well as on their reserve. They travel frequently between the two locations on business, to attend school or to visit family and friends. Artists living in remote communities have strong links to the larger markets in Vancouver, Victoria or Alaska. They often sell their work through family members living in the urban centres, advertise on the web, or wait for the dealers who travel regularly throughout British Columbia.

Media – Northwest Coast crafts people rarely limit themselves to one medium of production. In response to interview questions they say they enjoy the challenges of working with different materials.
This thesis is an analysis of historic as well as contemporary Northwest Coast arts and crafts. Appropriate individuals to include in the interview sample are those people who clearly reflect the characteristics of producing artists and craftsmen in the historic records. These earlier producers would have had:

a) family and social connections to the traditional community
b) a significant level of production so that they could participate in the market economy
c) established marketing networks

The interview sample thus focused on contemporary individuals who reflect the above characteristics. Interviews were requested with crafts people (living in the cities or on reserve), who have family and/or social connections to traditional cultural life. The interview sample was also limited to those crafts people who are producing and marketing sufficiently to occupy them full, or almost full time. However, it excluded artist/crafts people who participate primarily in the international art gallery market, and craft producers who have just started to work in the field, or who are marginal to the craft market.

To locate these individuals the sampling technique known as ‘snowballing’ was employed. “In snowball sampling you locate one or more key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates for your research” (Bernard 1994:97). The Northwest Coast community of carvers, jewellers and other crafts people is relatively small. Many of them are members of extended families. Others have apprenticed together or worked on major projects such as building feast houses or carving totem poles. Crafts men and women constantly travel to potlatches and feasts, where the work of other crafts people are displayed or distributed. A representative sample was obtained by questioning individuals who fit the interview characteristics for the names of crafts people like themselves.

Identifying the marketing population interview sample has been relatively simple. Telephone directories in Victoria and Vancouver provided names and addresses of stores and shops. Moreover, well-established stores usually have extensive web sites that provided further information. Electronic links from one web site to another led to information on retail stores, (real or virtual), selling Native Northwest Coast objects throughout the Province. Whenever possible, retail stores were visited.
Seasonal arts and crafts fairs also provided access to peripatetic members of the Northwest Coast marketplace.

Permissions
Precise procedures were carried out to ensure ethical recording and informed consent for my use of the information. Individuals approached for interviews were told the nature, history and intent of the project as well as an explanation of the taping and transcription procedures. A standardised permission form was shown and explained at the beginning of the interview. The questions and the interview process were discussed prior to the questioning. During taping, the interviewee could request that the recording be discontinued and resumed at any time. At the end of the interview, the conversation was reviewed. The interviewee was asked if he or she was comfortable with the questions and answers. The permission form was then completed and signed. A copy of the tape, its transcription and copies of photographs taken during the session were later sent to the participant along with a letter summarising the information as to the project’s purpose and intent. When appropriate, the original material is to be deposited in the Canadian Museum of Civilisation’s archives for purposes indicated on the permission form. If the participant requested that the conversation be edited, a transcript of the interview and a copy of the tape were returned to that individual for review and possible revision. In such cases, only the edited transcript would be deposited in the archives to be used as indicated on the permission form.

When interviews were conducted on reserve lands, the history and intent of my research was also presented to the appropriate community representative (a chief, a councillor or the cultural officer). The representative was then asked how the community wished to be involved and also to suggest names of local crafts people. Occasionally, the cultural officer provided initial introductions or joined the interview session. When the interviewee gave permission, and, when requested by the cultural officer, copies of the tapes were deposited at the band office.

Informants responded to the above permission process in several ways. The majority signed the consent form without any restrictions. Three interviewees asked to edit
the transcript before the manuscript is deposited in the archives. On some occasions, these recordings included personal, painful memories. In other recordings, the respondent made negative comments about another person. Only one respondent, after reading the transcript, rescinded permission for depositing the information in the museum archives, but has allowed the information to be used for this thesis.

The Fieldwork Setting

“The idea that ‘a culture’ is naturally the property of a spatially localized people and that the way to study such a culture is to go ‘there’ (‘among the so and so’) has long been part of the unremarked common sense of anthropological practice. Yet, once questioned, this anthropological convention dissolves into a series of challenging and important issues about the contested relations between difference, identity and place” (Gupta and Ferguson 1999:3).

“For the human sciences, the main threat posed by the discourse of globalization is the possibility of phenomena too large, too quick, too all-encompassing to succumb to our gaze” (Appadurai 1997:115).

One difficulty in defining the thesis topic and the interview sample has been the question of fieldwork ‘locale’. Contemporary crafts people may live simultaneously within several cultures. They move about frequently, and easily, between Native and non-Native communities, between reserve and urban centres and also between Native and non-Native markets. Thus the fieldwork methodology employed in this study could not conform to the traditional anthropological practice of living for a year or more in a remote community. The world of the craft person, the specific locale for my fieldwork, was found in a combination of studio, community, and marketplace throughout British Columbia. Research time was spent largely in people’s homes and studios, on and off reserve land, as well as in galleries, craft fairs and shops. Opportunities also existed for informal observations of activities, relationships and interactions among Native crafts people and their community, and between crafts people and their clients. Occasionally, informal interviews were conducted in these environments with crafts people and marketers.

The snowball technique of semistructured interviews created a fieldwork environment that was not grounded in a specific physical space, such as one reserve or one urban friendship centre. Rather, it was a social network that crafts people and
marketers inhabit by creating special relationships with each other, their community and the market place. Identifying the total number of people who occupy this unique social space has been difficult. Although several directories of artists and crafts people have been compiled, they usually focus only on one community. The craft producing population also fluctuates from year to year as the British Columbia economy grows or wanes, and the tourist and art market rise and fall. New crafts people take up weaving, basketry and carving by attending classes or workshops. Others stop their artwork because of new employment opportunities, family responsibilities, illness or other life events. A database, established for this research project, contains the names of seven hundred well known historic and contemporary producers. One store claims to represent a thousand Native artists. There may actually be several thousand Northwest Coast artists and crafts people who are currently active in the market, but who have varying degrees of financial success.

Recorded Interviews

“To begin with, the field is produced (not discovered) through the social transactions engaged in by the ethnographer. The boundaries of the field are not “given”. They are the outcome of what the ethnographer may encompass in his or her gaze; what he or she may negotiate with hosts and informants; and what the ethnographer omits and overlooks as much as what he or she observes” (Atkinson 1992:9).

Formal, semistructured interviews (using the guide established for this research project) began in the Fall of 1999. By March 2002, forty-five interviews had been recorded with producing artists and crafts people and with marketers of Native Northwest Coast handmade objects. Occasionally these two populations overlapped. For example, several Native craft people own stores or use their studio space to sell their work and that of relatives or friends. Native craft producers also sometimes participate in or manage other marketing venues such as Web sites, booths at craft shows, or sell their work at popular tourist sites.

Initiating contact with Native crafts people was not difficult. Individuals working in the marketing sector generously provided names of craftsmen and women. Crafts people demonstrating traditional techniques in stores, carving sheds and museums were also approached for interviews. People selling their wares at craft fairs were
often willing to continue the conversations in a more formal interview process. Contacts were made through attendance at feasts, treaty discussions and other curatorial activities on the Northwest Coast. Native-owned stores and studios open to the public, on and off reserve, occasionally provided a starting point for building the interview sample. At the end of each interview, names were requested of other contacts. The informant’s suggestions rarely duplicated those given by other people.

Of the forty-five recorded interviews, seven were ‘preliminary’ or test interviews, which established some guidelines. The remaining thirty-eight interviews were guided by the interview questions and the “snowball” sample process. The majority of the interviews took place in Vancouver, Victoria, on Victoria Island or in Ottawa.

The interview guide was useful in several ways. Respondents, who were not accustomed to this particular type of interview process, occasionally requested more information about the topics to be covered. The list of questions could then be reviewed and discussed before the taping began. Occasionally the respondents had prior experience as interviewees. Many had been questioned by journalists preparing newspaper articles or by students researching thesis topics at the local universities. Some interviewees had worked as demonstrators in public venues and were accustomed to answering questions from visitors. In these circumstances the informant often began to control the interview process, answering my questions with stories and explanations that he/she has given many times before. The guide sheet provided a review list to ensure that by the end of the taping all of the research questions had been discussed.

The guide was also a useful reminder of the main points of the research question. Even when the questions all appeared to have been answered at the end of the interview, the free-flowing conversations could create problems. Occasionally answers to some of the questions were scattered throughout the interview. Some information might be presented in depth, whereas other responses were answered briefly. Gauging the quality of the responses during the conversation itself was sometimes difficult. The interview guide was a tool to keep the discussion focussed.
Early in the interview process, the guide was changed by the addition of one more question - “Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to add?” Some informants took this opportunity to add a more personal statement, such as the role of spirituality. Others made broad political statements about the importance of land claims and treaties, or the relationship of creating objects and the revitalisation of the culture.

The Interview Sample

Producers

Of the forty-five taped interviews, thirty-three were with Native crafts people who were selected because they fit the profile needed for the interview sample. All of these crafts people were full-time producers who have family and social connections to the traditional community. They all have a significant level of production, which enables them to participate in the market economy. They have established, or are quickly establishing, marketing networks. Although a few respondents sell some of their work through galleries or have received important commissions, they are not among the recognized elite of Northwest Coast artists.  

The interviewed population is presented in the following section according to gender, tribal affiliation and medium of production for two reasons: first to confirm the appropriateness of the sampling process; secondly to gain a better understanding of the data obtained from the interviews. For example, does the sample provide a balanced and broad range of interviews? Are men and women respondents equally well represented? What proportion of tribal affiliations is represented in the sample?  

Gender – The interview population consisted of eighteen men and fifteen women. It is difficult to judge if this proportion correctly represents the gender composition of the contemporary craft producing population. A database compiled from published

---

8 I define Northwest Coast artists as members of the elite if they have a well-established international reputation, have their work in major museum collections and sold mainly in the internationally recognised galleries. The work of these artists is viewed as investments because of a growing secondary market. These people would include Robert Davidson, Jim Hart, the senior members of the Hunt family
information on Northwest Coast artists for this research project contains some 500 male crafts people and less than 200 female. However that database reflects information published primarily during the past twenty years. During this time period, emphasis was placed on promoting the names of carvers, printmakers and jewellers, which are predominately male occupations. Knitters, sewers, weavers and basket makers continue to be treated as anonymous crafts people whose work has not been identified in publications or scholarly research. To determine the precise proportion of male versus female producers would require a separate study.

Tribal Affiliation and Location – Craft work is produced in almost every Northwest Coast Native community. However, the major centres for art and craft production are Vancouver, Victoria, Vancouver Island and the small islands off the coast of Vancouver Island. The urban and commercial opportunities in these areas attract members of every tribal group. People come to attend school, find employment and join family members. Because Vancouver Island and the larger cities are on or near the traditional territory of the Kwagiulth and Coast Salish Nations these populations dominate the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Sample by Tribal Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coast Salish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwagiult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsimshian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuu-chah-nulth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillooet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlingit/Teslin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of Craft – Some crafts people work in different media over time. Carvers often begin with a strong background in two-dimensional design. This skill lends itself to a wide range of media surfaces, from the more expensive painted drums and prints, to the mass-produced t-shirts and greeting cards. It is thus difficult to classify them into and people who worked with Bill Reid such as Doug Cranmer. A number of the interviewees in this project may become, and certainly aspire, to join this elite circle.
one category of craft medium. Other crafts people, e.g. basket makers, knitters, weavers, and people with specialised interests such as pottery, tend to stay within one craft medium and produce objects only for a single niche in the commercial market.

Table 2: Sample by Primary Craft Medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft Medium</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carving</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketry</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printmaker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Seller
The marketing sample chosen for this research project has not depended entirely upon the “snowball” interview technique. Information on store locations was generally easily accessible. It is useful, however, to review the various types of marketing outlets included in the sample to ensure that a range of venues is represented.

General information on some thirty galleries and stores has been recorded in a working database. There are, in addition, three printing companies in British Columbia producing art cards, prints and posters based on the work of Northwest Coast artists. The majority of these businesses are centred in Vancouver, Victoria and in the larger urban areas on Vancouver Island. I have divided these outlets for Northwest Coast handmade objects into six categories - galleries, museum shops, tourist shops, Native-owned shops and studios, printing companies and finally itinerant sellers.

Galleries – The cities of Vancouver and Victoria have large, fairly wealthy populations that support a number of fine art galleries. Several of these specialise in Northwest Coast and Inuit art. Two Northwest Coast galleries in Victoria and four in Vancouver follow the art museum style. Large, dramatic masks and carvings hang on
white walls surrounded by empty space. Smaller objects of silver or argillite are shown in museum-like glass cases. Information on the maker, his/her tribal affiliation (and occasionally the price), is printed on labels attached to the wall. Stock sold in such galleries is usually priced higher than $1000. Lower cost items such as prints, jewellery or basketry are rarely stocked. There is also a small selection of books for sale, mostly museum publications, discreetly displayed nearby.

Museum shops and Tourist stores – These two types of outlets represent a continuum of marketing opportunities. Their clientele is very similar, and consist mainly of tourists, ‘small-time’ collectors and customers buying gifts. Although the walls may display a number of handmade objects of considerable size and value, the majority of the objects displayed are minor items ranging from a price of $1000 in the finer shops to less than $100 in stores catering to the tourist market. These stores often carry inexpensive, mass-produced items, such as tea towels or plastic totem poles from Japan or Asia. The large mark-up on such objects helps to sustain the owner’s profit margin. A limited number of stores specialise in promoting a single type of handmade object. In Victoria, in particular, certain shops have long-standing relationships with Salish knitters. Another type of a speciality shop is the jewellery store that provides space for both Northwest Coast style jewellery, as well as for non-Native designs.

Native-owned stores – These shops generally exhibit a range of gallery and tourist items. Of the five shops identified in this research category, two are supported by economic development programs on the reserves. Another shop is privately owned and is operated on one of the reserves. Two others are tourist shops in a small community on Vancouver Island.

Native studio/shops are usually smaller businesses. They display mainly the work of the owner/crafts person along with some objects by family members or friends. The crafts person rarely invests in mass-produced material such as tea towels or note cards. It is a place primarily for buyers to view a range of the crafts person’s work and to discuss possible commissions. A common order is for a pair of matching wedding rings or a small totem pole to commemorate a family anniversary or birthday. Such shops are typically attached to the artist’s studio or home, and are
often somewhat inaccessible to the general tourist. The overhead cost is low and the clientele is often knowledgeable as to the Northwest Coast art style. Buyers seeking original, hand crafted works are generally willing to pay a substantial amount of money to obtain the desired object.

Several printing companies produce note cards and small prints based on Northwest Coast designs. An image is usually commissioned from the artist who receives a royalty consisting of a percentage of the total sales. One well-established printing shop/studio will undertake silk-screening for the Native printmaker. Instead of charging for this service, the owner reserves a number of prints to sell in his own gallery. The artist may also leave his or her prints on commission.

The itinerant seller follows a network of seasonal craft fairs, rodeos, canoe races, and other events where large crowds gather. At each venue he or she rents a table or booth to sell during a weekend or week. Many of those participating in such activities are the Native crafts people themselves. However, I interviewed one non-Native merchant who keeps his stock at home and moves within the province according to a well-established cycle of craft fairs and sales on university campuses. His wares are generally priced less than $100 and appeal to people looking for something different, but inexpensive.

I conducted fifteen formal interviews, thirteen of which were taped. There were also informal discussions with shop owners and managers throughout the research period. The taped interviews included four Native marketers who had shops attached to their workshop areas. The remaining interviews were with non-Native informants including three gallery owners/workers, one museum shop buyer, two owners of relatively expensive tourist shops and one with less expensive objects for sale, a printer/studio owner and an itinerant seller.
Table 3: Taped Interviews – Dealers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallery</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist shop</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum shop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The methodologies described above provided appropriate and adequate information for the research question. Archival searches in public collections revealed documentation about an important period of activity in the development of Aboriginal arts and crafts on the Northwest Coast. Much of this information has not been previously published.

The methodology used to acquire information on the contemporary Native producer and the marketplace provided relevant interviews. The “snowball” technique produced sample of respondents within the anticipated fieldwork environment. By talking to men as well as women interviewees, I obtained a range of craft media and experiences in the marketplace. Although published information on crafts people is usually weighted more heavily toward male producers, the level of female participation in these interviews was higher than usual. Such interviews may help to fill the gaps in existing data related to craft producers and dealers. It may also suggest areas for further research.
Chapter Three - The Northwest Coast

Today’s consumers of carved totem poles, masks, rattles, and weavings, as well as those buying less expensive items such as tea towels, coasters, and postcards with Northwest Coast imagery, are all helping to preserve and validate a particular cultural heritage. The Native craftspeople producing these items draw upon a social and cultural framework that has developed for thousands of years. Thus the analysis of the production of Northwest Coast arts and crafts must begin with an overview of the archaeological and historical roots of this particular community.

The present chapter has three main sections, the first of which briefly reviews the sources of Northwest Coast anthropological information. The oral history, pictographs and material culture of these communities comprise important records of Aboriginal history and cultural activities. Written documentation by European observers began in the late eighteenth century with the arrival of Spanish, Russian and British explorers on the Pacific coast. The acquisition of ‘artificial curiosities’ started with the first European contacts, and by the late nineteenth century, museums were competing for ethnographic artefacts. Anthropological research was undertaken by Franz Boas, the “father” of American Anthropology in 1886. Such research has continued unabated, and for more than a hundred years, the Northwest Coastal has served as a fieldwork laboratory for academics and their students.

The second section is an ethnographic overview of Northwest Coast cultural groups. The extraordinary wealth of resources in this temperate environment created a complex hunting and gathering society. Archaeological excavations have provided many answers to questions regarding the history of human habitation, the introduction of new technologies, and the origin of social stratification. Ethnographic information has often focused on the role of slavery in a hunting society, the economic importance of the potlatch, and the psychological nature of Northwest Coast competition. A brief summary of the archaeological findings, social organisation and traditional material culture will be presented here.
The final section provides a short history of the early contact period with Europeans and the resultant effects on Native communities along the British Columbia Coast. The Pacific coast was claimed by Spanish explorers who moved northward from California, and by Russian traders travelling south from Alaska. However, it was the British explorers and the British and American fur traders who would eventually dominate the area. The resulting colonisation of the Native population continues to have major implications for contemporary society as Northwest Coast groups currently seek justice for land claims and self-government in the courts and through treaty discussions.

Background to Northwest Coast Culture Studies

The geographic and historical aspects of Canada’s Northwest Coast have been intensively studied and extensively documented. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, explorers and ships captains recorded information concerning the coastline and the people living there (Ledyard 1963). Artists sketched portraits and drew images of the villages, houses, clothing and material culture (Henry 1984). Traders recorded encounters with their Native clientele (Howay 1941; Mortimer 1791; Malloy 2000). A prisoner described the nature and circumstances of his captivity among the Nuu-chah-nulth (Jewitt 1849). In the nineteenth century, missionaries published texts to inform their Christian supporters about the life of the “savage” and the Church’s efforts to “civilise” them (Collison 1915; Sproat 1868). Ethnographic reports began to be published during this time period (Swan 1870; Niblack 1888; Boas 1887). Books and articles appeared in professional as well as popular journals. A myriad of Master and PhD theses have explored every aspect of Northwest Coast archaeological, ethnographic, historical and contemporary life.

There are many reasons for this extensive research activity. Some may be perhaps as complex as the historical development of anthropology itself. Others might be simply a researcher’s preference for a British Columbian lifestyle that includes close proximity to sailing and skiing. The following sections describe briefly three factors which encouraged studies on the development of Northwest Coast: the ready availability of the material culture; the easy accessibility of the community; and fascination with the complexity of the culture.
Availability of material culture
Northwest Coast ethnographic material began to flow into European cabinets of curiosities late in the eighteenth century (Cole 1985; King 1981; 1999). These early exchanges of material culture grew as Native people living along the coast eagerly entered into trading relationships and employment with European, Russian and American fur traders, sea otter hunters and whalers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the initial stream of objects became a flood as museums, (particularly in Germany and the United States), began to build their ethnographic collections. It is estimated that some 500,000 Northwest Coast artefacts are currently held in museums in various part of the world (Ames 1999:219; Cole 1985). These objects are an important resource of images for contemporary producers and a valuable reference for dealers and collectors.

The artefacts, and the people who made them, attracted important anthropologists to engage in Northwest Coast research. The performances of Bella Coola dancers in Germany attracted the attention of Franz Boas (Jacknis 2002:23). His relatively short periods of fieldwork among the Kwagiulth, the Bella Coola and other tribal groups resulted in extensive publications. When not active in the field, Boas continued to collect ethnographic information by using assistants such as Henry Hunt and James Teit. He also encouraged other researchers, students and colleagues, including Edward Sapir and Harlan Smith, to conduct linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork. In 1900 Boas persuaded the benefactors of the American Museum of Natural History to provide funds for the Jesup Expedition to research hunting cultures along the northern Pacific Rim. Such research work continues to the present day. The American Museum of Natural History recently revisited the contributions of the Jesup expedition with a new series of scholarly papers. Important exhibits, such as the tri-national exhibition, Crossroads of Continents (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988), drew from similar early Russian, American and Canadian collections and publications of ethnographic research.
Accessibility of the community
A second explanation for the research attention on the Northwest Coast is the relative accessibility of the traditional community. Beginning with the late 18th century, these communities have been in steady contact with Euro-American traders, missionaries and administrators. European and Native interaction continued throughout the mid-19th century, as settlements were frequently established near reserves. Native people also found seasonal employment in the White-owned mines, fish canneries and ranches. Anthropological fieldwork was relatively easy to initiate through contact with Indian agents, administrators, teachers, traders, and missionaries. Although some village sites were geographically remote or were difficult to access, (some still are). Native people in the community appear to have been remarkably agreeable to participation in academic investigations.

Complexity of the culture
Despite the long period of European contact, the disruption of traditional culture by colonial practices, and the diminution of languages, some Native people have tenaciously maintained their oral histories, cultural memories, and ritual activities. As a result, Northwest Coast has been a fertile research ground for anthropologists. In a relatively small geographical area linguists can record a variety of language families and local dialects. Ethnologists continue to unravel patterns of both matrilineal and bilateral kinship systems overlaid by clans, phratries and moieties. Researchers could pursue questions of both continuity and change in small Aboriginal societies. Studies focusing on the origin and purpose of potlatching have, in itself, produced a sizeable body of literature (Michaelson 1985; Rosman and Rubel 1971). Many of these publications, from the study by Ruth Benedict on personality types (Benedict 1934), to recent books on the effect of the potlatch law (Cole and Chaikin 1992), reflect changes in the anthropological paradigm during the past century. The Northwest Coast has provided information on the role of slavery (Donald 1997), the effect of missionary activity, and the contemporary relationship between Aboriginal people and the non-Native population of Canada. Ethnographers have published studies in the form of biographies (Blackman 1982) or assisted in the production of autobiographies (Assu 1989; Kirkness 1994). A somewhat separate.
but extensive literature exists on Northwest Coast art written by art historians and museum curators (Brown 1998; Holm 1970; MacDonald 1996; Wright 2001).

**An Ethnographic Overview**

The challenge of this section is to summarise some 2000 km of coastline and some 5000 years of history in a few pages. The story is seamless, with archaeological, ethnographic and historic data flowing into each other. The narrative begins with a description of the physical setting.

**Environment**

Writers introducing the Northwest Coast are often faced with a dilemma - how to represent the region on a map. Until the late 1970s, the Pacific coast was generally portrayed from the European perspective as the most western point of land in Canada. Maps showed the Northwest Coast stretching from southern Alaska, along the British Columbia shore, through Washington and Oregon to California. Recently, scholars have shifted this north-south orientation to create an innovative map turned sideways so that the sea became the focal point. (see Appendix 2). As Ames and Maschner notes:

“We can see the ocean as the substance, and the land as the void, as in a good navigational chart... Taking this ... perspective makes good sense at the beginning of a book on the archaeology and history of the Native people of the Northwest Coast. In their art, frequently it is the form of the voids defined by carved shapes that actually have substance, and in their oral traditions heroes must frequently go on journeys to the ocean floor, to negotiate with the chiefs of the sea creatures – salmon, sea mammals, and others - upon which they depended for food” (Ames and Maschner 1999:17).

Globalisation and increased Canadian and United States trade with Asia have also changed the perspective of the British Columbia coast. It has moved from a simple North American coastline to encompass the arch of the multinational Pacific Rim. Such recent changes in perspective have produced a new focus for the study of Northwest Coast archaeology and ethnography. Greater emphasis is now being given to several new concepts. Among them are the maritime nature of traditional culture, the historic associations with the communities across the Bering Strait, and the local
relationships of trade and warfare between communities living in close proximity along the coast.

Water is the predominate feature of the environment for the people occupying Canada’s northwest coastline during the past several thousand years. This element, in the form of ocean, rivers, or inland lakes, is considered to be the major determinate in their climate, food sources, patterns of settlement, transportation, and trading.

The Pacific Ocean is the most important body of water. Its currents, along with two semi-permanent atmospheric pressure cells, regulate the coastal temperatures. In the summer months, warm, dry air of the North Pacific High, with its clockwise wind pattern, reaches out over the cold waters of the Subarctic and Alaskan currents and helps to keep the temperature cool. In the winter the cold air of the Aleutian Low extends southward. Its counter-clockwise winds pass over the warm current flowing northward from California’s Baja coast. Although severe winter storms are a regular occurrence, the warmer water usually keeps the temperature above freezing. There is little snow or ice along the British Columbia coast, even though the winter rainfall is heavy.

Four major river systems flow from the mountains down to the British Columbia coast. The Fraser River flows from the central interior to the southern end of the province, and ends in a wide delta of mud flats. The Bella Coola is the main river on the central coast. The Nass and Skeena flow out of the northern interior. Two other major rivers, the Stikene and the Columbia are important sites for food resources and serve as trade routes. However, these rivers run primarily through areas not related to this study. Numerous smaller rivers and river systems traverse the western part of the province and are sources of fresh water fish and salmon spawning grounds for many Coastal groups.

Although emphasis is given to water, its counterpart, the land, also has an important role. Indeed, there may be as many stories of supernatural encounters in the forests as those about the sea. Heroes are said to meet with cannibals who transform into mosquitoes. People who foolishly insult goats will bring mountain tops tumbling
down onto their villages. In other tales, women marry bears and young men are saved by wood mice. Many of these stories continue to be carved, as characters for masks, as crests for poles and a sculpture.

Continuing with Ames and Maschner’s watery perspective, the first important land area is the continental shelf that moves up from the depths of the ocean to lie 200 to 650 feet below high water. The shelf is a coastal plain, which, in the southern part of the region, rises above the sea to provide occasional beaches of sand or gravel. Farther north the line between water and land ends abruptly where the Coastal Mountains emerge from the ocean to create fjords and inlets. In some areas the mountains rise directly out of the water, engendering spectacular waterfalls. In other areas the base of the mountain extends to include expansive areas of the coastal plain thus creating islands of significant size. The largest is Vancouver Island off the southern coast of British Columbia. A smaller chain of islands at the northern end of the coastal range includes the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii) and the Alexander Archipelago of Southeast Alaska. This line of large and small islands off the main coast of British Columbia create an inside passage which is protected from the violent winds and high seas that plague communities facing the Pacific Ocean.

The temperate climate and the heavy rainfall in this area of the Pacific Coast create a rain forest of spruce, fir, hemlock, and cedar over most of the coastal area. Variations in local terrain, such as swamp or lake areas, along with microclimates and the effects of human habitation often produce differing zones of vegetation. Although evergreen trees dominate, stands of maple, willow, alder, and cottonwood also grow in coastal forests. The ground and trees in this area are covered with lichens, fungi, mosses, and ferns making these woods difficult to traverse. The presence of some forty different types of fruits indicates the wealth and range of plant life. The ethnobotanist Nancy Turner has described the diversity of plant life, and the practical uses of which barks, stems and roots by Native people.

“From woods they have carved implements, containers and canoes, built houses and shelters, and fuelled fires for heating homes and for cooking and smoking foods. They have used sheets of bark to make containers and canoes, for lining underground food caches, and as roofing. With bark, stem, leaf and root fibres they have made twine, ropes, fishing lines and nets, baskets, bags, mats and clothing. They have also used plants and plant
products as bedding and floor coverings, as lining for berry baskets, drying racks and steaming pits, to make storage vessels, water conductors, and Soapberry beaters, as herring-spawner collectors, infant diapers, abrasives and tinder to start fires, for dressing wounds, and to make paints, dyes, tanning agents, glues, animal poisons, insect repellents, scents, soaps and cleansing agents, decorations, and toys” (Turner 1998:29).

The ocean currents and temperate climate in this area create an ideal environment for fish and wildlife. Plankton, thriving in the waters off the British Columbia coast, supports a long and complex food chain. Whales migrate to northern waters along the coast. Halibut, herring, and especially salmon were (until recently) plentiful in these waters. Seals, sea lions, and sea otters breed on rocky outcroppings and in kelp beds just off shore. The beaches and inter-tidal zones support shellfish, octopus, and a wide variety of marine life ranging from sea cucumbers to starfish. Different species of waterfowl have seasonal migratory routes along the coast. Other seabirds nest in large colonies on rocky shorelines. A variety of fresh water fish live in the rivers and inland lakes, and large runs of eulachon (smelt) appear in selected rivers along the coast. Caribou were once found as far south as central British Columbia, and several species of deer, elk and moose are still present. Mountain sheep and goats live on the higher peaks, and black and grizzly bear and several species of hunting cats roam the forests.

The Human Presence

Native oral histories record that the first inhabitants on the Northwest Coast emerged either from a clamshell opened by a curious raven, or descended by ladders from a great house in the upper world. Through a series of encounters with supernatural beings, particularly with Raven, these ancestral beings learned how to survive and relate to the surrounding world.

Archaeological evidence of human habitation on the Northwest Coast has been radiocarbon dated to about 10,000 years ago. This time period occurs after the last major period of glaciation in the Canadian Coast range that was 18,000 to 16,000 years ago. The warming process began 14,000 years ago and was followed 2000 years later by the melting of ice from the coastline. By 9,500 years ago, the ice cape had retreated to the coastal mountains gradually disappearing in the subsequent 2000 to 3000 years.
Although the data on early human presence are sparse, Carlson suggests that the
Northwest Coast was inhabited at the end of the last glaciation by several different
groups of people. He identifies these as the “Fluted Point tradition, the Stemmed
Point tradition, the Pebble Tool tradition, and the Microblade tradition” (Carlson
1990:68). Two of these nomadic groups, the Fluted and Stemmed Point traditions,
migrated from the interior of North America along the Columbia River between
8,000 to 9,000 BC. These groups may have descended from people who had earlier
crossed the Bering Strait and moved down an ice-free corridor from the interior of
Alaska onto the continents of North and South America. Two other groups, the
Pebble Tool and Microblade traditions appeared almost a thousand years later. These
people may have travelled in a reverse pattern, coming down the coastline from
Alaska and then spreading into the interior along the river valleys. This travelling
pattern suggests that the coastal inhabitants adapted maritime skills to river
environments; the exact opposite pattern of the interior Palaeolithic Indians who
adopted inland hunting and fishing skills to a maritime ecology. A third hypothesis
put forward by Fladmark suggests that early inhabitants arrived by boat from
Beringia (Matson 1995:62). All of these theories remain uncertain as archaeologists
continue to sift the data and look for new excavation sites. Since this paper is
concerned primarily with simply describing the population in the area, and
archaeologists generally agree on the time, if not how the settlement occurred,
further discussion is not needed here. In general however,

“The evidence…suggests to us that the region’s first people possessed a
flexible technology and a set of skills that allowed them to exploit a wide
range of environments, but particularly wet environments from lakes to sea
shores. By the time the archaeological record opens and we can get a glimpse
of the entire region of Cascadia (the area including BC, Alaska and
Washington and Oregon), it is occupied by hunter-gatherers sharing the same
food-getting equipment, at least in the south” (Ames and Maschner 1999:86).

The time period between 10,500 BC to 4400 BC is called the Archaic by Ames and
Maschner (1999). It represents the span between the late Pleistocene and the period
when archaeological evidence indicates the emergence of what is now considered
Northwest Coast hunting/gathering culture. Ames and Maschner identify a second
period, called the Pacific, which began around 3500 and continues into the historic
era. The Pacific period is divided into three phases: the early Pacific (4400 to 1800

63
BC); the Middle Pacific (1800 BC to AD 200/500); and the Late Pacific AD (200/500 to c. AD 1775). Information on this period is based on several well-documented sites with great time depth, one at Prince Rupert and another at Namu. The Pacific period is when “the coast’s peoples became complex hunter-gatherers, settled into large villages, became socially stratified, and developed their famous art style” (Ames and Maschner 1999:87). These key characteristics are elements in traditional Northwest Coast culture that have persisted into the ethnographic record. To some extent they continue to affect contemporary Northwest Coast communities and the production of Northwest Coast art and crafts. In this paper, a general overview of Northwest Coast culture will be presented and regional variations will be noted as required.

Northwest Coast Ethnography
For ethnographic purposes, the Northwest Coast region is usually divided into three areas. The northern communities from Alaska to the central coast include the Tlingit, the Haida, and the Tsimshian (comprised of the Coastal Tsimshian, Nisga’a and Gitksan). The central coast extends mid-way down Vancouver Island to encompass the Haisla, Heitsulk (Bella Bella), Nuxalk (Bella Coola), and Kwakiutl. The southern region extends from the lower half of Vancouver Island and the British Columbia coast into Washington State. These divisions are largely based on different language families, social organisation and art styles.

Language
Linguists have noted that the Northwest Coast communities spoke some 45 to 54 distinct languages, representing some 13 language families (the majority of these are found south of the British Columbia border). In British Columbia there are five main language families. Some of these, like the Tlingit and Haida, have a few regional dialects. Haida, for example, has only two, one each in the surviving villages of Masset and Skidegate. The other language families have subdivisions containing two or more languages some of which have further distinctions of regional or village dialects. Such subdivisions reflect traditional village sites and contemporary reserves. Table one shows the languages of interest to this thesis.
Table 4: Languages in British Columbia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phylum/Branch</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tlingit isolate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haida isolate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsimshian</td>
<td>Nass-Gitksan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coast Tsimshian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakashan</td>
<td>Heiltsuk-Oowekyala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kwakiutl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nootkan</td>
<td>Nootka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nitinaht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Makah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salishan</td>
<td>Bella Coola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Salish</td>
<td>Comox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pentlatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sechelt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Squamish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Halkomelem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nooksak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Straits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Thompson and Kinkade (1990:34-35)

Complex Hunters and Gatherers

Northwest Coast culture appeared to have had an enormous wealth of available resources. The ocean was seen as capable of being harvested in much the same way that agricultural peoples harvested seasonal crops. Anthropologists were encouraged in this perception by the large number and variety of fishhooks, nets, clubs, and other hunting tools found in museum collections. Ethnographic records and archaeological sites documented the exploitation of offshore, near-shore, and beach environments. Hunting parties, using large canoes from the west coast of Vancouver Island, killed whales with shell-point harpoons, cedar bark ropes, and sealskin floats. In areas closer to shore along the continental shelf, fishermen caught halibut from the ocean floor with cleverly designed v-shaped fishhooks made by pairing buoyant cedar and heavy alder. The carved charms on the hook and float were thought to protect the fisherman in his canoe from these enormous fish that could weigh as much as 800 pounds. Elegantly curved black cod hooks were steamed and bent with a bone barb lashed into place. Herrings were raked up from the sea’s surface using 14-foot poles with short prongs set into one end. Hunters in small canoes, using specially designed
paddles, silently glided up to sea lions and seals sleeping on rocky outcrops, killing them with bows and arrows. Sea otters swimming in kelp beds were killed for their fur and flesh. Fish were trapped behind weirs at high tides, caught in stinging-nettle nets, scooped from the river with dip nets, or impaled with gaffs and spears. The variety of food obtained from these rich environments was matched only by the diversity and inventiveness of the technology that was used. An indication of the wealth of on-shore resources was found in archaeological excavations of shell middens that covered “many thousands of square meters and [were] several meters thick” (Ames and Maschner 1999:89). Their presence suggests the importance of the gathering component of this hunting/gathering society. Molluscs were only a small portion of the foods available on the beach and at intertidal zones. Ethnographic data included recipes for the preparation of sea cucumbers, anemones, crabs, seaweed and a seasonal, but vast amount of fish roe deposited on kelp.

Much of this food was gathered seasonally. In the winter months most communities stayed at their village sites consuming the food gathered during the previous year. Hunting and ocean-going activities were curtailed during this stormy season. Winter was the season for feasting, ceremonial activities, and the acknowledgement of new chiefs, confirmation of family status, and the formation of new alliances through marriage. Food gathering activities began anew in late winter or early spring. The seasonal migration might include 2 to 5 different sites in a circuit ranging from 8 to 450 km depending on the region (Mitchell and Donald 1988:310).

In her study of the Tlingit, De Laguna details a typical annual cycle. This began in the early spring with the hunting of bear, marten, mink and beaver and the fishing of halibut in deep waters on the continental shelf. Shellfish and seaweed were gathered on the beach. Eulachon, a small oily fish was caught at certain streams. Its oil was rendered through a process of rotting and boiling and then stored for later

---

9 Wessen’s studies at Ozette indicate that, despite the mounds of shells found at certain archaeological sites, molluscs were neither the major source of protein, nor the food used to stave off starvation during the winter. “Although their high predictability and year-round availability make shellfish a dependable buffer against starvation, it is unlikely that their use was restricted to that circumstance. Rather,
consumption or trade. In late Spring, many people hunted sea otter or fur seal. In April hemlock boughs were placed in the water to collect the herring spawn. The first runs of several different types of salmon began in April and May, and from June to September the Tlingit devoted themselves to catching and curing salmon. They also picked and dried berries and collected other food and medicinal plants. Some people hunted harbour seals during the early part of the summer, dried the meat and rendered the oil. Summer was also a time for trading, raiding, and warfare. In the fall, men hunted sea otters and women dried and smoked the fish caught during the fall salmon runs. Some families went directly from the fishing sites to hunt mountain goat and sheep, deer and bear. This was the season when the animals were fattest, and their hides were in good condition for tanning. By mid-October many families had settled back at the winter village sites (De Laguna 1990:208).

Although the resources available to different Native groups varied, this semi-nomadic pattern was generally a common practice along the coast. Some groups had sufficient resources near their winter village so that they needed to travel only to two or three different resource sites. Others had to journey long distances to find eulachon rivers or salmon spawning sites. The food sources of nearby forests and marshy areas also varied according to local topography and climate.

Local food resources were often created or enhanced. Sections of forests were burned to clear areas to promote berry growth. Fish weirs could be quite extensive, requiring hundreds, or thousands, of stakes. The salmon or herring trapped behind these fences attracted other predators such as seals, birds, and other species of fish. Such animals were hunted or fished as well, thus creating a harvesting site of some complexity. “In this sense, people on the Northwest Coast manipulated their environment to modify or even create microenvironments, suitable for human use ... the history of fishing on the Northwest Coast is not a history of adding new fish species to the list of exploited fish, but of adding new environments in which the same fish could be taken” (Ames and Maschner 1999:117).

shellfish were likely a significant minor element in an economic structure that exploited a wide range of local resources” (Wessen 1988:203).
As described above, exploitation of food resources not only depended on location, but also changed over time. From an archaeological perspective, people migrated into new areas having various food resources. As technology developed, new foods could be hunted, gathered and preserved. Changes in the environment and in the sea level altered the access to food, particularly in tidal areas. The growth of Native population and cultural complexity in the Pacific Period, for example, could be related to newly available resources of salmon and shellfish. “Clearly, a local group’s annual round was a product of the distribution, both spatial and temporal, of the accessible resources” (Mitchell and Donald 1988:309).

This description of the overwhelming richness of Northwest Coast food sources has been challenged by Suttles (1987). He argued that the wealth of the rain coast flora and fauna, and the specialised technology, was not sufficient in itself to maintain the population living in the area. Although there was a wide variety of food and at times a considerable amount of it, its availability was severely restricted. Rather than the leisurely migration from spawning stream to breeding ground, represented in ethnographic accounts, Suttles provides a more restricted account of small windows of food-gathering opportunities. In his perspective, people needed to be precisely at the right place and the appropriate time. The locations for these varied resources covered many kilometres ranging from far out in the ocean, back to particular rivers, and on to areas set farther back into the mountains. The food resource, moreover, may have been available for only a few weeks. A sizeable population was also required to collect and process such large quantities of food, whether they were fish eggs, eulachon, or large land or sea mammals.

Food resources were at times unstable. Unseasonable variations in the weather could severely reduce the period of the fish spawning season, bird migrations, or the ripening of a berry crop. Long periods of stormy weather could cut off access to the ocean for halibut fishing or hunting sea mammals. Forest fires could destroy berry picking and plant food sites for one or more seasons. This annual variation in the amount of food along with seasonal limitations to access of food sometimes led to periods of hardship and starvation. Suttles argues that:
In general, my thesis is that while the habitat was undeniably rich, abundance did not exist the year round but only here and there and now and then. and that such temporary abundance – though they may well be a necessary condition for population density and cultural development of the sort seen on the Northwest Coast – are not sufficient to create them. Equally necessary conditions were the presence of good though limited food-getting techniques, food-storing techniques, a social system providing the organization for subsistence activities and permitting exchanges, and a value system that provided the motivation for getting food, storing food, and participating fully in the social system” (Suttles 1987:46).

Social Organisation

The social, economic and cultural system of the Northwest Coast Native population centred on the family. The nuclear family was part of a larger lineage group, which in turn, formed a system that included other families in a single village or in neighbouring villages having the same language. Neighbouring tribes often played an important role as trading partners, enemies in warfare, and as sources of slaves. Key values in the community centred on ownership of resource sites, status, rank and alliances. These values were often expressed by making public statements, holding potlatches, arranging marriages and ensuring the validation of inheritance.

Perhaps the most striking symbol of the Northwest Coast social group was the enormous cedar plank house. These lineage houses appeared during the middle Pacific Period (1800 BC to AD 200/500) and were found on all regions of the coast. Regarded as wonders of architectural engineering, these houses were on average 50 feet long by 30 to 50 feet wide. “Monster House”, the lineage house of Chief Wiah on Haida Gwaii, had three tiers of living space. They were made of post and beam construction with the four corner pillars supporting long roof rafters. The walls were thick planks of adzed cedar, and the roof was covered with overlapping shingles of cedar. Although the thick posts were set permanently into the ground, the wall planks were movable. When families travelled in the spring or summer to their fishing sites, the planks were secured between two canoes and the family possessions were loaded on the platform. On arrival at the site, the planks were then used for temporary housing.
The permanent winter houses could accommodate 60 or more members of a family. Households set up sleeping compartments on platforms along the sides. A fire in the centre of the house was shared for cooking. The family’s winter food supplies were stored along the roof beams where fish were dried and smoked by the cooking fires below. Bentwood boxes, watertight baskets and kelp bulbs contained eulachon and other fish oils, dried foods and materials for making tools and clothing. Carved chests held ceremonial regalia and family treasures.

Important lineage houses were given ceremonial names and the front facade was often painted with images representing family crests. Carved house posts supported the roof. The entranceway was sometimes through an opening in a carved pole. Totem poles and other memorial poles were sometimes as high as 30 to 50 feet. The carved imagery of the family crests announced the historic figures, mythical beings and alliances of the family living inside. MacDonald (1984) suggests that the house form itself, with its central hearth and smoke hole reflected the Northwest Coast cosmology of lower, middle and upper worlds. The house form was also symbolised in the patterns of woven ceremonial blankets, and at a later period, in button blankets. At important ceremonies people wrapped themselves in blankets symbolising the house in which they lived. Here they danced and feasted surrounded by their family, guests, and rivals within the context of the Northwest Coast world view (MacDonald 1988; MacDonald 1984).

The house represented a family’s lineage, the origin of which was traced back to a time when an ancestor encountered a supernatural being. The successful result of such a meeting not only provided the hero with rights to specific songs, dances, personal and family names, it also was a source of names for houses, canoes and coppers, along with crest images and ceremonial regalia. Lineage membership gave individuals the rights to fish at specific salmon spawning streams, and freshwater lakes. They could harvest certain stands of cedar, and gather food at specific berry picking sites, bird nesting areas and stretches of coastline that belong to the family (Blackman 1990:249; Codere 1990:366).

Membership in a family lineage was inherited matrilineally among the northern coastal groups and bilaterally on the south and central coast. Inheritance among the
Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian passed from uncle to nephew. Among the southern groups, wealth, names and property rights could pass from father to son or through daughters from father-in-law to son-in-law. Nuxalk children claimed inheritance from both sides of the family. “An individual could thus claim membership in as many as eight different descent groups. Although descent was traced ambilaterally, residence in the father’s village tended to reinforce bonds with the dominant descent group; and in time relationships to other descent groups through the mother, became lost” (Kennedy 1990:329).

Lineages, particularly among the northern tribes, were sometime grouped in clans. The Haida had two clans or moieties, i.e. Raven and Eagle. The clans were exogamous and members fulfilled ceremonial functions at funerals and feasts for their opposite clan. Early ethnographic information for the Tsimshian identified four clans: Killerwhale or Fireweed, Wolf, Eagle and Raven or Frog/Raven. More recent work has suggested that these clans functioned as moieties at the village level. Men and women were expected to marry outside their clan membership, and to fulfill ceremonial roles for members of the opposite clan. Moreover, important ceremonial and status objects, such as poles and canoes, were to be purchased from the paternal side (Halpin 1990:275).

In the central and southern groups, however, the clan system and the emphasis on exogamous marriage and clan reciprocity were less important. The Haisla and Heiltsuk had crest groups named Raven, Eagle Orca and Wolf, which “were the counterpart of the exogamous matrilineal clans of the tribes to the north. Their names were similar, and their existence no doubt made intermarriage more acceptable to the northerners. But they were neither rigidly exogamous or consistently matrilineal” (Hilton 1990:317). Among the Kwak’iutl, the tribal group was composed of one to seven numaym or lineages. At the time of European contact, there were approximately 26 tribal groups living in villages on Vancouver Island and on nearby smaller islands. By 1980 these tribal groups had been reduced to 12.
Rankings and Status

The people of the Northwest Coast have been depicted as being obsessed with rank and status. In her study of culture and personality Ruth Benedict (1934), chose the Northwest Coast as a prime example of the competitive type of primitive society. These cultural elements of inherited rights, status, and competition continue to be important in contemporary Northwest Coast culture. Carvers talk about the right to use particular crests, and families protect the right to sing particular songs. At public feasts protocols regarding the serving of food, the order of speakers and the distribution of gifts are followed.

Social status and differential ranking probably emerged at the same time period as the appearance of the plank house. Archaeologists attribute this change to the development of effective technologies to catch and preserve large quantities of salmon. The food surplus provided by annual salmon runs permitted hunters and gatherers to establish permanent or semipermanent dwellings.

“Surpluses in food and material goods also require someone to manage them and an exchange or trade system for their distribution. The step following mastery of preservation and storage was in all probability the development of specialists, individuals who did not have to spend all or most of their time participating in the food quest. Such individuals would then be free to put their energy into politics, religion, war, arts and crafts, or whatever was dictated as important by the society of which they were a part” (Carlson 1996:22).

Ethnographic studies identify three social classes on the Northwest Coast - nobles, commoners and slaves (Suttles 1987). A person’s rank was indicated symbolically by the use of crests, names and chiefly regalia. Status within the family was indicated by where a person slept within the house. Slaves and low ranking members of the family lived near the entranceway. The head of the family lineage had his sleeping platform along the back wall where it was warmer and less vulnerable to attack by warriors from neighbouring tribes. A visual ranking system was also apparent outside the house. In the village, houses were placed in rows along a beachfront or river edge. The most important families had centre stage, whereas less important lineage houses stretched off to either side. If there were a sufficient number of houses in the village to make two rows, the more important families lived closer to...
the beach. Villages were also ranked in order of importance with certain chiefs and families having precedence over others.

**European Contact**

The well-established social organisation among the people of the Native Northwest Coast began a period of rapid change after European ships sailed into coastal harbours. For thousands of years, Native people had been hunting and gathering local resources. Through alliances, and established patterns of raiding and defence they had developed living sites along the coast and inland along certain rivers. The culture had an intricate cosmology, a complex technology of food gathering, and a stratified social system. The art forms included decorated architecture, carved posts and several types of totem poles. Complex performances composed of songs and dances were illustrated with masks, rattles and costumes. In the hundred years following the arrival of the European traders, these systems of cosmology, social organisation and economy would be almost destroyed. However, elements of the culture and technology would survive; helped in part by their transformation into commodities. The skills of hunting and fishing were adapted to the fur trade, and, later to supply the canneries. Over time weavings, carving and paintings were sold as curios, artefacts, and as arts and crafts. Songs, dances and masked performances were marketed to the tourist trade, to folk festivals and more recently performed at cultural centres and museums.

Native-European contacts on the Northwest Coast were a series of local events. During a period of thirty years and a space of some 2000 km, Native villages engaged in commerce, battles and sometimes marriages with four European groups. Although the Spanish and the Russians were the first traders to arrive, their influence was quickly superseded by the British and, to some extent, by Americans. The following paragraphs provide a general overview of this early history and focus primarily on the role of the British in the development of Canada’s west coast.

**The Fur Trade Era 1774-1850**

Published research on the early history of the Northwest coast is extensive. Historians such as Gough (1992), Pethick (1976; 1980) and Fisher (1996; 1977)
have examined ship logs, admiralty charts and colonial correspondence. They describe the rise and fall of different European powers and their resultant effect on the distant commercial ventures on the Northwest Coast. Their descriptions of the expansion of European empires into new areas and the establishment of trading monopolies explain Canada’s early political history. Biographies of explorers, ship captains and fur traders portray the personal and private lives of adventurers in various historic settings.

Francis Drake, in 1579, may have been the earliest European explorer to see the Northwest Coast. Although scholars speculate that he may have sailed as far north as Vancouver Island, the only evidence of such a voyage is a brass plaque fastened to a pole near San Francisco Bay (Gough 1992:20; Pethick 1980:11). The Russians were the earliest traders on the Northwest Coast. They started to explore the Alaskan panhandle in 1741, and soon set up fur-trading companies extending into the Alaskan Archipelago. They intended to establish sovereignty in North America and to create a lucrative market for furs in Russia and China.

“By land and by sea the Russians pressed forward to establish their own distant dominion on the most north-westerly reaches of America. So extensive was Russian interest in the fur trade that between 1743 and 1800 some 101 ventures were undertaken by a total of forty-two companies, and nearly 187,000 pelts were taken (about ten per day) – worth in all about ten million rubles” (Gough 1992:124).

The Russian trading posts were confined mainly to the Alaskan and northern Northwest Coast. At one time the Russian presence on the west coast extended briefly to northern California, but their attempt to control a western Pacific empire faded away.

The Spanish also attempted to control the Northwest Coast in the late 18th century. They had been the dominant European presence on the American continents for almost 300 years, and had settled in Central America, South America and Mexico. The southward expansion of Russian interests galvanised Spanish efforts to secure the western coast. In 1774 the Spanish sent an expedition commanded by Juan Perez, who sailed as far north as the Queen Charlotte Islands. Here he encountered a ‘canoe-load’ of Haidas off the coast of Langara Island.
“The Spanish offered clothes, beads and knives, and in return the Haida traded some sea-otter furs and a variety of handmade articles including mats, hats, plates, spoons, ornately carved wooden boxes, and what appear to have been chilcat blankets” (Fisher 1996:50).

The Spanish attempt to control the coast included a number of expeditions and the building of a fort at Friendly Cove. They lacked sufficient resources, however, to effectively control the coast against the growing number of British and American trading vessels. By 1794, the English and Spanish governments had negotiated an agreement to maintain Nootka Sound as a free port where people from either country could build temporary shelters. They would not claim territory, and would not permit other Nations to stake claims. The Spanish then left the Northwest Coast, abandoning their attempt to build a northern empire.

In 1778 Captain Cook sailed into Nootka Sound and remained for a month to refit his ship and to trade with the Mowacheht Chief, Maquinna. Sea otter furs were part of the trade goods that came on board Cook’s ship. On the return voyage, these furs were sold at enormous profit in the Chinese market. A report of Cook’s third voyage was published in 1784. By 1786, British trading vessels were heading to Nootka Sound. Two years later, American ships began to arrive and the competition for furs became intense. By 1790, twenty-six voyages had been made by Englishmen and seven by Americans (Gough 1992:127). The competition for furs gradually drove the ships northward as traders looked for new Aboriginal trading partners and new resources. They were also searching for the Northwest Passage back to the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the Northwest Coast with its complex coastline was quickly mapped and the sphere of European contact and influence widened.

During the period when the British ships were sailing along the Pacific coast, fur trading companies were attempting to find a land route across the Rocky mountains to the Pacific Ocean. In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie, a trader with the North West Company, made his way from Fort Chipewyan to the central coast near Bella Coola. He narrowly missed an encounter with Captain Vancouver who had sailed into the same area six months earlier. Mackenzie’s search of land routes to the coast was followed by other traders, such as Simon Fraser and David Thompson. These men, and many others, working for the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay
Company, mapped large portions of the Columbia, Fraser and Thompson river systems. By the early 19th century, they had established a series of trading posts along major water routes from the shore of the Pacific Ocean into the Interior. Using a mixed transportation system, consisting of hundreds of pack horses or mules and long fleets of canoes, they brought trade goods into the British Columbia Interior and then returned with beaver pelts.

Researchers have offered various interpretations of this period of Native-European relations. At first, the exchange was perceived as essentially exploitative. The European traders were portrayed as clever men who obtained valuable furs for a handful of beads or pieces of iron. Gough notes, “Thus in 1778 the Indians were already being manipulated in a contest for empire between the British and Spanish and subsequently the Russians and the American. The native could not shield themselves against this new and penetrating materialism. ...In brief, industrial Europe possessed the means to subjugate a non-industrial society” (Gough 1984:10). Recently, historians have suggested that the Native trader had far greater control over the transaction than originally believed. Archaeologists and ethnologists may have developed a clearer understanding of the long tradition of aboriginal exchange, and the role of chiefs in controlling the trade process.

“Contrary to the expectations of some early traders who had not read Cook carefully enough, Native people were not simple-minded savages who would part with dozens of furs for a few trinkets. Rather they were experienced, astute traders who knew all about margins of profit and how to drive a hard bargain” (Fischer 1996:52). Perhaps both perspectives are correct. In the short run, despite the occasional acts of aggression, contact with European traders represented an addition of new resources to the traditional way of life. “Nuu-chah-nulth chiefs regarded the newcomers as an owned economic resource, in the same way that they would claim drift rights over anything that floated into their territory” (McMillan 1999:181). The control that Native people appeared to have over the trading process was due, in large part, to their dominant position with access to resources and their larger population.10 The subsequent period of contact changed the balance of the relationship.

10 Unfortunately a great deal of information about the land based trade during the period 1810 to 1830/ and discussion about trading relationships, control of goods,
The British fur traders maintained and gradually strengthened their position in British Columbia. The Hudson's Bay Company amalgamated with its main rival, the North West Company in 1821. However by this time, furs had already become scarce and were generally less profitable. In the 1790s, some 100,000 pelts had been shipped to China, creating a glut on the Asian market. Despite the low sale prices, sea otters continued to be hunted, almost to extinction. In the southern part of the British Columbia Interior, beaver and other small fur bearing animals were also becoming scarce. The company then turned its attention to other means of making profits and reducing costs. In such endeavours they occasionally employed members of the Native community as labourers.

For some time, the company had engaged Native people as wilderness guides and. Later, they helped with the pack trains and to paddle the canoes for the fur brigades. As the fur trade became less profitable they attempted to open the land for agriculture, but only a small part of the province is suitable for farming. However, they did introduce potatoes, which became a profitable crop for some Native families. The Haidas in particular, brought canoe loads of potatoes to sell to the Hudson's Bay Company in Victoria. The Company also exploited the deposits of coal which were found at the north end and central section of Vancouver Island. For several years, the Native community had been working the surface of the coal vein and trading the ore to the Company. With increased demand for coal for steamships, however, the Company decided to establish a mine site.

"Native men continued to collect surface coal and to work as hauliers and longshoremen. Native women were hired to carry brick and clay to the mines and move coal in canoes. The work of hewing the coal face was reserved for white men" (Meen 1996:104).

Native people were also employed to catch, dry and salt salmon for export. They hunted whales almost to the point of extinction. The whale oil and that of other fish, such as black cod, were packed in barrels and sold overseas. Native people also worked in the growing forestry industry. The Hudson's Bay Company built several water-powered sawmills on Vancouver Island for which the Native population

emergence of chiefs and the role of women has of necessity been left out of this
supplied logs. Several communities made shingles for export to California and Hawaii. Native people also made barrels for shipping fish and whale oils and for storing salted fish. More than two thousand such barrels were produced from Fort Langley’s Hudson’s Bay Company alone.

The production and sale of objects of traditional material culture was another form of income for Native people. As noted earlier in the discussion of first contact, the Haida sold mats, spoons, boxes and other goods to the Spanish explorers. Cole also notes the early trade with the Nuu-chah-nulth in material culture by the British and Spanish explorers.

“In their avidity for European metal, the natives seemed willing to part with almost everything from lances, whistles, and masks to the skins off their backs. ‘These people offered every thing for Sale, apparel, paddles. Canoes, and spears would have been indiscriminately parted with.’ wrote an early trader to Nootka Sound” (Cole 1985:3).

Ready-made materials were not the only objects for sale.

“As soon as Malaspina’s officers had ‘found much that was worth obtaining for the Royal Museum’ from among the domestic utensils and weapons of the Yakutat, “the women were observed much occupied making [baskets] and the men in making dolls, spoons and other articles of wood which the men and even the officers purchased eagerly.’ The production of artifacts for the European market commenced very early” (Cole 1985:5).

The early trade in curios for cabinets of curiosities, museums and souvenirs continued throughout the fur trade period. Malloy recently analysed the collections at maritime museums in Salem, Massachusetts and other whaling ports used by the “Boston men”. She lists masks, rattles, clothing, hunting and fishing equipment (Malloy 2000). This material was acquired between 1788 and 1844 for the newly established scientific and philosophical societies that ‘blossomed’ in the years immediately following the American Revolutionary War. Academics and wealthy ship owners were the major collectors. Ship captains had also amassed sufficient materials to create a museum for their benevolent Marine Society.

“These collectors found an essential harmony between memorializing their own adventures in tangible souvenirs and returning scientific specimens to the learned and marine societies, where their curiosities could be

thesis.
incorporated into the evolving scientific taxonomies that placed newly encountered cultures into a context of the known world” (Malloy 2000:32).

Collections of traded material were also sent back to Spain, Russia, Germany and England. When Aboriginal hunters and seamen joined the crews of the sealing and whaling boats, they brought their own objects of traditional material culture to trade all along the Northwest Coast and as far away as Canton, California and Hawaii (Malloy 2000:44).

Over-hunting of seal and sea otter populations by the first decades of the nineteenth century, brought economic hardship to Native hunters, sailors, and guides as well as to their communities. The Haida responded by using traditional skills and art forms to develop the first non-traditional objects for sale in the marketplace. Argillite, a soft black stone found in only one area on the Queen Charlotte Islands, was rarely carved before European contact. A few decorated labrets (lip ornaments) have been uncovered in archaeological excavations. Art historians suggest that the earliest carvings made for sale were produced in the 1820s. (Macnair and Hoover 1984; Wright 1982). The first objects were probably argillite pipes made to replace the easily broken clay smoking pipes sold by the Hudson’s Bay Company. During the next century, Haida artists created increasingly elaborate forms of pipes. The designs integrated and intertwined traditional imagery of ravens, bears and humans in Haida clothing. They also included figures and designs modelled after European ships, architecture, horses, dogs, and men and women in European clothing. By the mid-nineteenth century, Haida artists were producing dinnerware in argillite, including cups, plates, bowls, compotes and wine glasses. These items were decorated with lettering, images and designs copied from American coins, pressed glass, and inlaid furniture.¹¹

¹¹ The market for such argillite sculptures continued through the nineteenth and twentieth century. Carvers kept a steady market by responding to consumer demand and over the centuries produced totem poles, boxes and bowls and sculptures based on traditional stories (see Drew 1980; Barbeau 1957).
The evolving economic relationship between the fur traders and the Native community was suddenly changed by two events. The first was the discovery of gold in the British Columbia Interior; the second event was a wave of epidemic illnesses that decimated the Native community.

In the middle of the 19th century, British Columbia had approximately one thousand non-Native residents, mostly men, who were fur traders attached to some dozen trading posts and forts. Ten years later, a gold rush drew tens of thousands of miners, shopkeepers, cowboys and businessmen to the area. Twentyfive to thirty thousand people arrived in Victoria in 1858, and thousands more travelled up the Columbia and Fraser Rivers to the gold fields in the Interior. Most of them were unsuccessful miners leaving the California gold rush. The population was predominantly Caucasian Americans, but there were Chinese, Black and European immigrants as well. They fought with the Aboriginal inhabitants over access to the gold, to the land and about the treatment of Native women. Douglas, the governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, who was in charge of this growing colony, used the resources of his police, courts, the British navy and his formidable personality to keep the peace.

Throughout this period Native people had suffered epidemics of smallpox, measles and other deadly illnesses, which had been transmitted by contact with European sailors and traders. In 1862 a particularly severe epidemic of smallpox broke out in Victoria. Native people from villages all along the coast had been coming to Victoria to trade for many years. In an attempt to control the epidemic, the local administrators immediately expelled the Native people. However, they had already been infected and the returning canoes spread smallpox throughout the Coast. Estimates vary on the number of deaths. One author places the death toll at a third of the population (Gough 1984:80). Other writers deride this “fatal impact” view of European contact as too pessimistic. “Estimating the demographic impact of disease in the early contact period has become a kind of numbers game based on very pliable evidence” (Fisher 1996:61). Researchers suggest that the population before European contact may not have been as large as estimated by observers at that time. The empty villages, often cited as proof of the devastation, may have been deserted simply as a
result of seasonal activities. Some analysts have also tended to discuss death rates while ignoring birth rates. Nevertheless, a demographer who has specialised in the epidemics on the Northwest Coast, notes in a recent publication:

“The Northwest Coast experience with contact-era ‘new diseases’ was both devastating and revolutionary. Populations declined; some groups died out; the human suffering was appalling. The new diseases and associated population loss affected in one way or another virtually every aspect of Native culture, from subsistence patterns to oral literature” (Boyd 1999:278).

The gold fields along the lower Fraser River were soon exhausted. Some prospectors moved north when new deposits were discovered, first to Barkerville and then on to the Yukon and Alaska. A large number of gold seekers, cattlemen, shopkeepers and other suppliers remained in British Columbia, and began to look for other forms of livelihood. Native people (as the majority population) had participated in many aspects of the British Columbia economy. They now found themselves relegated to the economic periphery.

Towards the end of the 19th century there was increasing immigration to the province. “[Native people] were roughly half the population in 1881, one-quarter in 1891, one-seventh in 1901 and one-eighteenth in 1911” (Johnson 1996:167). The new arrivals began to exploit the local resources. Hugh tracts of land, (particularly in the British Columbia Interior, where bunch grass provided free grazing for cattle), were quickly claimed by white ranchers. More significantly, these landowners garnered the water rights, a crucial resource in this semi-arid region. Native people in British Columbia were given small plots of land as reserves that would be safe from acquisition by settlers. However, the acreage offered each family was insufficient for their needs. The government defended its parsimonious actions by claiming that the reliance on traditional fishing and food gathering activities freed Native people from needing to own larger reserves. The practice of defining reserve areas by existing housing, cemeteries, and traditional village sites was even more disruptive. Small parcels of dispersed acreage were thus created. Living on reserves and as wards of the government, Native people lacked access to economic capital, education and, most importantly, to political power. Instead, they found employment as seasonal labourers. They followed a pattern of seasonal wage migration similar to
the traditional migration to various fishing and gathering sites. Depending on the location, the cycle would include travel to areas where fishing companies had established canneries. Here the women packed cans and the men fished from small schooners owned by the company. Some Native people travelled to the hop fields and fruit orchards of northern Washington State or into the British Columbia interior. Many of the men found work in the lumber camps, or as cowboys on various ranches and cattle drives. Aboriginal men worked on the crews when the railroads and highways began construction in the mid-to-late 19th century. At the end of such employment they returned to the reserve, and supplemented their store-bought provisions by hunting, fishing and gathering traditional foods.

This pattern of part-time and seasonal employment allowed people time to make and sell items of traditional material culture. The late 19th century was a period when interest in ‘curios’ was expanding along with the growth in tourism, nationalism, World Fairs and museums. Trade in such objects, which had been continuous since early contact, rose to a “flood tide between the mid 1880s and about 1910, tapering off by the 1920s” (Knight 1978:41). Cole’s Captured Heritage (1985) is an excellent case study of the pattern of Northwest Coast acquisitions. Another such study Graburn’s publication on the Alaskan Commercial Company collection, now at the Hearst Museum (Graburn 1966). This San Francisco company acquired the Russian American Company’s chain of fur trading posts in 1868. Until 1896, the company controlled almost all access to seal fur, local transportation, food and other necessary supplies within Alaska. In the 1870s the company began to acquire traditional Aboriginal and Inuit material culture for the Smithsonian, as well as for various World Fairs, and other museums and private collectors. In 1889, the Smithsonian curator wrote to the company “We are ravenous for Indian relics, and modern manufacture” (Graburn 1966:6). By the 1890s the company was wholesaling objects to curio stores in Alaska and California.

Although production of crafts and curios was a growing source of income. the schools and missionaries were also promoting handwork as a necessary skill for self-reliance and future employment. Boys were taught woodworking and carpentry. Girls were taught sewing, knitting and other forms of needlework to prepare them for
home making and for work as seamstresses. An early photograph shows young Native women at their knitting circle dressed in Victorian style clothing (see Appendix 3). Another photograph, taken at Metlakatla, a village established by the missionary William Duncan, shows a line of young women sitting behind their spinning wheels (see Appendix 4). These spinners were part of an experiment in the development of a local cottage industry. The villagers brought in a flock of sheep and were taught animal husbandry, shearing, spinning and hand weaving. "Cottage industries were sustained by a mission policy that harked back to bucolic visions of a pre-industrial society which seemed appropriate for recently “tribal” native peoples” (Knight 1996:153). The resulting fabrics were intended for local sale and “were part of a social strategy to build closed Indian communities in which local authorities and people would not be dependent upon outside economic forces or social pressures” (Knight 1996:152).

A number of cottage industries developed independently of missionary activities. One of the most successful was Cowichan knitwear. Coast Salish women in one area of Vancouver Island began to mass-produce patterned sweaters, toques, slippers and gloves. They used fleece from sheep brought to the island by Hudson’s Bay traders and by early settlers. Knitting was learned in the missionary schools, probably by the Sisters of St. Ann, or from the local Scottish homesteaders. The highpoint of production was in the 1930s when approximately $10,000 worth of sweaters was produced. More recently, less expensive Japanese imports have reduced the demand for Native-made knitwear (Meikle nd; Hill 2000).

Wood carving for the tourist trade was another source of income. Wall plaques, masks, rattles, bowls, and spoons were in steady demand by tourists and traders. The miniature totem pole was the iconographic image of the Northwest Coast curio market. These poles were made cheaply and in vast quantities, but production could never satisfy demand. Argillite sculptures continued to provide income for Haida carvers.

Basketry provided income for women in many communities along the Coast and in the Interior. European settlers purchased the picking baskets, burden baskets, clam
digging baskets, and large lidded storage baskets that Native people peddled from door to door. By the late 19th century, the growth of the tourist trade began to influence the type and style of basketry being produced. A new market developed for small, highly decorated trinket baskets, basketry-covered bottles, shells and containers. Thousands of these baskets were sold in curio shops, on street corners, at ferry wharves and fall fairs. A photograph of the 1905 display at the Canadian Guild of Crafts exhibition shows some 130 baskets and boxes hanging on the wall (McLeod 1999:126). The collection demonstrates the wide range of available basketry styles (see Appendix5). They included a Haida spruce root hat, Nuu-chah-nulth grass trinket baskets and twinned covered bottles. Interior Salish burden baskets and imbricated storage baskets. A cedar bark mat, bentwood box, birchbark containers and beaded bag represent other types of Northwest Coast craft work available at the time.

Conclusion
This photograph of the wealth of baskets and other handmade objects displayed at the Canadian Guild of Crafts signifies an important change in the categorisation of Northwest Coast material culture. Over several thousand years Northwest Coast material culture had evolved as part of a complex economic and social organisation. It was closely tied to an ancient cosmology, a system of land allocation, and reciprocal kinship obligations. The arrival of European traders, missionaries, settlers and government agents shifted the production of material culture from its traditional utilitarian and ritual framework to a global economy and a new system of European values. Its changing status to curio and then to tourist object, prepared the way for the next stage of innovation and commodification – the arts and crafts market.
SECTION TWO – ARTS AND CRAFTS
Chapter Four – The ‘Arts and Crafts’ Market 1900-1940

“For historians part of the problem of the revival and survival of craft lies in the tangled roots of private and governmental support of the various experiments and socio-economic efforts to preserve and broaden production and marketing bases of the crafts” (Green 1994:31).

The first three chapters of this thesis presented the theoretical and methodological background to the study, and the historical context of Northwest Coast material culture. The following three chapters are concerned with the emergence of a commodity known as ‘arts and crafts’. In the two hundred years following European contact, Northwest Coast material culture moved steadily across a typology of Western commodification - curios, artefacts, tourist art and fine art (Cole 1985; Jonaitis 1981; Ames 1981). For a short period of time, however, hand-made objects created for sale to the Western market, were categorised as ‘Arts and Crafts’. The shift into and out of this classification was an important step in the ‘social life’ of Northwest Coast material culture.

The first section of this chapter reviews the historical context underlying the appearance of the Native arts and crafts category in British Columbia. It considers the growth of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and its later adoption in North America. The discussion then turns to two important precedents for the Arts and Crafts Movement in British Columbia. One was the promotion of Native Arts and Crafts in the United States, (particularly in the Southwest); the second was the establishment of an Indian Arts and Crafts Board by the United States federal government. The final section of this chapter presents the history of Canada’s support for Native arts and crafts in the early 20th century. Efforts by private individuals and governments to create a value for the handmade object in Canada paved the way for Alice Ravenhill and the British Columbia Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts.

The Arts and Crafts Movement

The significant feature of the Arts and Crafts Movement was the recognition that hand work was a means of implementing social change. The introductory chapter in
this thesis discussed various definitions of art and craft. When these two terms are pluralised, capitalised and linked, they usually refer to the late 19th century movement of social reform through the production of artistic, handmade crafts.

The Arts and Crafts Movement began in Britain and derived its philosophical position from the work and writings of John Ruskin and William Morris. Both men advocated the return to the production of hand crafted objects as a means of alleviating some of the social ills created by increasing industrialisation. They thought that craft work would not only bring pride and joy to the maker, but by raising the standard of design, would also improve peoples’ aesthetic taste and increase their quality of life. This concept was accepted with surprising rapidity.

Between 1882 and 1888, five Arts and Crafts Societies were established in England. Some of these associations focussed on impoverished communities. One such group established a handicraft school in East London. Other associations, like the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, sponsored displays of work by individual artists and by members of various guilds and societies. These exhibitors, often upper or middle class women, had few opportunities to show their efforts in embroidery, china painting and other arts in a public venue. A third type of Arts and Crafts society, The Home Arts and Industries Association, founded in 1884, focussed on the rural poor. This Association recruited more than five hundred volunteer and professional teachers in its attempt to revive traditional country crafts (McLeod 1999:53).

The goals and ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement quickly travelled beyond England, and spread to Europe and North America. Exhibitions in major European cities began to include decorative arts as part of their displays of fine arts. By the early 20th century, a number of arts and crafts workshops and organisations were established in the United States. The Roycrofters and Gustav Stickley’s Workshops, both in northern New York State, produced furniture and other objects based on Morris’ designs (Parry 1996:178). Societies were also established in Chicago, Boston and California to teach and promote traditional and local hand crafts. As in Britain, the goals of these societies were a mixture of aesthetic and social reform.

“Some of the larger Arts and Crafts Organizations – Gustav Stickleys Craftsman Workshop and Elbert Hubbard’s’ Roycroft colony among others – were big businesses as well as ideological statements. Others –Fellowship
Farms, New Clairvaux, Elverhoj and Byrdcliffe – were descendants not only of Morris’ little pockets of craftsmen and women in England, but also of the nineteenth-century American utopian experiments such as the Zoar, Amana and Shaker communities. Some linked crafts with agriculture and self-sufficiency; others were closer to the socialism of nineteenth-century reformer Charles Fourier” (Green 1994:32).

The interest in social reform also extended to improving Native American welfare through craft production. Members of the Arts and Crafts Movement in northern California, for example, used their workshops to train Aboriginal wood workers. The furniture thus produced was purchased for offices and schools on Native reserves across the United States (Trapp nd).

The formation of arts and crafts societies was only one of many movements for social reform simultaneously underway in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Attempts were made to improve the standards of living conditions, hygiene and income of working class and impoverished families in the industrialised cities as well as in rural or agricultural areas. Much emphasis was placed on promoting the health of young children and reducing infant mortality. In the United States the Settlement House Movement drew attention to the plight of new immigrants. The conditions of poverty and injustices suffered by Native Americans were illustrated in public presentations by Indian agents, missionaries and benevolent societies.

Many middle and upper class women were attracted to these organisations. They volunteered their time, money and social connections to improve the living conditions of the poor. They invited guest lecturers into their homes to speak about the issues of the day, and organised talks and classes for the general public, particularly for working people. These women also distributed clothing, food and information. They published and distributed brochures and leaflets, conducted surveys and worked to implement legislative changes. Feminist scholars argue that the appeal of the social reform movement was based on the growing women’s rights movement. The ‘Lady Bountiful’ who attempted to improve the life of other groups in society, was, also working for recognition of her own right to education, women’s suffrage, and for a voice in social policy and power.
“Women’s giving and voluntarism have played a central albeit unheralded role in women’s history, providing access to power outside the masculine realms of history and commerce. Through gifts of time and money, women have built institutions, provided charitable services, secured the vote, challenged racial and ethical stereotypes and opened professions to other women. They have also carried out ‘invisible careers’ for themselves, pursuing distinctive forms of female entrepreneurship” (McCarthy 1990:ix).

During the late 1890’s, Alice Ravenhill, (whose work is discussed in the next chapter of this thesis), was a public educator teaching in this social reform movement. Employed by the British Women’s Co-operative Guild, she lectured on the Poor Law and related legislation, on methods for ensuring family and public health, and on home economics. She wrote in her autobiography:

“The audiences to which I was to present my subject matter in a lucid, practical, and attractive manner were drawn from the artisan and mechanic classes – men and women given to much thinking, reading and reasoning on the social problems of the day” (Ravenhill 1951:93).

Ross (1990) notes that middle and upper class women, such as Ravenhill, who lectured to the housewives at the Women’s Co-operative Guild, also tried to speak for them. These Lady Philanthropists with their family connections and wealth had powerful voices to call for legislative changes. In the process, however, they may have muted the voices of lower-class women, and thus performed a disservice. Similar problems concerning representation and misrepresentation were later applied to efforts by white philanthropists on behalf of the Native producers (Jacknis 2002:181).

The emphasis in Great Britain on the value of handmade objects acquired a different interpretation in the ‘New World’. Although arts and crafts supporters in Canada and the United States agreed with Morris’s objection to the uniformity of poorly designed and mass-produced commodities, they also appropriated local handmade products as symbols to express a new and growing nationalism (Cohodas 1997). For example, the folk arts in Canada’s Quebec province, and in the southern Appalachian region of the United States, both offered a source of a ‘home-grown’ identity. Such works helped to distinguish the New World from the Old World. Becker in her study of the ‘revival’ and marketing of mountain crafts notes:
“‘Traditionalizing’ mountain handicrafts and producers as preindustrial offered middle class consumers a distant and timeless ‘usable past’ in which their Southern Appalachian contemporaries, removed as a source of potential cultural conflict, were redefined as an ideal, integral to the American national identity” (Becker 1993:ix).

Indian arts and crafts, in particular, seem to provide a link to an ancient culture that was uniquely North American. One advocate was Julia Seton who, with her husband, Ernest Thompson Seton, founded the Woodcraft League of American as well as the Woodcraft Indian Society at the start of the 20th century. She called for a folk art that had been handed down through many generations. Handicrafts must be from “one’s own soil, not an engrafted folk art brought from an other world, but an art evolved from the inner consciousness of those who lived here before us…” (Seton 1962:4).

“Until lately, we lamented the dearth of American folk art and culture. All our experience in this line looked to come from the Old World, because we knew of no indigenous ancient art. However because Old World art was not native to our country it was not entirely satisfying. It was a good art, but it was in an environment not its own. It merely served to exaggerate the need we felt for our own native culture. Then when it was almost too late, our artists began to find what we were all unconsciously seeking – the native art of America, which is the art of the Indian” (Seton 1962:5).

Promoting Native Artefacts

Some forty years before Alice Ravenhill established the benevolent Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts, Indian-made products were being promoted for sale for the marketplace. These efforts however, were quite different from those of the traders who shared in the proceeds of the sale, or museum collectors who thought they were preserving remnants of vanishing cultures. Missionaries and church workers, Indian agents, schoolteachers, ethnologists, and patrons of art all promoted the production of arts and crafts. Each of these groups had their own goals. Most of them, however, shared the hope that marketing traditional handicrafts would help to alleviate poverty, unemployment and social disruption on the reserves. For some Indian agents and social workers such activity was regarded as a means to preserve or re-establish traditional knowledge which would revitalise the culture.
“The arts and crafts supply an approach to the history, legends, music, and recreation and the intangible elements of Indian culture. To those who regard the crafts in this way and utilize them in the promotion of other projects, their destruction seems unlikely, for they are revealed as fundamental elements in methods of procedure and will therefore be perpetuated because they have definite functional values” (Burton 1936:39).

The United States Experience
Southwest Pottery

Efforts to study and support Native handicrafts in the United States began several decades earlier than similar efforts in Canada. It began in the Indian villages of New Mexico and Arizona (Meyn 2001:1) which were already important centres of production for traditional handcrafts. Pueblo and Navaho weavers, potters and silver smiths had been making objects for the tourist trade since the late 19th century (Batkin 1998). Archaeologists excavating near Santa Fe in the early 1900s, uncovered numerous painted shards and suggested that local Indian potters try to recreate these elegant forms and decorations. A number of Pueblo crafts women began to experiment with new techniques and designs. Unfortunately the improved quality of their work did not automatically generate a more profitable market.

“A problem was presented when the artists were obliged to sell their wares for almost nothing after they had been encouraged to make good pieces both ornamental and enduring. Vessels of all sizes, shapes, and decorations were taken to Santa Fe and peddled from door to door, or were disposed of to the tourists, who sometimes took advantage of the Indian’s ignorance of price and value. Often after a day of futile effort, a potter would sell to a ruthless merchant for a few cents all that remained of a load of her wares. No discriminations were made; the entire supply was sold like junk. Such experiences were no incentive to careful work; and, consequently, while a few potters became more and more skilful, others became more and more indifferent” (Burton 1936:57).

The value of the work and the potters’ expectations of higher prices were slowly recognised by means of public demonstrations and sales at expositions and fairs. The School of American Research in Santa Fe played an important role in increasing the commercial value. Its staff established a study collection and, by offering higher prices for better work, raised the quality of the craftsmanship and design. An annual Indian fair was organised in 1922 and continued for six years. The entries were
judged, awarded prizes and subsequently sold. One of the local wealthy patrons, Elizabeth White, opened a shop on Madison Avenue in New York where, for ten years, she sold Indian art objects at a loss (Mullins 1990:108). The Pueblo potters also helped to develop a better market by demanding higher prices for their work. Burton records one example of how the Native producer began to influence the market.

“In 1925 Antonita brought an unusually good pot to the fair exhibit... She informed Mr. Chapman [a museum staff member] that she wanted twelve dollars for it. That with a ten per cent commission, which the fair charged the Indians for selling their products, would make the selling figure thirteen dollars and twenty cents, a price then unheard of. It proved to be the prize-winning pot. After the awards had been made, the pieces according to custom, were placed on sale... Mr. Chapman felt that only through experience would Antonita learn what buyers would or would not pay. No sooner had the price been set than another member of the staff asked, “What does this mean, putting such a price? Mark it reasonably; there are certain limits.” Mr. Chapman’s reply was “How are they to learn?” In fifteen minutes the pot and ribbon were sold for thirteen dollars and twenty cents” (Burton 1936:61).

The development of high quality products and a fair market price for Pueblo pottery required approximately 25 years of consistent efforts by the staff and patrons associated with the School for American Research. They provided local potters with archaeological examples, established a study collection, offered venues for sale, and tried to help the producers understand market demands. The project benefited from the supporting structure of the School, the Indian Arts Fund and the

---

12 This fair was the forerunner of the current Santa Fe Indian Art market, which attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists each year.
13 It should be noted that Navaho rugs and Zuni silver work brought in twice the income of Pueblo pots to their respective communities. A marketing history of these craft industries might reveal interesting parallels or divergent practices.
14 By 1925, Bunzel noted that the Pueblo women potters were “no longer dependent on ancient pottery for their ideas. They still sometimes use ancient shards as a starting point for new designs, but even in the reconstructions, there is the opportunity and indeed necessity for a considerable amount of free invention” (Bunzel 1990:56).
15 The Indian Arts fund was a national private organisation whose purpose was to revive Indian arts and crafts through education of the producers and of the buyers through exhibitions, publications and publicity.
Laboratory of Anthropology, all of which served as counterweights to the opposing pressure from local traders. The increasing income from craft sales was said to have raised local standards of living in the Pueblos, improved family stability, and brought the Native community into “a swiftly moving tourist trade, even during the depression” (Burton 1936:70). Accompanying these processes was a revitalisation of cultural and religious practices. To the European observers, the end result appeared to be a growing self-assurance and pride in Native identity.

Among the local supporters were a group of middle and upper class women who, like their counterparts in Britain and Canada, acted as Lady Philanthropists. Such women were wealthy, socially well connected, and better educated spinsters who found greater personal freedom and power in the Southwest than in the New York or Chicago social circles where they grew up. The two White sisters, for example were heirs to a large fortune based on newspapers and railroads. They donated land to build the School of American Research and established the study collection of pottery, weaving and baskets at the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe. The sisters in turn, were supported by less wealthy women who acted as companions, secretaries and organisers. The community also included artists, such as Georgia O’Keefe, or writers like Willa Cather. Mullins (1990) suggests that this was a ‘city of women’: a nexus of money, influence and organisational energy composed by, and for, strong, independent women. A similar image of a women’s network, without the personal wealth, could be applied to Alice Ravenhill and her companions.

The Lady Philanthropists of Santa Fe were attracted to the new, and generally unknown, landscape of the southwest and to the Native art of the Pueblos. They also embraced the new discipline of anthropology and the activism of righting social injustice. As consumers of culture and trendsetters of fashion and style, they turned away from their European heritage to champion an American-based identity. Many of these women were well educated, and some had been classmates at Bryn Mawr.

---

16 Private benefactors established the Laboratory of Anthropology in 1931. Its purpose was to collect and study traditional material culture of the Southwest United States.
They read anthropological and archaeological texts, visited Native homes and workshops, and participated in Pueblo ceremonial dances and activities. Their social action consisted initially of lobbying to block legislation that would allow the acquisition of Indian land. Their efforts expanded to protest the repression of Aboriginal religious beliefs and cultural practices. Mullins argues that their actions helped to establish a new concept of multiculturalism in American society. Such activities were also self-serving.

“Through their philanthropic patronage of Indian and other indigenous arts, [these women]...extended the aesthetic skills of the bourgeois household into greater public influence through a form of ‘politicized consumption.’ Moreover, by moving to a relatively underdeveloped periphery and finding value where others had not, they had a chance of commanding greater public influence and authority than if they had remained in the Northeast” (Mullins 1990:47).

The work of these women, with their money, resources and social connections exceeded any aspirations that Ravenhill or her smaller, poorer committee could have had. Early in the 1920’s the two philanthropic societies, (i.e. the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs and the Eastern Association on Indian Affairs), sponsored small public exhibits in Santa Fe, Boston, New York, and Chicago. In 1931 they launched the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, which had the slogan, “Indian art as art, not ethnology” (Mullins 1990:105).

To promote the exhibit, the Lady Philanthropists, particularly Elizabeth White, recruited support from academics, prominent art critics, the Department of Indian Affairs, and private foundations such as Carnegie. Newspaper and magazine journalists were encouraged to publicise the event. A similar pattern of drawing together support and publicity from all available resources would be followed a decade later by the British Columbia Society. Yet the goals of the Northwest and the Southwest committees ultimately differed. The Southwest Ladies Bountifuls tried to create a new awareness of Indian craft as art. “The patron-philanthropists perceived their task to be twofold: to encourage Indians to make pieces in accord with elite tastes and to educate potential buyers” (Mullins 1990:108). The Ladies were dismayed to find Macy’s and Bloomindales department stores carrying Indian art as a form of interior decorations. Ravenhill, on the other hand, encouraged the
Hudson’s Bay Company store, and other stores to show and sell Northwest Coast objects. Her goal was to develop new markets, either commercial or artistic, that would provide income to local Native producers.

**Federal Government Activity: The Indian Arts and Crafts Board**

“In the early days, the Indian producer worked only if he needed a basket, a pot or a piece of weaving, to replace one that was worn out, or broken. Occasionally he created a piece to give to a member of his family or a friend, but there was always a concrete reason for the production of every object. To learn to produce as a professional is something entirely new to most Indian craftsmen, and to stimulate the creation of this new professional attitude is the educational task of our Board” (d’Harnoncourt 1943:16).

The development of Indian Arts and Crafts in the United States was successful largely because of Federal support. Beginning in the early 1920s, activists on behalf of Native people had unsuccessfully lobbied the Federal government to pass legislation that would provide training, financial support and a marketing mechanism for craft producers. In 1926 the Government asked an independent Committee to survey the existing conditions of arts and crafts production and to make recommendations. The Committee studied pottery, weaving, painting and silver work from the Southwest, and leather and bead work from the North. They recognised

1. These products as a part of Indian culture as a whole; inextricably related to Indian religion, ways of life, and self expression.
2. These products as art, and as part of the art heritage of the American people as well as of the Indian.
3. These products as a present and potential source of income to the Indian and to various trade factors: therefore as an element in the economy of the tribes and of other population groups” (Institute for Government Research 1943:18).

The Report also noted that craft production was a part-time, individual effort that provided only a small portion of a family’s income. The producers were often spread over a wide rural area. Usually only one or two crafts people worked in a village that was quite remote or inaccessible by road or railway. Income was estimated to be 10 cents an hour, and only a few individuals earned as much as $2 a day. Other forms of employment, such as crop picking, forestry or fishing, were more profitable when
they were available. There were also a wide variety of quality and production standards.

"As a whole dealers and traders are the strongest influence affecting the kind and quality of production. What they are willing to buy very largely determines what will be produced. There are notable cases where such a dealer or trader has raised the whole quality of production in a given area by insistence on high standards. There are other cases where such an influence has resulted in the production of shoddy (sic). The Indian producer often turns out products specifically on the order of the dealer following perhaps a model furnished by the dealer, and using materials furnished by him."
(Institute for Government Research 1943: 21).17

Analysis of the typical marketing process showed that the handmade object travelled from the craft person to the trader then to the wholesaler, next to the retailer and finally to the consumer. By the 1920s the increasing number of roads permitted more direct contact between the producer and the buyer. Better transportation also allowed the craft person to take his own work to the tourist market. Some contract work, either for piecework or as wages, was available to crafts people. These early work opportunities were seen as foreshadowing future industrial employment on the reserves.

The Research Committee chose to focus on the economic aspect of arts and crafts production, arguing that traditional usage was limited, and the market plan must be focussed on tourists and collectors. The problem for the Committee was how to incorporate and maintain an important element of America’s history and culture within the economic demands of the marketplace. The Report suggested that the manufacture of traditional material culture should focus on the following three categories: works of art, functional objects and souvenirs. The art market was seen as small but lucrative. The functional object was not considered as functional for American homes. Rugs were thought to be the wrong size, the pottery colours and patterns did not fit current fashions and the prices were too high. The only option left for successful craft development was souvenirs. However, expanding that market

17 The influence of traders continues today. A trader in Navaho rugs at the Sante Fe Indian Art Fair interviewed in 1999 said that he chooses the colours for his Navaho weavers according to current fashion. He also occasionally helps with the designing process.
commodity raised other concerns. For example, there was the possibility of creating problems in the art market by reducing the value of the "rare" handmade object. Mass manufacture of traditional items might destroy "the primitive, individualistic, non-commercial connotations which now lie back of so much travel and handcraft business and which are also the source of interest to the limited, but high purchasing power group with art appreciation" (Institute for Government Research 1943:25).

The Committee was also limited in its actions by a 'do no wrong' policy in dealing with the Native producer. New marketing options should not be detrimental to Indian life, change the nature of the handmade object or lower the standards of art. In effect, the Committee turned to a set of principles found in the Arts and Crafts Movement. "This Committee adopts ... the view that what is vital and essential in Indian art is: first, what the Indian has within himself - his feeling for form, color and design; and second certain characteristics in his products which can only be retained by true handcraft methods of production" (Institute for Government Research 1943:28). The solution was thus an attempt to improve production through better processes and to adapt the product to American usage. This effort was to be accomplished by establishing a Government agency.

Legislation to establish an Arts and Crafts Agency was proposed to the American Congress in 1930 (Schrader 1983: 31). This first Bill was blocked. A new Bill was introduced in 1935 and was passed, despite some objections by Senators and members of the House of Representatives. John Collier the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs "called upon the Indians in their tribal groupings to 'vigorously, clearly mindedly and experimentally' attack the problem of their own political, civil, cultural and industrial organization" (Schrader 1983:92). The new Arts and Crafts Board was empowered to promote Native economic welfare by the development of arts and crafts using marketing research, technical research and assistance, and coordination of government and private agency efforts. It was also able to give financial support. Perhaps most importantly the Board was responsible for creating a

18 The Congressmen were concerned about the possibility of an expanded government bureaucracy, increased dependency of Indians on government funding and fears of competition with established handicraft traders.
trademark for authenticity, quality and for establishing standards of craftsmanship (Act of Congress 1943).

In his account of the Board’s first six years, d’Harnoncourt reported on marketing research, laboratory experiments for new techniques, and efforts to safeguard the trademark label. Native communities were able to establish new clubs, co-operatives, museums and sales outlets with the Board’s assistance. As crafts people’s income increased, so did their interest in continuing production of traditional crafts. Crafts which had been in danger of fading away were now being revived. Funding also provided support for publications, as well as training and educational programs for Native people and for Indian workers.

Public exhibitions were probably the most dramatic activity of the new Board, particularly the displays prepared for the World’s Fairs in Paris, and San Francisco. The San Francisco exhibit was considered to be the largest exhibition of Indian arts and crafts ever assembled. It covered an area measuring an acre and a half and attracted a million and a half visitors. Sales at this exhibition affirmed the presence of a market for high quality handmade products. The Board followed this success with a exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. D’Hanoncourt closed his report by noting:

“In broad terms, it is the job of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board to bring together the market of the twentieth century and the Indian craftsmen, whose production philosophy and habits correspond to those of our own handicrafts area 900 years ago. We have now established the fact that the craftsmen can produce merchandise that answers the demand of the modern market. We have found that this modern market can and will absorb many times as much as the Indian craftsmen produce today. We have also, in our producing and merchandising organizations, creating the tools with which the gap between the medieval production habits and the methods of the modern market can be bridged; but we must realise that it takes time to span such a wide gap” (d’Hanoncourt 1943:16).

As a result of this work by the Federal Government, the market expanded to a point where supply could not meet demand. Exhibitions in museums and World’s Fairs created a broad-based public awareness and appreciation of the ‘art’ qualities of the handmade objects. Efforts were also made to link the traditional art form to
contemporary fashion and to modern manufacture. Standards of quality were set, and special labels assured authenticity. Through these actions, America’s Native heritage became a respected part of the country’s historical consciousness. These goals and accomplishments set a framework for the small, but ambitious efforts of Ravenhill’s British Columbia Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts.

The Canadian Experience
During the early of the 20th century, Canadian promotion of Native arts and crafts lagged behind the limited activities undertaken in the United States. There was no governmental legislation to protect Canadian Indian ‘antiques’ similar to the United States’ 1906 Preservation of American Antiquities Act. The intent of Canada’s Indian Act was to ‘civilise’ the Native population, not perpetuate or strengthen the traditional culture. The agents promoting such ‘civilisation’ were the administrators working on the different reserves, along with schoolteachers and missionaries who ran the boarding schools on behalf of the government. Curio traders and shopkeepers appeared to be more concerned with access to high quantities of low priced goods, rather than improving the quality of the product, or increasing the income of the producer. There were few ethnologists or philanthropists who supported Native cultural efforts.19 Museum ethnologists concentrated on recording vanishing traditional knowledge and preserving artefacts, rather than developing a new economy. Only Harlan I. Smith at the National Museum of Canada promoted traditional crafts for the marketplace (Smith 1917, 1918). There were however several Lady Philanthropists who advocated the continuation, recognition and development of hand crafts. This section of the chapter discusses three early attempts to commodify Native arts and crafts: the private sector’s efforts through the Canadian Craft Guild; the federal government actions; and two commercial ventures.

The Canadian Craft Guild
The Canadian Craft Guild played an early role in attempting to gain recognition and appreciation of Native arts and crafts. In Canada, as in England and the United

---

19 Some museum staff, i.e. Edward Sapir and C. Marius Barbeau, were concerned with Native rights and tried to stop anti-potlatching and sun-dance legislation.
States, middle and upper class women devoted their time and energy to the development of Arts and Crafts Societies. The first Arts and Crafts Society in Canada was established in 1903 in Toronto where the designs and social principles of William Morris were promoted by well-known artists, academics and business leaders. Many wealthy people in Montreal and Toronto decorated their homes with Morris style textiles, wallpapers and murals that were locally produced or imported by Canadian retailers. Museums hosted exhibits. Publications and magazines featuring Morris’ designs were widely available.

The Canadian Handicrafts Guild, established in 1905, evolved from the Handicraft Committee of the Montreal branch of the Women’s Art Association of Canada (WAAC). Like its counterpart in the United States, the intent of the early Guild founders was to preserve Canadian folk art by creating a market. This in turn, would encourage the production of high quality hand crafts. From its inception, the Guild included the work of Native crafts people in its exhibitions and salesroom. Aboriginal baskets, beaded materials and other traditional crafts were displayed near embroidered Dukobor textiles, and rural Quebecois woven coverlets and handmade furniture. The Canadian Handicraft Guild recognised and valued Native Arts and Crafts as an integral part of a multicultural Canadian heritage.

Two women, Alice Peck and May Phillips, established the Canadian Handicrafts Guild. Their life histories, values and motivations were very similar to other Lady Philanthropists discussed in this thesis. Alice Peck, born in 1855, was a member of a wealthy upper class Montreal family. She was inspired by the work of British women working with the London poor, particularly Octavia Hill who had also inspired Alice Ravenhill. Like other successful organisers, Peck maintained an extensive network of important social contacts through her travels, clubs, conferences, and especially by her correspondence. Her travels took her across Canada and the United States, including the southwestern areas of the United States. In 1910 she described the railroad station in Albuquerque, comparing it to a museum with demonstrations of rug weaving and silver work, and displays of pottery and baskets set out for sale to the arriving tourist.
May Phillips was the second founding member of the Craft Guild. Born in 1856, she also came from a well-educated, professional family. Her father’s early death, however, left the family with debts and economic hardship. Phillips trained in New York as an art teacher and later established the School of Art and Applied Design in Montreal. Her professionalism came at a time when painting and drawing were considered to be merely womanly accomplishments or hobbies, rather than appropriate careers for ladies. Peck and Phillips were part of the late nineteenth century women’s social movement.

“By the turn of the century, a critical mass of educated, privileged women, armed with greater self-confidence, became leaders...Opportunities in higher education and position in society gave women from prominent families access to power. Their status, although still below men of the same class, was elevated relative to the working farming, and fisher classes, the Indian population and many new settlers to Canada... More advantaged by their class than disadvantaged by their gender, many of these women endeavoured to create harmonious relationships among the various classes and cultural groups in Canada” (McLeod 1999:60).

The formation of the Craft Guild was part of a flourishing environment of clubs, committees and associations among Montreal’s elite early in the 20th century. Peck and Phillips joined the Art Association of Montreal. Membership allowed them access to the Montreal Museum’s art collection, reading room, art classes and annual meetings. However, women were not allowed to vote or serve on the important committees. They became interested in the socially prominent Antiquarian and Numismatic Society and helped to organise a Woman’s Branch. Their activities included fundraising and cataloguing the newly acquired collections of Native artifacts at the Chateau Ramezay Museum. In 1894 they helped to form the Montreal Branch of the Women’s Art Association of Canada (WAAC). The intent was to “encourage higher artistic standards and greater public interest in art and to give women artists a forum for informal art discussions” (McLeod 1999:91). Within this Society they formed the Home Arts and Handicrafts Committee, the purpose of which was to promote women’s artistic handicrafts and the work of rural, Native and immigrant groups.

The first exhibit of handwork by Home Arts and Handicrafts Committee was shown at Morgan’s Department Store in downtown Montreal, and attracted some 8000
visitors. The display included a variety of woven textiles, laces, metal work, painted porcelain and a large collection of Indian crafts obtained from public and private collections. As part of the effort to raise the quality of craft production, the organisers invited Native women from the local reserves to view the basket collections. “The WAAC Montreal Branch claimed its 1900 exhibition had inaugurated the good work of ‘improving the arts and handicrafts of our Indian and the residents of country districts’ which it ‘behoves our branches to carry forward. Montreal gave notice that it placed these handicrafts high on the WAAC agenda” (McLeod 1999:97). A second exhibit in 1902 brought Indian hand work into a fine art gallery for the first time and linked the work more clearly with the goals of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. A sales shop was opened that same year for various hand crafts including Indian basketry and beadwork. Exhibitions were sent to Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and to England and the United States helping to raise the profile of Canadian hand crafted objects.

By 1906, the Home Arts and Handicraft Committee had separated from the Women’s Art Association and was renamed The Canadian Handicraft Guild. Drawing on a support network of scholars, businessmen and political leaders, the Committee established a national reputation. In 1910 Phillips travelled across the country giving speeches and helping to set up branches in various cities. She also looked for new sources for crafts. In Victoria, British Columbia she spoke to the newly established Island Arts Club. This local Society was initially interested in promoting drawing and sketching, but eventually it changed its name to the Island Arts and Crafts Society. A new Arts and Crafts club in Vancouver was established two years later during a promotional trip by Guild member, Christine Steen. These trips to the west coast provided an opportunity for the Canadian Handicraft Guild to establish links with Indian agents, visit reserves and locate new crafts people whose work met the standards set by the Guild.

20 The Society developed an interest in Native crafts in the 1930s when Alice Ravenhill and the collector Charles Newcombe were invited to give talks. The first exhibit of Native art by this Society was in 1940, almost four decades after the Montreal Society had included work of Native material culture (McLeod 1999:165).
Guild activity and new memberships slowed somewhat during World War One. They were renewed after the end of the war. A new program of activities encouraged the revival of crafts, especially among women living in rural areas. The Guild offered kits on traditional handicraft activities that included materials and instructions on knitting, weaving, embroidery and making rugs and mats. An important relationship was established with the Women’s Institutes that had been set up across Canada. The leadership also sought to augment the Guild’s prestige by presenting gifts to the British Royal family and promoting wide spread publicity on their activities. Throughout this period the Guild continued to purchase objects for its collection and to sponsor exhibitions. By 1929 some 300 exhibits had been prepared and more than $700,000 had been given to crafts people (McLeod 1999:189).

Work with Northwest Coast Native handicrafts and producers had been part of the Guild mandate since its inception in 1900. As noted earlier, a major collection of Pacific Coast baskets were displayed in their first exhibition. Visits were also made to British Columbian reserves to purchase objects and encourage production. In 1910, Phillips gave prize money to Indian agents in British Columbia to reward the most talented basket maker, seamstress and wood carver. The Guild encouraged Indian agents, missionaries and schoolteachers to send the work of Native children to Montreal for exhibition and judging. In 1933 the Guild established a new Committee of Indian Work under the leadership of Alice Lighthall. Her mandate called for the promotion and preservation of Native handicrafts by means of education, and training. The sub-committee developed teaching materials for use in the Indian schools. They provided cards illustrating the designs used on traditional objects in museum collections. This project was very similar to the Northwest Coast drawings prepared by Ravenhill for use in British Columbia’s Indian schools. She used the objects in the Provincial Museum in Victoria.

21 These women’s groups were originally established to help rural women improve the quality of their lives through education, hygiene and handwork. Alice Ravenhill travelled through British Columbia lecturing to Women’s Institutes and helped organise groups on Vancouver Island.
Like philanthropic groups in the United States, the Guild lobbied for changes in the Indian Act and tried to halt the Government’s assimilationist policies. The women worked to educate the consumer about fakes and reproductions, and lobbied against cheap Japanese imports. The Guild persuaded the Department of Indian Affairs to conduct a survey among its Indian agents. They were asked to identify current craft production and to determine whether a marketing outlet would help to preserve traditional handwork. The response to this survey “confirmed the significance of a Guild marketing role in helping to retain and revive these skills” (McLeod 1999:225). The Committee then recommended that regional museums should be established for Indian handicraft. The onset of World War II however sidelined these efforts.

*Canadian Government Involvement in Arts and Crafts*

Early records of the federal government’s involvement in the sale and promotion of Native handicrafts, albeit sparse, focus mainly on Aboriginal people in the Eastern, Central and Prairie Provinces. The information that does exist, however, indicates a ‘hands-off’ attitude towards the efforts of Native people to gain and control local craft markets. This policy undoubtedly extended to the Northwest Coast as well. Letters sent to the Department of Indian Affairs by Native basket makers and bead workers complained about the imposition of taxes, and the need for permits and licenses to sell from door to door or from town to town.

“I will be greatly badly hurt by these licenses (sic). You know that we have not any factories around home to make money than baskets…You know, if not you should know, that we have to work all winter to sell our baskets in summer. Now if we have to pay $15.00 licenses just for a while what shall we do? The basket trade is down as ever…. You see you have to protect us like children” (O’Bomsawin to Department Indian Affairs 1914).

The replies from government agents often showed little sympathy. They explained that Native people under the control of the Indian Act are tax-exempt. However, if they left their reserves to sell their products, the municipalities and local parishes could impose taxes or require permits.

This attitude was temporarily altered by the activities of Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs. In 1919 he
wrote to Indian agents in British Columbia asking for information on current craft production and for suggestions on marketing these products. The agents’ replies noted that baskets, argillite, and woodcarving continued to be made and sold to tourists and, to some extent, to local settlers. The most comprehensive reply came from James A. Teit, an ethnographer who worked with the anthropologists Franz Boas and Edward Sapir. Teit who was a linguist and political activist, had collected and documented major collections of Northern Plateau material culture for museums in New York, Chicago, Ottawa and Victoria (Tepper 2001; Wickwire 1998). He was able to provide D.C. Scott with an annotated list of more than a dozen traditional activities that had, or could have, a wider market. Some crafts, like baskets, moccasins and gloves were being made for sale to tourists and to the general population. Others, such as snowshoes and traditional costumes, could be developed for a speciality market for local use or for museums. Several skills, including the production of rawhide bags, horse equipment, fur robes and rope or net making, were no longer viable in a modern market.

Teit also provided a snapshot of current marketing practices. He pointed out that Native craftspeople had few opportunities to sell their work. Occasionally dealers or museum people came to the reserve to buy, and sometimes, local people would commission an article of traditional manufacture. Native people also took their handmade objects to the local stores, but Teit noted that the prices they were offered did not reflect the cost of the materials and the investment of labour. “Most stores will not handle or buy their products at all, whist others will do so only if the Indians take the price in same of trade” (Teit to Scott 1919). The final option was for the Native people to peddle their work, going house to house, or to set out their wares on street corners or wharfs where tourists congregated.

Teit and other Indian agents recommended that the government become involved in marketing objects of traditional manufacture. They suggested that a single agent should travel through the Province to promote the production of arts and crafts in the Native communities. In areas with shortages of raw materials such as deerskins or furs, the agent could promote intertribal trade, and thus develop local economies. The government should also establish a sales outlet in one of the large tourist
centres, particularly in Vancouver or Victoria. Its manager should be someone knowledgeable in traditional Indian ‘lore’, so that he could explain the history and cultural context of the object to the buyers. It was suggested, as well, that the Government should also provide opportunities, through the schools or by promoting apprenticeships, for training in traditional crafts.

Scott asked for a meeting with Edward Sapir and Harlan Smith at the National Museum to discuss these ideas. His intention was to hire Teit who, as the Department’s Provincial Agent in British Columbia, would be responsible for promoting the production and marketing of arts and crafts. He would also encourage the exchange of raw materials among the Indians. Such plans were not implemented because Teit became increasingly ill and died in 1922. Scott later sadly noted, “I could not carry out the project as no one could take his place” (Scott to Jenness Oct. 30, 1929).

The onset of the First World War drew government attention away from domestic and Aboriginal issues. Native people had to find their own markets, but it appears that they had little interest in developing or promoting their traditional work. They also received contradictory messages from Indian Agents, missionaries and buyers about arts and crafts production. Traditional beliefs and lifestyles were viewed negatively, portrayed as primitive and backward. Deasey noted that elders who talked about legendary stories were considered to be in senile decay. The Indians wanted to be associated with modern objects, gramophones and moving pictures (Deasy to Scott March 21, 1918). Yet government agents were promoting production of traditional knowledge through handicrafts. Indian Agents were encouraging Native people to spend time, money, and energy to produce objects of little monetary value or social prestige.

The market values of traditional material culture also produced a contradictory picture. Objects were traded more frequently than sold. Baskets taken door to door were exchanged for used clothes. Baskets taken to the local store were exchanged for

---

22 The Indian agent, Thomas Deasey, offered to return to Victoria from northern
food or household goods. The shopkeeper then placed a 75% to 100% mark-up on the basket, which in turn was sold to a curio dealer from an urban centre. When Native people saw their work for sale in cities or large towns, the dollar value of the basket had doubled or even tripled from the initial price that the maker had received. This process was discouraging to the producer.

“Now a days, the Indian want the value of his time and experience in any calling. It is not to be found in making handicrafts work, that is only valuable as a keepsake or ornament” (Deasy to Scott March 21, 1918).

Local Efforts in British Columbia

Efforts by the federal government or the Canadian Handicrafts Guild to support Aboriginal arts and crafts were taking place in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, far away from the reserves and urban centres of British Columbia. However, Northwest Coast Native people continued to make objects of traditional material culture for sale. The tourist trade provided a market and the local population bought gloves, moccasins and other items for personal use. Although the large-scale acquisition of historic artefacts by American, European and Canadian museums was generally finished, a few museums continued to collect. A number of individuals also tried to help Native people to augment their income through the sale of arts and crafts. Indian agents and missionaries, in particular, often promoted Indian work and tried to make such objects more accessible to the marketplace. Two examples are discussed below.

Missionaries As Arts And Crafts Promoters

“The key role of missionaries in the demise, modification or commoditization (sic) of Native art is a surprisingly neglected topic in the current surge of research on contact arts, colonial transformations, and hybridity” (Graburn 2000:14).

Some research has been undertaken on missionary activities and traditional material culture. MacDonald discusses missionary involvement in removing artefacts from the Native community (MacDonald 1985). Other writers have studied the missionary as collectors or as promoters of traditional objects made for sale (Lee 2000). Earlier
in this thesis, reference was made to Duncan’s work in developing craft skills at the Metlakatla Mission. Occasionally missionaries undertook promotional efforts on their own. One such example is the Reverend Stanley Higgs who worked at the Lytton Agency in the early 1930s. He was particularly impressed by the work of the local basket weavers.

“Annie Lee’s work was exquisite and she was justifiably proud of it. I suggested that Mr. Graham the Indian Agent might be able to arrange for it to be entered in the fine arts competition later that year. This actually took place and the next time I saw the beautiful piece of art work was in the agent’s office. I identified it as the work of Annie Lee, and asked how it had done at the exhibition. It turned out it had won first prize as a piece of art, and also in the basket weaving display, but Annie Lee had not been made aware of this, and of course she had not received the prize. The oversight was remedied almost at once after our conversation” (Higgs 1987:224).

Reverend Higgs then conceived a plan to market the local Native women’s basketry work in Vancouver. He asked the makers if they could increase their production. He then tried to persuade the Hudson’s Bay Company Store in Vancouver to host a demonstration and sale of their work. He found the “reception almost too good to be true” (Higgs 1987:225), receiving a promise of store space on the fifth floor, and a window display on the prominent street side. Higgs then approached local hotels that sold baskets as tourist items: again he received a positive response. Hotel owners believed that although tourists were often unwilling to pay what they considered high prices for baskets, the Hudson’s Bay show would nevertheless improve sales. Higgs also took a basket to a local candy shop and demonstrated how neatly a half-pound of wrapped candies could fit inside. The shop immediately put in an order for a display of small and medium baskets. Higgs’ final stop was the city’s newspaper that was persuaded to print the story. He explained that the

“whole idea behind the program was primarily to preserve a threatened Native art form and secondly to educate the public, especially the tourist, as to the value of a set of dinner mats, a tray, baskets and all varieties of basket work, and dissuade them from indulging in hard bargaining with the Natives” (Higgs 1987:225).

Higgs returned to the Agency in triumph and the basket weavers started to fill the orders. He noted “It was good to see womenfolk who had not touched cedar root or bark for years plying their art so skilfully” (Higgs 1987:226). Unfortunately Higgs was transferred to another Agency before he could complete the project.
Indian Agent turned Middleman

Thomas Deasy was appointed as Indian Agent for the Haida Agency in 1910 and remained until his retirement in 1924. Stearns (1981:59-71) suggests that he was generally successful in his relations with the Native population and was particularly interested in local arts and crafts development. One important venue for the sale and display of Native handicrafts was the Prince Rupert annual Fall Fair. Deasy’s friend and fellow Indian Agent for the Tsimshian communities wrote to him about the details.

“...The Exhibition will soon be on and I am beginning to worry about exhibits. The Fair committee suggested moving the Indian booth to another part of the building as they thought there would not be as many Indian exhibits this time to warrant the use of the old stand which is very much coveted by many would-be exhibitors. I have refused to budge and have assured the committee that the exhibits this year - notwithstanding Mr. Perry’s absence - would equal if not excel former exhibits. In order to make my word good I am depending upon the kindly interest you have always taken, and the support you have always given to the Indian section” (Collison to Deasy August 15, 1923).

The display of arts and crafts was to be enhanced by a demonstration of basket and mat weaving, and argillite carving. The craftspeople, two Haidas and a Tsimshian, would receive the cost of their travel, an honorarium of $3 a day and the right to sell their work at the Fair.

Deasy’s correspondence indicates the amount of artefact and arts and crafts materials that would have been available on the Islands from 1910 to 1920. In a report to Duncan Campbell Scott he described a private collection of some 500 Haida baskets

---

23 Fall Fairs were an important venue for the display of Indian arts and crafts. W.H. Keary, (Secretary-Treasurer of the Board of Trade in New Westminster) wrote to his friend Deasy: “I am enclosing a list of awards given solely to Indians of B.C. The retiring Indian Agent at Kamloops, took a great interest in our Exhibition and captured many prizes for the Indians, who are admitted free the whole week of the Fair, in addition to the cash prizes they obtain.” (Keary to Deasy July 19, 1923). Indian crafts were also featured at the major Vancouver Pacific exhibition. “Hand weaving, the manufacture of raw wool into various grades of yarn, basket making and totem carving being featured each day during the period of the exhibition by graduates of British Columbia Indian Schools” (McKay to Ravenhill October 26, 109
Deasy was 54 years old when he became an Indian Agent and he would not be receiving a sizeable pension on retirement. He searched for other sources of income and acted, at various times, as an agent for timber, mining and oil companies on the Northwest Coast. None of these ventures however were as successful as his marketing of Native hand crafts, particularly, argillite carvings.

His main buyer was an American collector, Leigh M. Pearsall, whose wealth was derived from New York City real estate and the Cotton Exchange. Pearsall’s intention was to create a famous legacy.

"I have secured nine poles from the State of Washington, through purchase, but they are not exactly what I want and I would like very much to secure some from you if possible and in this connection I wish to give you every assurance that I am not making a commercial venture and have no thought of disposing of them for profit or otherwise except that when I transfer my Indian relic collection (said by Prof. Warren K. Moorehead to be the largest private collection in the world) it shall be to the United States government or to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, these two collections being the largest in the world. I say this, as I can readily understand how you might not wish to have any connection with a commercial venture where it has to do with these wonderful Indian productions. The poles I have and any I may get from you will be put in a fire-proof building so that there will be every reason to believe that they will be preserved for all time for the general good of all interested" (Pearsall to Deasy July 31 1922).
Pearsall had already purchased the entire collection of A.A. Aaronson’s Victoria shop from the owner’s widow, as well as the collection of the Hudson’s Bay Company store in Seattle. Deasy suggested that he try buying carvings from Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe in Seattle, but Pearsall dismissed these wares as tourist material. The former Indian Agent then offered his own collection to Pearsall with information about its rarity, quality and family connections to famous Chiefs and carvers.

“In my Collection are invaluable articles of the “Stone age,” and Indians now know their value. We no longer get articles for small sums. The four “Blankets” belonged to the “Edenshaw” and “Adams” families - the oldest and greatest of Haida Chiefs. I just paid $350.00 for some of the articles to H. Edenshaw, the son of the 1st “Chief Edenshaw.” The three Carved Totem Poles are the best ever carved by Haidas; also the two small wooden Totem Poles. I could open a store, during the tourist season, and make quite a sum from the Haida work. ... Am taking a 40 foot pole on the ground in front of my house. Towage, to the steamer, and freight from here to Vancouver, runs high, on large totem poles. I can get poles; but the cost would be high. Am packing, and hurried. I do not care, personally, whether you take the Collection. My idea is to be free from worries, of any kind” (Deasey to Pearsall).

Deasy corresponded with other collectors, such as G.T. Emmons with whom he was negotiating the sale of a stone bowl. He also heard from the Native people at Haida Gwaii who wrote about their work at the cannery, activities in the community and especially marriages and recent deaths. His most important correspondence was with Alfred Adams at Massett who operated a general dry goods store. The letterhead on Adams’ 1924 stationary identified his store as ‘General Merchants’ and advertised his stock of Victrolas and Victor Records. The list also included patent medicines, groceries, fruit and vegetables, dry goods, hardware, rubbers, boots and shoes, gasoline and oil, assorted paints, and Coleman gas lamps.
By 1925 Deasy had retired as an Indian Agent and become a successful dealer. He was searching for more argillite carvings and tried to buy back his original collection of 160 pieces. The original price for this collection was about a $1.00 an inch, but Pearsall was willing to pay $2.00 an inch. Deasy also decided to buy new pieces from Haida carvers and wrote to Alfred Adams asking him to be his middleman. Adams replied:

"Regarding slate totems, I am ever ready to act for you in getting the poles for you. I think the Skidegates are in position to sell good bunch of them, as they have been carving up to now, and expect they will sell them to me at the figure of 60 (cents) an inch, and all I expect to make is to pay for my time and expenses for two weeks. Which I figure will take me to make the trip" (Adams to Deasy January 17, 1925).

Deasy, now living in Victoria, asked his friend, Keary, to look for poles in Vancouver. Keary obligingly sent him some poles and noted "I see lots of slate totems in the windows in Vancouver curio stores. There is one down near the C.P.R. station. I do not often go to Vancouver, but I generally try and hunt up, when I hear of any of these curio stores" (Keary to Deasy January 23, 1925). By February of 1925, Adams had promised to provide 700 to 1000 running inches of slate poles. Deasy's friend was also making trips to Vancouver to pick up all the poles he could find in tourist shops. Meanwhile Pearsall had purchased poles from Stanleys Olde Curiosity Shoppe in Seattle, but later returned them as overpriced tourist art. The first shipment of freshly carved poles from Adams was sent to Deasy in March 1925.

"The business is very quiet and I cannot sell very much now, I tell you Mr. Deasy I cannot tell you how I am thankful to act in getting poles for you. I expect to have more poles about another month. If you can afford it I would be pleased if you can send me more funds to buy all the totem poles in Skidegate. You will be pleased to get Tom Prices' poles and also Jon Cross and George Smith's. I had found they high in their prices; only they good, their work cost me 77 cents an inch, and you must sell them separately apart from others. With the Massetts I measure them to-morrow and I'll ship them either Sunday or Tuesday" (Adams to Deasy March 13, 1925).

Deasy bought back his original collection of 160 poles at twice the original price. Pearsall was delighted with the large number of new additions to his argillite collection. "When it comes to smelling out the Jadite work here and there about the

---

26 The two carvers, Price and Cross are now considered as being among the finest of the Haida artists.
Northwest you have them all beat a mile … To get 2000 inches all in one fell swoop after I thought it looked as though the ground had been thoroughly cleaned up is a feat of no small proportions” (Pearsall to Deasy June 16, 1925). By July Keary noted “You cannot buy a slate totem in Vancouver for “love nor money” (Keary to Deasy July 27 1925).

One of the most interesting results of Deasy’s activities as Indian Agent turned middleman, was Alfred Adams’ engagement in the curio trade. By 1928, Adams had opened two more stores on the Islands, including one at the new cannery site. He had enough money or credit to purchase a car and planned to travel from Masset to Skidegate to acquire curios. He was also bringing large shipments of curios to Victoria for sale. Harlan Smith, the curator at the National Museum (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) notes in his 1928 acquisition file that Adams was selling $1000 worth of curios a year. By 1929 Adam’s store stationary had changed its heading from promoting Victrolas and Victor records to advertising Indian Totem Poles and Baskets. He wrote to Deasy

“Business is very dull with me owing to so many other competitions recently got up. I am afraid it is going to be quiet all winter. I am expecting to collect a large number of totem poles again. I might open a curio store in Vancouver next summer providing if I succeed get good number of poles. I’ve just recently received a letter from Sweden where a man talking buying Haida totem poles” (Adams to Deasy Sept 28, 1929).

The Depression put an end to the argillite market and to other handicraft sales. Pearsall lost a great deal of money in the stock market crash and stopped buying Northwest Coast material. Deasy’s friend Kearny who had recently bought carvings from Adams for resale was caught in a market downturn.

“I have that ink-stand and platter that Alfred Adams tried to sell you and whom you sent to me. I did not have all the money myself to purchase them but I induced a young gentleman here to come in with me, telling him that we should be able to make some money on the deal. We paid $50.00 for the inkstand and $28.00 for the platter and we have not been able to sell them yet. …You say they are asking $2.00 an inch down there, I am trying to sell these jadite poles I have for $1.50 an inch, but as I say we cannot sell anything of this kind in New Westminster unless to some chap visiting here from the East” (Keary to Deasy July 9, 1930).
Deasy’s efforts as middleman, however, showed that Northwest Coast handmade objects were starting to find a private collectors market early in the twentieth century. By the 1930s, progress had been made in creating a public value for Indian arts and crafts, whether it was south-western pots being sold on Fifth Avenue or an exhibition at the Montreal fine art museum. The doubling of prices per inch of argillite carvings suggests the growth of a new market, sufficient to attract investors, and stable enough to encourage Native enterprise. Deasy’s transactions also encouraged Alfred Adams to push for higher prices for better work. The Indian Agent was accomplishing what the ‘Lady Bountifuls’, the Arts and Crafts Boards, and Duncan Campbell Scott had hoped to create – a market for native arts and crafts.

**Conclusion**

Deasy, as an Indian agent turned middleman, and Reverend Higgs, a missionary turned promoter, are only two examples of the many non-Natives engaged in creating a local market for Aboriginal arts and crafts. From 1900 to 1930, Indian agents, schoolteachers and missionaries attempted to use the traditional material culture as a means of systematically improving the reserve economy and alleviating social problems. Individually they did not have the resources to establish a viable environment. Isolated from the larger marketplace, they were not able to identify the nature of the problem, nor determine which aspect of hand work they should promote – the art, the craft or the tourist object.

By the late 1930s, however, a social and economic environment was finally established in North America, which was conducive to promoting Native arts and crafts. The concepts of social reform and self-help, associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, were by then widely recognised and generally accepted among the educated elite. Nationalist sentiments and a sense of moral obligation encouraged people of wealth and power to recognise the value of Native arts and crafts. Governments programs, particularly in the United States, were setting up formal structures to teach, market and exhibit objects of traditional material culture. Unfortunately similar efforts in Canada were focussed primarily on Native communities in the eastern and northern parts of the country. Attempts to develop
markets for Northwest Coast items were sporadic, and depended on private individuals. Alice Ravenhill’s Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts provided a focal point for regional development.
Chapter Five – Alice Ravenhill And the Society for the Furtherance of 
B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts – 1940-1960

The founding of a British Columbia Arts and Crafts Society just prior to the Second 
World War was a late development in the history of the Arts and Crafts Movement. 
Nevertheless, as with similar societies in Canada and the United States, it challenged 
the common perception of Aboriginal people and the low valuation attached to their 
crafts. The Society’s projects facilitated the redefinition of Native hand work as art, 
and thus helped to create a new, more profitable environment for the producer. Also 
Alice Ravenhill’s writings, public speeches, and voluminous correspondence drew 
together influential people in politics, academia and government. United in their 
concern about Native welfare, their voices helped to create a new awareness of 
human rights and increased respect for Aboriginal people in British Columbia.

The first section of this chapter presents the history of Alice Ravenhill and the 
establishment of the Society. Her life experiences, philosophy and actions directed 
the form and substance of a philanthropic group of people who continued to support 
her ideals some 30 years after her death. The latter portion of the chapter traces the 
Society’s history, accomplishments and demise. The emergence of a strong Native 
rights movement after the Second World War transformed the Society’s role and 
relationship to its Native partners. Moreover, changing attitudes towards Aboriginal 
traditional material culture and its acceptance as works of art made the need for an 
Arts and Crafts Society obsolete.

Alice Ravenhill- British Columbia’s Lady Bountiful

A Victorian Childhood

“...The stream of social life into which I was born has almost petered out. With 
it has disappeared to a great degree the atmosphere in which I was reared, 
with its sense of responsibility for the advantages enjoyed, of the paramount 
duty of serving others, of self-control and reticence, of dignified endurance of 
reverses, of respect for authority and law, of cheerful self-sacrifice, and of 
dogged perseverance to gain desired ends” (Ravenhill 1951:222).
Alice Ravenhill was born in 1859, in an English country house at Snaresbrook, Essex. The second daughter in a family of seven children, she grew up in a setting of wealth and privilege. Her maternal grandparents had made their fortune in the manufacture of English woollens. Her paternal grandfather trained as a lawyer, married a wealthy heiress, and later became a bank director. He had sufficient wealth, property and standing to live the life of a country gentlemen and his sons attended Eton, Winchester, and Oxford. They in turn became lawyers, engineers or served in the army. The women in the family were expected to be accomplished in social skills and arts that befitted a lady of the time. Alice remembers

“My mother, for example, educated at a residential school in London, played the harp with skill and was an experienced and graceful horsewoman, a charming hostess, and the competent manger of a large household. Her exquisite stitchery was lavished on the dainty garments she provided for her children; and she continued to display this skill until her death at seventy-two years of age” (Ravenhill 1951:2).

Alice’s role models were drawn from her immediate family, particularly her grandparents and mother. The men enjoyed music and discussed politics. They mainly read English history, essays, poetry and ‘sermons by the old divines’. The women had multiple pregnancies and nursed the surviving children through numerous illnesses. They supervised large households with cooks, servants, and stable hands, while playing a central role in the activities of the local village and church. At the same time, they managed to stay aware of current fashions and indulged their own interests and whims.

Although surrounded by wealth and privilege, children in Alice’s family were taught self-control and discipline. Lessons in character were administered early and reinforced by verbal reprimands, or, when necessary, by punishments of suppers of dry toast and water, or doses of vile tasting medicines.

Ravenhill’s childhood memories included a long list of illnesses, her own and those of her siblings. Whooping cough, rheumatic fever, measles, mumps and chicken pox affected one child after the other. The children were often referred to as ‘delicate’ and their illnesses left behind ailments which, as adults, were alleviated by visits to European spas.
“Prompt, unquestioning obedience was our first duty, from the moment we could understand the tone of voice. This requirement was consistently imposed by both mother and head nurse, the latter somewhat of a tyrant... Self-control was early required of us. We must not show disappointment... Neither must we show cowardice...” (Ravenhill 1951:18).

Such restraint was reinforced by strict attendance at church services, by the recopying of sermons and maxims as school exercises, and by the books offered for early childhood reading. She remembers learning at age four the maxim: ‘If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.’ This verse was often repeated in letters and correspondence written some eighty years later, as a form of self-encouragement or to encourage others.

The Ravenhill children were taught their responsibilities to those ‘less fortunate’. In the nursery the children made toys for the ‘cowman’s children’, which “once undertaken, must be completed, or if carelessly constructed must be unpulled and remade” (Ravenhill 1951:19). As a young girl, Alice accompanied her aunt and sisters when they paid formal visits to invalids in the village or to cottages on their relatives’ estates. They distributed meals and visited the elderly.

“Looking back these many years I think the idea of duty was over stressed in our childhood. Its paramount importance was kept constantly before us as also was that of honour, both in word and deed, not counting the personal cost” (Ravenhill 1951:26).

A poorly educated governess taught the younger Ravenhill children in the family’s schoolroom. Reading, literature and geography were learned by rote memorisation of long passages of the Bible, poetry and lists of countries, their capitals and geographical features. Arithmetic, spelling, music lessons, French and sewing were taught along with various hobbies such as drying wildflowers. At the age of 12, Alice went to a residential school where she and her older sister studied for five years. Their daily schedules emphasised Bible study, ancient history, French, geography, Greek and Latin roots, and German and English literature. Less time was expended on contemporary geography, science and mathematics. Many hours were also devoted to learning the manners of an accomplished Victorian lady. Along with lessons in music, elocution, and popular ballroom dances, the young ladies rehearsed bowing, walking, carrying on general conversation and developing an ‘ease of’
manner’ when asked to play or sing. They practised writing letters to request the
class of a servant, and to accept or decline invitations to a variety of social
functions. At the end of her life, when she looked back on these years, Ravenhill
believed she had received a good general education in academic subjects and
valuable social skills.

Social Reformer
Alice and her sister left the residential school when the Ravenhill family fortune
diminished. Her father had been cheated by a business partner and, to conserve their
resources, the family moved to a smaller home in London. Now eighteen, Alice
undertook her first foray into social reform. She served as a Sunday School teacher
in her parish which included a section of one of London’s poorer districts. In her
study of ‘Lady Philanthropists’, Ross noted that such charitable activities offered
young women “modest adventures”.

“Colonial metaphors abound in the nineteenth century’s construction of the
relationship between the British poor and the philanthropists and social
workers who lived among them. Dark, exotic possibly dangerous, yet
intriguing and childlike, the “natives” provided among other things an arena
for middle-class female adventures and self-discovery” (Ross 1990:174).

Having finished school, and being an eligible young lady, Alice entered a world of
social engagements, including balls, visits to country houses and trips to Europe. She
became engaged to an eligible young physician. Three days before the wedding,
however, her parents cancelled the engagement in a dispute over the marriage
contract.

“Modern maidens will smile at my submission to such drastic procedure. I
was stunned by the shock; debarred from seeing my fiancé or from receiving
his letters; and whisked out of London. The old nursery training was
rigorously exacted; I must give no outward sign of the ordeal through which I
had passed” (Ravenhill 1951:52).

Although she never married, the wedding debacle did not seem to hinder her
acceptance into important social circles. Through her brother’s acquaintances, Alice
became friends with two of Queen Victoria’s younger children, Prince Leopold and
Princess Christian, and was impressed by the philanthropic activities of the women
in the royal family. Leopold’s wife, the Duchess of Albany held a salon which
welcomed ‘men of letters’, including Ruskin, whose writings had helped to establish
the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Duchess also attempted to improve working
conditions for women and spent Sunday afternoons in an “unsavoury district of
South East London among the girls she helped so substantially” (Ravenhill 1951:56).
Princess Christian, who had helped to nurse Prince Albert through his fatal typhoid
illness, dedicated herself to improving social conditions by establishing schools for
nurses.

The Ravenhill family fortunes slowly declined and several bad investments forced
the family to leave London. Their sons had moved away from home, but the three
girls remained unmarried. They lived with their parents who maintained a strict code
of feminine deportment. Alice’s older sister was an artist, and her younger sister
devoted her time to singing at charitable events and working on silk embroideries for
local churches.28 At the age of 29 Alice broke away from her parent’s restrictions
and enrolled in a diploma program for County Council Lecturers in rural districts.
She would teach “Home Nursing,” First Aid and “Health in the Home. “This was an
era of awakening, in respect of public health and the urgent need for reform in the
conditions under which the “working classes” lived and carried on their occupations”
(Ravenhill 1951:64). The role of women in these activities gradually became
acceptable. Courses for women to teach domestic science had been available since
the 1870s. Women could now receive training and instruct others in home nursing,
first aid, nutrition, sanitation and other aspects of child and family health. At the end
of Alice’s year of study and practical nursing, Princess Christian presented diplomas
to her and three other women graduates.

Ravenhill developed a rigorous methodology for preparing her lectures and courses.
It was a pattern she applied some 50 years later to establish and maintain the British
Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts Society. She conscientiously did her homework
before each lecture, by interviewing knowledgeable people and gathering
information on local social conditions. “This method of applying to the fountainhead

28 Art embroidery was an important aspect of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Edith
Ravenhill guided the Church Embroidery Guild in Victoria for 13 years and was an
active supporter of her sister’s efforts to establish the Society. The older sister
Margaret disapproved of Alice’s social reform activities and of what she called
“platform women” (Ravenhill 1951:62).
for information was one I followed all my life. Today I cannot recall a tithe of the men and women to whom I addressed my requests for help” (Ravenhill 1951:76). She honed her communication skills, learned to use concrete examples and based her talk on local experience and conditions. Each presentation reflected her audience’s expectations, and she modified her language and illustrations to meet their needs. For example when talking about health and working conditions East-End London audiences expected a “spade to be called a spade”, while a gathering of titled ladies “sheltered behind the Victorian screen of false modesty” (Ravenhill 1951:72).

During the next 20 years Ravenhill established a career. She gave public lectures, conducted surveys and wrote reports on the working and living conditions in rural communities, homes and schools. She travelled to America to teach and learn about public health and home economics and helped to establish a program to teach ‘domestic science’ at the University of London. Her knowledge and contributions were recognised, and she was appointed (often as the first or only woman), to committees, lobby groups and commissions studying legislation for public welfare. Throughout these years, she continued to vacation in Europe, and spend time with a social set that included many upper-class men and women who pioneered social welfare reform in British society.

Moving to the New World
In 1910 Ravenhill left England for Canada. Alice’s household for a number of years, had consisted of her sister Edith, her brother Horace and his son Leslie. This young nephew, an agricultural student, had decided to emigrate to British Columbia and his father decided to go with him.

“But I confess the shock to me was startling when my sister insisted that she and I must join our men folk as soon as we could and make a home for them both during the early years of pioneer life… the surprising fact was that not one of the three apparently realized either then or later that this meant I must resign the ever developing and encouraging work to which my life was devoted” (Ravenhill 1951:170).

Alice’s departure from her English home, her circle of influential friends and the growing appreciation of her work was difficult. The following year found her at a remote farm on Shawnigan Lake on Vancouver Island. The brother and nephew, who
had arrived a year earlier, had cleared land and built a homestead. Alice and her sister packed water and wood, looked after livestock and performed other farm and domestic chores. However it soon became clear that the land was unsuitable for farming and a return on their initial investment could not expected for many years.

Despite the remoteness of the farm, the Ravenhills received visits from relatives and friends from America, England and Australia. Among them was a young New Zealand anthropologist, Diamond Jenness, who had just finished his training at Oxford. His ship, the Karluk29, was to depart from Vancouver for a 3-year scientific expedition to the Arctic. Jenness later became the Chief of the Anthropology Division of the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) and remained a lifelong friend and supporter of Alice Ravenhill and her activities.

After four years at Shawnigan Lake, Alice and Edith attempted to return to London so that Alice could resume her career. They interviewed several housekeepers to look after their brother and nephew, but the unremitting rain, the hard work and pioneering conditions discouraged all potential candidates. In 1914, Canada entered the First World War and Alice’s nephew was the first young man in the area to enlist. He was killed by poison gas at Ypres in 1915.

Throughout this period Alice continued to lecture, teach and build her network of influential people across Canada and the United States. She became involved with British Columbia’s program of Women’s Institutes, and travelled to remote communities on Vancouver Island and on the mainland to give lectures. She often felt, however, that her work was undervalued and that her talks were met with resentment, suspicion and a colonial anti-British prejudice. Undaunted, Ravenhill continued to lecture, write pamphlets, edit a Woman’s Institute quarterly journal and publish her talks. She established a number of Women’s Institutes on Vancouver

29 Early in the expedition, the Karluk was trapped in the ice and later crushed. A number of the crew were stranded and several died. Diamond Jenness escaped, having left the ship with several members of the expedition to hunt. He stayed in the Arctic and conducted ethnographic fieldwork from 1913-1916 (Tepper 1983).
Island and hosted and attended international conferences. She was employed for two years as director of Home Economics at Utah State College, but contracted influenza and returned home too ill to continue working.

During the following 25 years Alice, her sister Edith and their brother Horace, lived together in Victoria. Edith took the lead in the Church Embroidery Guild. Horace supported the Boy Scouts Organisation and Alice continued to join committees and work for Woman’s Institute groups. Decreasing income and poor health led them to sell their home and move into a residential hotel. Alice and her sister took a final vacation, a cruise along the Inside Passage to Stewart, Alaska. Horace, now in his seventies, fulfilled a lifelong dream by taking a train to Nova Scotia, then bicycling alone across Canada back to Victoria.

**Ravenhill and the Emergence of a Program for Native Arts and Crafts**

Ravenhill’s idea to establish a Society to help Native people in British Columbia developed from her skills in traditional women’s hand work. Alice’s mother was famous for her “exquisite stitchery” and her sister Edith spent much of her life involved with women’s embroidery guilds. It is not clear whether Alice devoted much time to hand work during her years lecturing or helping to manage the Shawnigan farm. She was taught, however, to sew at an early age and fine needlework was encouraged at her finishing school. After moving to Victoria, Alice spent a great deal of time at her hand work, and was photographed at age 82 posing with her embroidery frame. She also sent gifts and samples of her sewing to various correspondents and acquaintances. Alice enclosed a sample of her embroidery in one of her earliest letters to Anthony Walsh.

> “I worked it over my hand, not in a frame; and a magnifying glass will show you the amount of stitchery involved. I have specialised for years in this method of reproducing Indian designs, including imbricated baskets, and my work has gone all over the Empire; but I can secure no follower; young people won’t take the necessary trouble to study the significance and practise the absolute accuracy” (Ravenhill to Walsh October 31st 1939).

She exhibited “two beautiful pieces” (her own evaluation) of hand worked textiles at the 1940 Arts and Crafts Exhibit in Victoria. Her most important embroidery may have been the needle-worked image of a Mythical Raven in “accurate tribal
colouring” (Ravenhill 951:215) that she sent as a gift to Queen Elizabeth in 1939. The value of this piece lay not so much in the object itself, as in the resulting royal thank you letter and photograph. Ravenhill proudly mentioned these tokens of the Queen’s esteem in later correspondence and in conversations with visitors throughout the remainder of her life.

The link between embroidery and sewing for Victorian women and Alice Ravenhill’s interest in Native hand crafts is noteworthy. Of all the arts and crafts activities in the last half of the 19th century, this hand work was probably the most significant in providing new opportunities for women’s employment and self-expression (Parker 1984). Sewing was considered a womanly task, and all women were expected to be able to sew. It was also a respectable source of income for working class and lower class women. The emergence of “art-needlework” offered new opportunities to upper-class women. The Royal School of Art Needlework, founded in 1872, offered safe and respectable employment to “poor gentlewomen in workshops restricted to their own kind” (Mcleod 1999:53). It also offered new opportunities for creativity. MacCarthy noted:

“Morris was by this time (1876) at the centre of the burgeoning Art Needlework movement. It is possible to view this as a retrograde movement, a means of keeping women captive with their needles...But Morris was concerned with the releasing of creative instincts which would otherwise be dormant. In his determination to break the grip of mechanically worked canvas embroidery, introducing freer designs, more varied colours, he was indeed the prophet of the subversive stitch. He was among the first of the designers when the Royal School of Needlework was founded ... to restore ornamental needlework for secular places to the high place it once held among the decorative arts” (MacCarthy 1994:360).

Appreciation of this new avenue for women’s self-reliance crossed the Atlantic when William Morris’s sister-in-law Bessie Burden took an exhibit of embroideries from the Royal School to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. This display inspired the creation of an American organisation to help support impoverished women by means of their needlework and other handicrafts (Mcleod 1999:56).

Alice Ravenhill became interested in British Columbia’s Native people in 1926, when she was asked by the Women’s Institutes to develop rug-hooking patterns based on traditional Northwest Coast designs. She asked Charles Newcombe, a
neighbour and a well-known collector of Northwest Coast artefacts, for assistance. She also conducted her own research in local libraries and the Provincial Archives.

“You cannot “research” without background … further, at the Archives, as probably you know, there is no Index to guide students or even experts. It is a case of dig, dig, dig, for yourself, as ten years has taught me during what amounts to months of time passed in this spade work” (Ravenhill to Walsh March 7th, 1940).

Three years later, she was ready to respond to the Women’s Institutes’ request. However, the organisation had lost interest. Nevertheless, her newly acquired knowledge led her to offer lectures on the history and arts of Native peoples to the Arts and Crafts Society and other clubs. Ravenhill noted that the attendance and interest in these lectures was among the lowest she had ever experienced. She also used her research to “reproduce in needlework a number of BC Tribal designs with painstaking attention to all details and colourings, at first on large hooked rugs and then on bags, book covers, cushions etc.” (Ravenhill 1951:210). These products were offered for sale at a local shop, but there were few buyers. Several of them were also sent to purchasers (possibly family and friends) overseas.

Eventually, Ravenhill used her research to prepare a brochure on Native People in BC for the provincial schools and wrote a longer paper titled *The Native Tribes of BC* for the Provincial Museum. She continued to research, select and reproduce designs in needlework based on Native images, noting in a 1940 letter that “coiled basket designs reproduce admirably in cornstitch on bags, aprons, curtains, borders etc.” (Ravenhill to Walsh March 7th, 1940). She also suggested stencilling imbricated basket designs as borders for tablecloths and other textiles as an idea for “girl’s work” (Ravenhill to Walsh February 7th 1940).

The Founding of the Society

“Through art we can, in time, at least direct these young Indians towards the preservation of their own individuality and character, as a social duty they owe to their own culture. This integration should be accomplished if only to assure the survival of human personality” (Ravenhill to Walsh August 3rd, 1940).
The Society created by Alice Ravenhill had a forty year history of a multi-faceted social, political and educational program. It began with a fairly simple goal - to establish a committee to help fund the publication of a story written and illustrated by Okanagan children. It was not long however, before other projects and humanitarian goals became the focus of a growing number of concerned individuals.

The Okanagan story was the brainchild of Anthony Walsh, a young teacher at a Native school on the Inkameep Reserve. Ravenhill originally contacted Walsh in 1939 as one of many possible sources of information for her research on pictographs. In October of that year, she heard a radio program describing Walsh’s drama program to encourage Native children to perform plays based on traditional stories.

“I am wondering whether in any small way I can help you, either by furnishing you with any legends among those I have collected which might be dramatized, or by sending you tracings of costumes, masks, native houses or paraphernalia which might be of service... I have over 150 tracings which I associated with selected legends which I have sent in vain to three outstanding publishing firms, in one case with the backing of Lady Tweedsmuir and her offer to write an Introduction. I shall persevere, but, of course existing conditions are entirely adverse” (Ravenhill to Walsh October 13th, 1939).

Ravenhill’s familiarity with publishers seems to have attracted Walsh’s interest. He sent her a copy of a Nativity story illustrated by his students with Okanagan settings and imagery. Ravenhill was charmed by the children’s drawings and asked several friends to form a committee to raise funds for its printing.

This new Indian Arts committee was yet one more benevolent educational or cultural association in an already crowded social calendar for Victoria’s upper class. The Arts and Crafts Society, the Authors Association, Women’s Institutes, and church groups were only a few of the clubs that demanded time, money and energy from a small, educated elite.

In its early meetings, the Society consisted of Ravenhill, and five or six people interested in the history and social situation of British Columbia’s Indian population. Perhaps the most distinguished member of her newly fledged committee was Major Bullock-Webster. He was a Director of the British Columbia Dramatic School and became the Department of Education’s local Superintendent for Community and
School Drama. The Major began his career in London as a stage manager, producer, and acted as a juvenile lead. He had also performed in the London music halls as Broncho Bill. After emigrating to northern British Columbia, he directed local drama societies and wrote plays. Bullock-Webster’s main contribution to the committee was his involvement with the drama award ‘The Chief Okenonton Cup’, which was to be presented annually for the best Indian play or performance in the Province.

The other committee members were Mrs. Sanderson-Mogrin and Miss Russell - two ladies who were friends of the Ravenhills. Mrs. Sanderson-Mogrin brought to the committee her “vivid interest and wide social connections and her affection for me” (Ravenhill to Walsh June 5, 1941). In 1940, a music teacher from Vancouver with an interest in Native music, Miss Cave Browne Cave, wrote to ask if she could join. Although Ravenhill welcomed her, distance precluded her active participation. Bullock-Webster introduced Mr. Pickford to the Society in 1941. A local civil servant, Pickford had a long-term interest in Native history, particularly in archaeology. He remained an active member for many years, assuming various responsibilities for correspondence and exhibitions. Mr. Flintoff, a local printer, joined the Society after becoming involved in the publication of the Nativity Story.

Miss Betty Newton, whose parents managed the Windermere Hotel where the Ravenhills lived, was the most essential member of the new Society. She had helped Alice with her various projects for several years, particularly the copying and colouring of Indian designs. Eventually, she was responsible for much of the day-to-day work of the Society – typing, mailing letters and packages, setting up displays and arranging events. Although her contributions are rarely acknowledged in Alice’s correspondence, Edith Ravenhill also helped her sister and Miss Newton to set up and host the various exhibits and displays.

The Nativity Tale became an important first activity for the Society, since it raised money as well as awareness of the committee’s existence and goals. Contributions slowly, but steadily, arrived from socially prominent subscribers, including one from the Lieutenant Governor of the Province. The $100 needed for printing costs was eventually obtained and then surpassed. The committee discussed reimbursing the
supporters from revenue raised by the book’s sale. It was decided, however, that the
effort involved in bookkeeping and mailing refunds was too great. Any surplus
money would form “the nucleus of a fund for future developments” (Ravenhill to
Walsh March 14th 1940).30

The Society’s existence almost ended when Walsh was awarded a travelling
fellowship and planned to leave British Columbia. Ravenhill felt betrayed. She had
invested her time, energy and social connections to help his projects. Alice had
hoped that he would become the head of a new government supported organisation
to develop local Indian arts and crafts.

“Then, just as I was hoping another month would see you relatively free to
help me push this movement in B.C. you tell me all your energies are to be
devoted to serving Alberta for the coming twelve months, just when one or
two were considering how to advance your position in this Province. Why
help this pageant idea in Albert when such a thing in Vancouver might have
brought about a real “push” in B.C.” (Ravenhill to Walsh September 12th
1940).

The threat of Walsh’s defection was followed by the loss of three other important
supporters. Dr. Lamb, Director of the Provincial Archives, had accepted a position in
Ottawa. The other two, Dr. Cowan, Director of the Provincial Museum, and Mr.
Kermode, Curator of the Provincial Museum, were also leaving their posts.
Ravenhill noted that for years neither of the two Directors was interested in what she
had been attempting to do. However, both men had finally come to be on “more
mutually understanding terms... Dr. Cowan at the Museum, who after 6 years told
me when announcing his departure also, that at last he realised the claims of our
Indians and their art, etc; but in both cases the successors of these two men are
known never to have given a thought to our Native Tribes from any point of view.

30 The entire project was nearly derailed just as the funding requirement was almost
completed. Instead of being an original work by Native students, Walsh was accused
of having simply rewritten an existing story in one of the Indian readers supplied by
the Department of Indian Affairs. Ravenhill initially treated the accusation by the
local Indian agent as if she simply did not hear it. However she immediately wrote to
Walsh to “ease my own conscience of its present feeling of responsibility” and asked
for a categorical denial of the accusation. His answering letter must have reassured
her because the project went ahead with Ravenhill offering to write an introduction.
However Walsh’s name was carefully omitted in the credits as one of the authors.
much less have they an elementary interest in Anthropology” (Ravenhill to Walsh September 1, 1940).

The artist, Arthur Lismer, was another supporter of the committee’s work. He had been organising an art exhibit in Ontario for Francis Baptiste, one of the Okanagan students, but in 1940 wrote to Ravenhill that he was in danger of losing his position at the National Gallery. Ravenhill feared the Society would disappear. “These changes for the moment sweeps away the men who at least knew how persevering has been my feeble work and the fresh movements of this year... [My] “so-called committee never meets and I cannot secure more members and the current 2 or 3 members are interested, but too busy to devote any time. Miss Newton is devoted, but her lack of education, youth and social position do not generate the power needed to move the cause forward” (Ravenhill to Walsh September 1, 1940).

Despite all her complaints, Ravenhill showed no intention of abandoning her Society. The eventual publication of the Nativity Tales was both gratifying as well as being a prelude to further work. A thousand copies had been printed which Ravenhill hoped to sell to bookstores in Victoria and throughout the British Columbia Interior. Repeating the usual maxims, ‘difficulties make the man’, or ‘if checked in one direction I try another’ or ‘if at first you don’t succeed etc.’, Alice ploughed ahead with her usual vigour, strategies, problem solving and networking.

By 1941 the Society had grown too large to continue meeting at the Windermere Hotel and moved to Mr. Flintoff’s printing office. It now had letterhead, a set of bylaws and a bank account. More importantly, they had attracted the interest of the newly appointed Provincial Museum curator, Dr. Carl, as well as Mr. Ireland of the British Columbia Archives. Both men remained active in the Society for many years. The committee was now busy raising money for a second publication, Meet Mr. Coyote. This was a collection of traditional stories told and illustrated by the children at St. George’s Residential School in Lytton. The Tale of the Nativity continued to be in demand and the committee ordered a second printing of 500 copies. The Society also produced Christmas cards, with designs by Francis Baptist, as well as a calendar with selections of his paintings. The Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and
Crafts had, in three years of hard work, established a place for itself in British Columbia.

**Contributions of the Society**

During the forty years of its existence, the Society promoted Northwest Coast Native art and craft as well as lobbying for human rights for Canada’s Aboriginal population. Its members organised exhibits, competitions, sales and lectures, offered bursaries and training opportunities to Native people. It also supported programs to educate non-Natives about the history and conditions of their Aboriginal neighbours. The Society worked to institute nation-wide political change for First Nations communities, to improve local living conditions and to create new economic opportunities. Sometimes it joined with other local or national organisations. At other times it took on special projects alone.

This section of the chapter discusses Ravenhill’s early efforts to create a new market and develop new producers. In the Society’s first few years, Ravenhill and her small Committee moved the sale of contemporary Native hand work from street corners and tourist shops to venues frequented by Victoria’s upper class society. These included the church meeting halls, department stores, libraries and museums that they patronised. The shifting of acceptable places for the sale of Indian ‘curios’ helped to reshape the value of the object and began the movement of traditional material culture to its current location in fine art galleries. Another of Ravenhill’s accomplishments was to promote and develop craft activities. The production of traditional material culture was beginning to be recognised as a viable economic opportunity, as well as a necessary element to restore Native pride and self-esteem.

**Creating a Native Art Commodity**

Ravenhill’s work can be viewed as transferring products of Northwest Coast Native manufacture from Kopytoff’s category of “the common” object to “the singular” (Kopytoff 1986). This process had to be accomplished by changing or transforming the perception of the commodity without changing the nature of the object itself. The value of these objects lay in their authentic, handmade quality and in their link to a Native culture. The challenge was to make these characteristics have a higher
monetary value. Change could be accomplished by creating new venues, new expectations of behaviour, and a new social relationship between the supplier and the consumer. Ravenhill’s effort in 1939 to create recognition for Francis Baptiste, one of the Indian artists, offers a case study in commodification.

The Natural Artist

During its forty year existence, the Society supported a large number of artists by means of its publications, bursaries, exhibits and awards. The first of these artists was Sis-ulk, (the Native name for Francis Baptist), a young artist from the Okanagan community of Inkameep. Baptist’s drawings, now in the Provincial Archives, show running horses, deer, buffalo, and other animals as well as Indians on horseback. Such imagery is more typical of Plains cultures rather than the raven and eagle designs of the Coast (Holm 1970) or the traditional vision quest imagery of the Interior (Tepper 1994). In 1938, several of Baptist’s drawings were sent to London as part of a exhibit of children’s work from the Empire. His image of a horse and warrior won an award and attracted the attention of the English King and Queen. Baptist eventually attended the newly established Indian Art School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but did not pursue an artistic career. He became, instead, a cowboy and rancher in the Okanagan valley, and is perhaps best remembered for his success and reputation on the rodeo circuit (Baptist nd).

Francis Baptist’s work was selected from the drawings submitted by the children on the Inkameep reserve to illustrate the Tale of the Nativity. The Committee members found his work to be “the most advanced” and suggested:

“What we most desire are that they should be drawn from his surroundings; that the faces should not be European; (in any case the Holy Family were Jewish), but the more typically Okanagan Indian the outlines are, the more illustrative they would be of the charming details of the “Tale”, though I well know an artist must express himself, not the conceptions (sic) of others” (Ravenhill to Walsh January 26, 1940).

31 These artists include Mungo Martin, George Clutesi, Gerald Tailfeathers, Judith Morgan and more recently Lou-Ann Neel. They also provided small bursaries to Native nurses, teachers and undergraduate students attending universities and technical colleges.

32 Baptist is variously spelled as Baptiste, and Francis is sometimes given as Francois.
Ravenhill wanted to protect the ‘natural artist’ in Baptist, but could not resist the urge to train him in the European art tradition. She showed his work to two “experts”. Monsieur Radin was identified as a former curator of one of the art departments of the Louvre Museum, Paris and was noted as “a great authority”. The other was Mrs. Maltwood, a “sculpture of some note, well known in England, widely travelled and student of Greek and Persian as well as Chinese and Japanese Art” who had recently moved to Victoria (Ravenhill to Walsh July 3, 1940). Monsieur Radin considered Baptist “to possess undoubted talent specially in the direction of decorative ability” and suggested that he paint murals or draw posters. Mrs. Maltwood discovered elements of both Persian and Greek-like forms in the artwork. She also suggested a career in murals and sculpture.

Later that same year, Baptist’s work was shown to Lauren Harris, and also to Arthur Lismer. Both men were members of Canada’s famous set of artists known as the Group of Seven. Lismer, who was employed at the National Gallery as educational advisor, took a different view when reviewing Baptist’s ‘natural’ painting.

“Whilst I agree that his work suggests mural style, I have an idea that it is a racial characteristic and rather a white man’s idea of anything that appears ‘decorative’ in line and motive. To be preserved undoubtedly, but his development as an artist will eventually include a significance of depth that will not be merely a record of his two-dimensional and expressive symbolism...I am not so certain that he should be left “natural” and untrained” (extract from letter Arthur Lismer to Ravenhill, quoted by Ravenhill to Walsh July 20, 1940).

Ravenhill began to promote Baptist’s work. She proposed that the Provincial School Inspector of Art circulate “specimens of his work” to the Native schools. Miss Newton and the Ravenhill sisters submitted Baptist’s paintings to the Island Arts and Crafts Exhibition. His picture of a buffalo sold for $7.50 on the first day. The cost of framing and the 10% commission charged by the Arts and Crafts Society gave Baptist a profit of $4.35. More significantly, the Lieutenant Governor and his wife were interested buyers. The successful reception of Baptist’s drawings encouraged Miss Newton to write to Walsh.

“Why don’t you get one of your Committee to write the Vancouver Art Gallery for information as regards the B.C. Artists’ Exhibition. If you wish to get Francis known that is the place to begin” (Newton to Walsh May 1, 1940).
Baptist's One Man Show

In the spring of 1940 Alice and Edith Ravenhill and Miss Newton set up a ‘studio show’ of Francis Baptist’s paintings. This was probably the first one-man show of Native art in Victoria, and possibly in Canada. Much effort went into making it an important exhibit.

“I have personally addressed and dispatched here in Victoria 150 notices of the Exhibition and we shall try to secure early Press notices. Unfortunately the Lieut. Governor and Mrs. Hamber cannot “open” the show, but we shall try and get them another afternoon; meanwhile Mr. Fairbairn has conveyed to me their best wishes for a great success” (Ravenhill to Walsh June 17, 1940).

The Press, however, showed no interest in the display. This problem Ravenhill believed would have been avoided had the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province been able to attend. She herself wrote the favourable reviews that were printed in the newspaper. There were 500 visitors among whom: “We had some of the best social people in Victoria, friends of mine” (Ravenhill to Walsh, July 3, 1940).

Representatives of the clergy attended but no one came from St Ann’s Nunnery. Ravenhill was disappointed. She had been trying, unsuccessfully, to interest the nuns in promoting Native art in the Indian Catholic schools.33

The exhibit was successful in other ways. Children and their teachers came from the Songhees and Saanich Reserves. Several of Baptist’s paintings were sold and there were orders for others. A possible commission for six pictures and some murals were discussed. Moreover, several local artists offered to supply paint and art lessons to the young artist. Ravenhill notes, “more interest was aroused by the whole affair than has ever been known in Victoria in connection with our Indians” (Ravenhill to Walsh September 12, 1940).

The Ravenhill sisters and Miss Newton suddenly found themselves in the business of marketing Baptist’s pictures. These women did not have the experience, money, or support of an organisation to help them sell Native art. Their attempts to pass the

33 Ravenhill wrote in frustration to Walsh: “I ought to tell you none of the priests whose names and school you suggested to me last February took any heed of my letters – neither did the Lytton parson – or Dr. Raley – though this has been his want of courtesy to me on previous occasions” (Ravenhill to Walsh July 3, 1940).
responsibility onto Baptist, to Anthony Walsh or to someone else on the Inkameep reserve, were unsuccessful.

The important ‘studio show’ was followed by other efforts to create more exposure for Baptist’s work. Ravenhill wrote newspaper and magazine articles. Exhibits were suggested for the Vancouver Art Gallery and more importantly for the National Gallery of Canada. Baptist’s drawings were also sent to Ontario for an exhibit and auction of Indian paintings. The proceeds were sent to help refugee children. Ravenhill noted that “It would be an excellent thing as publicity; an Indian artist contributing to such a cause” (Ravenhill to Walsh August 3, 1940).

Several of Baptist’s unsold drawings from the one-man show were sent to Arthur Lismer at the National Gallery who had expressed a willingness to put them on sale. He also proposed a one-man exhibit in Ottawa. By late fall, the Gallery was reducing the number of its exhibits, but Lismer remained optimistic for a venue in Ottawa, Toronto or another gallery in the east. He wrote to encourage Baptist to continue painting and to Ravenhill and Walsh to continue planning for a show. He also proposed that the Gallery should purchase one of Baptist’s paintings. This offer may have been one of the few (and possibly the only), proposed acquisition of a Native artist by the Gallery during this time period.

Ravenhill intended to market Baptist as a Native artist acceptable to elite Victorian society. At the studio show in the parlour of the Windermere Hotel, Baptist’s Plains style feather headdress was prominently displayed, as a symbolic presence of the absent artist.34 His Indian name ‘Sis-hu-Ik’ was always used in publicising his work and a photograph of him wearing his headdress was attached to articles and press information. The invitation to the one-man show clearly drew attention to his Aboriginal origins. It announced an “Exhibition of Animal Paintings by a British Columbia Indian Artist Sis-hu-Ik from the Indian Reserve in Inkameep”.

---

34 It should be noted that this type of Plains style headdress was not part of traditional Interior Salish headwear (Tepper 1994).
The same invitation also emphasised Baptist’s acceptance by European society. In an almost huckster manner of ‘get them while they last’, the announcement went on to say “Such of these paintings as are not sold during this Exhibition are to go on to the NATIONAL GALLERY at OTTAWA (sic), for exhibition purposes”. Finally the notice attempted to set a Royal seal of approval on Baptist’s work by announcing that, “The work of this gifted young artist has been exhibited in Vancouver, Montreal, Glasgow, and London, where in 1938 it attracted the attention of Her Majesty the Queen” (Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts: Ms1116).

Creating a New Producer

The opening of new venues would be successful only if the Native artist could change as well. Ravenhill was aware of Baptist’s shortcomings and sent Walsh a steady stream of advice and admonitions for the young artist. Her suggestions included everything from his artistic drawings to his social manners.

“We are so glad you can report convalescence and therefore hope Francis will be ready for Mr. Flintoff’s [the lithographer] very helpful suggestions. We do not want to interfere with his spontaneity, but the advice of an experienced reproducer in black and white counts for much, does it not? Could you gently suggest to the boy that he send a little note of thanks to either Miss Newton or to Mr. R.G. Newton, her father and Manager of the hotel, for arranging the exhibition here of his pictures?” (Ravenhill to Walsh May 20, 1940).

The attempt to provide Baptist with new social skills was handled with a mixture of sensitivity to the young man and a cross-cultural clumsiness derived from the attitudes and language of the period. Such awkwardness is exemplified by Ravenhill’s single encounter with Baptist. In the late summer of 1940, the artist and his friend Billy Louis (or Louie) helped drive a herd of cattle to the Vancouver meat market. They took the ferry to Victoria to visit the Misses Ravenhill and Newton. Arriving early in the morning they explored the town and then spent an hour outside the Windermere Hotel “getting up the courage to ask for Ravenhill”. Alice Ravenhill and Betty Newton took the young men through the Empress Hotel and gardens to view the Parliament buildings and to meet the Directors of the Provincial Museum and the Provincial Archives. To these tours and privileges the young men
remained monosyllabic in their responses. Even a gift of oil and poster paints, brushes and boards from a potential patron did not elicit the expected response.

“Francis took the parcels, smiling, but saying nothing; only when asked if he would not like to open them he said ‘NO’. I guessed this was shyness, so Miss Newton and I proceeded to do so and expressed for him our delight at such a gift” (Ravenhill to Walsh August 7, 1940).

Miss Newton reported them as “...almost dumb. Miss Ravenhill thought it was shyness, but I am certain it was that they thought it polite only to speak when spoken to and never ask questions. This of course made it a bit difficult” (Newton to Walsh August 9, 1940). Of greatest concern to the two women was Baptist’s apparent failure to understand the commitment they had made on his behalf to create more paintings. Although purchasers were waiting for drawings, Baptist seemed unconcerned about this obligation.

“The one thing I really extracted from him was that he paints what he thinks at the moment. I gathered when he sits down to his table so to speak he gets his ‘inspiration; that he should paint anything to order was quite evidently an entirely new idea, which I got the impression was cast aside” (Ravenhill to Walsh August 15, 1940).

Ravenhill’s offers for training and teaching by local artists aroused no response from Baptist. Perhaps even more hurtful was his failure to mention the important one-man show they had worked so hard to organise. They were also concerned about his unworldliness, particularly his shyness, since it would be difficult to promote him if he could not learn to market himself.

“I hope Francis will learn to meet strangers and express himself with more lucidity, after the style of Chief Oskenonton, as when people get to know his pictures and reporters wish to interview him, he must have something to say for himself’” (Newton to Walsh August 7, 1940).

Despite the lack of response from Baptist, Ravenhill was unwilling to discontinue her efforts to promote him. New commissions and demands for more pictures and Christmas cards were all forwarded to Walsh. Major Bullock-Webster was sent to approach the Press Manager of the Canadian Pacific Railroad about using Baptist’s drawings on “folders, post-cards, ships menus etc.” (Bullock Webster to Smith June
19, 1940). All these plans, however, were unsuccessful, and the Society moved on to develop other artists and art opportunities.

The Society's Indian Art Program

The Society broadened its efforts to develop Native art. It organised scholarships, juried exhibitions, and offered prizes as a means of establishing new artistic standards. One such scholarship used funds from the Women’s University Club. This money would

“be awarded annually to promising young B.C. Indian artists, to promote the study of former fine old native arts and craft which have suffered sad degradation by cheap, ignorant inaccurate attempts at reproduction, either by immature Indian children in residential schools or by cheap commercial imitations, amounting only to misleading caricatures. A further object of the Memorial Fund is to extend opportunities for the development of originality by Scholarship holders in art forms, adapted to modern requirements” (Submission 1946:17).

Another important promotion was the annual exhibit of art work by Native school children. Such displays, primarily two-dimensional work, were organised by the Provincial Museum under the auspices of the Society. Ravenhill and other members of the Committee involved as many Native schools as possible. Similar efforts were made to promote Native Northwest Coast participation in school exhibits in Toronto, and in a proposed exhibit of art by Native children at the National Gallery.

Appreciation of Northwest Coast art also required public education. Members of the Society wrote articles for journals, and encouraged newspaper coverage of their exhibits, demonstrations, performances and other programs. Invitations to attend such events were sent to school groups, and important members of the community. The general public was notified through advertisements. Each of these projects, openings and award ceremonies represented another opportunity to gain public awareness and broaden general knowledge of British Columbia’s Native population.

---

35 The use of Native designs on travel materials has a long tradition. The most recent reappeared is the use of Northwest Coast designs on the tails of British Airways jets.
Creating a Craft Commodity

In 1940, Ravenhill attempted to extend the Native arts and crafts market. Acting almost alone, she directed her efforts toward increasing the production of better quality merchandise, and opening new sales venues. At first, she tried to develop the product by improving access to the traditional forms of Northwest Coast art.

A small grant from the Department of Indian Affairs permitted Ravenhill to make a series of charts of traditional Northwest Coast designs. She hoped these charts and the associated handbook would be distributed to Native schools so that children could use them in sewing, woodworking and other art projects. She had practised reproducing the designs in needlework and thought that her efforts were successful. Indian girls, she suggested, could use the images in her charts to decorate small craft items such as bags, cushions and table napkins. These objects could be made for themselves or for sale.

Ravenhill also began a letter writing campaign to various teachers in the Indian schools telling them about her “Committee’s desire to supersede the inaccurate representation of so-called B.C. Art in Souvenir Stores throughout the Province”. She also asked if “any of the children have tried thus to develop their latent gifts along with their own (untaught) lines, and whether the Art Instructor in your schools is interested in this effort and has tried experiments with the children” (Ravenhill to Teachers, February 6, 1941). Her inquiries met with little interest or response from the schools.

“One almost despairs of securing intelligent direction from the average teacher, unless there is a steady campaign against the idea that we can ever transfer to the Indian white culturation. … Unless our teachers can themselves learn the Indian way; his history, culture and social drives and values, we shall never get far in the emancipation process” (Ravenhill to Walsh August 3, 1940).

Ravenhill attempted to create opportunities for Aboriginal adults to earn a livelihood by means of craft production. Following the tradition of the Arts and Crafts Movement, she believed that a crafts person’s engagement with the traditional objects would permit the ‘survival of the human personality’. Following a suggestion
by Walsh, she proposed the establishment of a centrally located hostel where crafts people could live, work and study. The participating artists would be carefully chosen and would work there for different periods of time. Skilled supervisors would offer training, and a collection of the best examples of arts and crafts would be provided. This concept was similar to the work undertaken in the Southwest by the White sisters and the School of American Research in Santa Fe. As a result of her long study of Northwest Coast objects, Ravenhill was aware of the differences in tribal style. Her study collection would display examples from all the different communities. In proposing her idea to the Department of Indian Affairs she wrote:

"No one knows better than yourself that to set a Salish man to carve after the method of a Haida or a Tsimshian, or a Nootka woman to coil and imbricate a Chilcotin basket is worse than a waste of time. Each tribe has its own skills as each had its varied dramatic representation in dance form. The attempt now being made in some cases to emulate the products of the 15 cent stores or to meet the demand for the corresponding debased form the tourist demands for cheapness only results in failure; indeed I owe you an apology for even referring to such mistaken efforts" (Ravenhill to McKay June 13, 1940).

Despite the various frustrations, there were a number of accomplishments in these early years. In 1944 the Provincial Museum issued her handbook and noted a growing interest in Native arts and crafts “particularly among universities, schools of art, commercial organisations and students of anthropology, not to mention the general public…” (Ravenhill 1945: np). Ravenhill also attempted to persuade textile manufacturers in England and Montreal to adapt Native designs for their decorative fabrics. If this idea became successful the results would not necessarily provide income for Native people. However, such fabrics would increase multicultural awareness and understanding. Unfortunately, the growing war-time economy did not permit the proposals to move forward.

It is difficult to determine which of Ravenhill’s many ideas were drawn from other Arts and Crafts Movements in Canada and the United States. She was involved with the Canadian Handicraft Guild, corresponded with Alice Lighthall and even attended

---

36 "Your ideas of a central school for Adult Training seems to me valuable – would you allow me to write about it to Mr. Alan Chambers and Dr. McGill and Major
one of its conferences. An acquaintance showed her an article in *The Beaver* (the Hudson’s Bay Company magazine), on the Department of Indian Affairs new Arts and Crafts Program. She wrote to the Director of the program, Mr. Hoey, offering suggestions and seeking advice on the development of British Columbia’s Native arts and crafts. Arthur Lismer urged her to write to the United States Arts and Crafts Board. In response to her inquiry she received “a large mass of printed matter”. She was also aware of the development of various craft activities in the Southwest, and, several years later, encouraged Walsh to visit Santa Fe and the School of American Research.

Such information may have helped her to define the role of British Columbia Native crafts. In a letter to Walsh she outlined her three-point manifesto:

1) “to lift back to self-support some of the many Indians now on Relief,

2) to contribute to Canadian Culture,

3) to constitute a stepping stone to World Peace – for only by establishing mutual respect and sympathetic relations between fellow Canadian of diverse racial origins can we hope to realize our own prayers for Peace among Nations” (Ravenhill to Walsh June 4th, 1940).

Ravenhill then showed her extraordinary skills in gathering information, mobilising social networks, and lobbying. She discussed her ideas with the Indian agent, Major McKay, who was “interested and sympathetic” and gave her advice. She then prepared a three-page memorandum based on her manifesto and sent it to local government officials as well as to two Federal Senators in Ottawa. These prominent legislators said that they would discuss her ideas with the Department of Indian Affairs. Having received political support, she then sent letters to the Ottawa bureaucrats in the Department of Indian Affairs, who in turn asked that she send a copy to Major McKay. Thus, through a circuitous process of influence and persuasion, Ravenhill arranged matters so that the local Indian Agent was officially notified of his supervisor’s interest in Miss Ravenhill’s program.

---

McKay. It would give a peg on which to hang some discussion and give me a reason for writing again” (Ravenhill to Walsh June 4, 1940).
Developing the Market

At the end of the 1930s, the federal government began to provide support for the development of a Native arts and crafts industry. Funding became available for training and for hiring a local arts and crafts co-ordinator. Ravenhill had hoped that Anthony Walsh would accept this new career opportunity, but he was not interested. The Society eventually established its own marketing agent, assigning one of its members, Mrs. J. Goodman to the position. Her responsibilities grew quickly and by 1948, the Society had become actively involved in developing and marketing Native crafts. Mrs. Goodman and her committee distributed materials to Native patients in local hospitals, (particularly the tuberculosis wards), and encouraged them to make and sell moccasins, dolls and beadwork. An award-winning display of crafts was shown at a fund raising event at the Empress Hotel. Another display was set up as part of the Society’s exhibit of children’s art at the Provincial Museum. Mrs. Goodman organised a two-week sale of handcrafts with the Canadian Handicrafts Guild at the Hudson’s Bay Company store in Victoria, and a second sale, three months later, at a shop, David Spencer Ltd. The Society also developed a label that could be attached to objects that met standards of quality and authenticity. The label showed a ‘Copper’ with an eye shape inside. The logo referred to a shield shaped piece of copper - a symbol of wealth and honour in traditional Northwest Coast culture.37

In an effort to improve the quality of Northwest Coast craft work the Society established a collection of “authentic specimens” which could be used for demonstration and display. Similar to the collections at the Canadian Craft Guild and the School of American Research, these Northwest Coast hand crafts promoted “the building of an industry of modern high-class native handicrafts.

“This collection should thus inspire higher standard of craftsmanship by skilled Indian artists today, and should also increase the demand now developing (chiefly among American collectors) for products of real artistic merit. Incidentally also this should materially improve the artistic and economic status of Indian craftsmen” (Submission 1947:17).

A chief’s Copper was a symbol of the wealth that was displayed and distributed at potlatches. The rare metal was associated with supernatural riches, particularly with that of the underwater kingdom. Coppers were often named, ritually broken or sold for extraordinary prices.
The Society believed that it was not enough to simply set up craft tables or establish a respected standard of craftsmanship. They believed that the market needed to be developed by educating the general population about the value of Native people’s traditional hand work. The 1948 Conference at the University of British Columbia, sponsored by the Society, was perhaps its most important achievement in reaching this goal. For several years the Society, (now called the B.C. Society for Indian Arts and Welfare), had lobbied the University for academic courses on Aboriginal history and ethnography. A summer school designed for teachers in Indian schools had been successfully instituted in Victoria. However, the Society had failed to persuade the University of British Columbia to introduce anthropology classes on Northwest Coast Indians. Now the University was hosting the first conference on Native issues, and more importantly, Native people were actively involved. The two-day meetings included panels on arts and crafts, employment, education and training teachers and welfare workers. A newspaper at the time focused on the possibility that “the Indian could find social equality with other Canadians through the medium of art” (Vancouver Sun April 3, 1948). The paper reported the dilemma posed at the conference, a dilemma faced by the United States Indian Arts and Crafts Board some twenty years earlier.

“Native art should be encouraged among Indians, yet economic returns are poor. If the Indians aim is to be achieved, the public must be educated to a greater appreciation of native art, thus increasing the demand for original goods. This demand would tend toward mass production of native craft work, including baskets, totem poles, gloves and ornaments, and under large scale production the authenticity of native art would decline” (Vancouver Sun April 3, 1948).

Ravenhill did not attend the conference in Vancouver. She had become increasingly frail and was almost bedridden. Her friends began a campaign for her to receive royal recognition for her many contributions. Canada, however, no longer permitted royal honours to be given to its citizens. Nevertheless she was overwhelmed by the accolades and tributes from politicians, government workers and academics. The University of British Columbia awarded her an honorary Doctorate, which she received in absentia. She continued to write letters, to lobby, and demand action for
social reform as well as for the recognition of Aboriginal rights and respect for their arts and crafts. These efforts continued until her death at the age of ninety-three.

Throughout the decade of the 1950s, the Society continued to grow. Its membership now included a number of Native people. The welfare component expanded and the subcommittee prepared Christmas baskets, made hospital visits, and offered emergency loans to Native people in the Victoria community. The Society also lobbied to get water piped to nearby reserves and drew attention to the poor condition of reserve roads. Its working subcommittees demanded better health care, recognition for human rights and equal opportunity for the Native people in British Columbia. Monthly educational programs were offered on topics related to current events affecting Native communities or their cultural history. In 1958 the University of British Columbia finally initiated an anthropology course on the culture of Northwest Coast Indians. The Society took some of the credit for this new curriculum, believing that its lobbying efforts had helped to raise awareness of the need for more education. Ten years after the first conference on Indian issues at the University of British Columbia, the Society sponsored a second Conference. This one was concerned with Indian Business Men and the development of Native business opportunities.

In their ongoing effort to promote Northwest Coast Native arts and crafts, the Society continued to fund bursaries, hold exhibits and sell crafts. During the next several years it held competitions in the hospitals for the best handicrafts, and awarded trophies and prizes to support quality work. It also supported Mungo Martin’s trip to England where he presented a totem pole to the Queen. The Society maintained its long association with the Provincial Museum, and participated in the planning of the galleries in a new museum building. On one occasion its efforts expanded into the international market by sending a display of Northwest Coast craft material to Switzerland.

Perhaps the most ambitious project undertaken by the Society was the establishment of the Goldstream Indian Village Co-operative in 1958. Several years of research and discussion with the federal government took place before the co-op was
incorporated. The Board was composed of Native as well as Non-Native members. Its chairperson was Mrs. W.C. Woodward, who had been a president of the Society for many years. Shares in the co-operative were sold and an application was made for a loan from the Department of Indian Affairs. The Society argued that economic opportunity was the long term solution for problems faced by Native communities. This in turn depended on improved education and more supportive government policies.

“To get a little more opportunity here and now, we assisted last year in the formation of the Goldstream Indian village Co-operative. This is now a functioning organisation, operating with microscopic capital, but it has already marketed several hundred dollars worth of sweaters. …the benefits have gone chiefly to knitters beyond the range of the ordinary commercial organisations operating in Victoria and Duncan, knitters who would have had no market without the help of the co-operative. Our business so far represents an expansion of the market, rather than a substitution of one marketing agency by another” (B.C Society of Indian Arts and Welfare Annual Report: 1959:3).

The Goldstream Co-operative sent crafts to England for display in British Columbia House, to the Calgary Stampede in Alberta and to the international boat show in Seattle. The Co-op supplied raw materials to its members, found new sales outlets, and “improved standards of design and quality of workmanship. It has set a new standard of uniform process and prompt payment in the industry” (B.C Society of Indian Arts and Welfare Annual Report: 1960).

In 1969, the Society opened a craft shop in co-operation with the Provincial Museum. Thirty-two volunteers, (about half of them members of the Society) offered the program in July and August. The annual report notes that “32 Indian people contributed crafts of good quality. They were grateful for the opportunity sell and to bring their work to the attention of the public. It was generally felt that the Museum was enhanced by the sale and display of Authentic Indian work.” (B.C Society of Indian Arts and Welfare Annual Report: 1969:3). Approximately 340 items were sold along with books produced by the Society. The total receipts were $1702.75. It was the beginning of an important outlet for the sale of crafts, and a new financial resource for the Society. More importantly, showing contemporary Indian handcrafts in a museum environment lent authenticity for these new works.
by linking or associating them with artefacts. The following summer the number of
participants tripled to 110 crafts people contributing “crafts of good quality”.
Eighty-two volunteers worked in the shop. The summer’s income was now
$9668.69. Objects that sold well were baskets of all sizes, coasters, mats, carvings,
pictures, totem poles, masks, various beaded items, and knitted articles such as
caps, mittens, socks and toques. The Society also arranged craft sales at the First
United Church, St. Matthias Church and the Hudson’s Bay Company. A market for
objects of quality and authenticity had finally been created.

By the late 1960s, Native people had become a visible and vocal political force in
Canada. Aboriginal soldiers returning home at the end of the Second World War,
demanded equal rights, franchise, better education and greater economic
opportunities. They announced it was time for an IVD – an Indian Victory Day.

“The future must really provide to one and all a real life of freedom from
want, together with a binding security, in other words, the democracy in
which we have devoted our lives and energy to attain during the conflict…”
(Convention 1945).

Several Aboriginal people had been involved with the Society for many years, as
general members and as members of advisory committee. Now the Society joined
its efforts with other Indian associations such as the B.C. Indian Advisory Board,
the Native Brotherhood and the local Friendship Centre. The Annual Report of
1969 also noted the newly formed B.C. Native Women’s Society whose “.. aims
and objects of this new society parallel those of the B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare
The President, Harriet Esselmont wrote of the new relationship developing between
philanthropic societies and Native people.

“At the close of this report mention is made of the fact that at the beginning
of this year the society finds itself on the brink of something big. To remain
unchangeable in attitude and inflexible in method is to spell our doom by
stagnation. It is for us now to commit ourselves whole heartedly to co­
operation with the Indian people, to follow rather than lead, to hand the tools
rather than to do the job and to stand back in admiration as the new structure
rises, as rise it will from the efforts of the Native peoples themselves” (B.C.
This changing relationship marked the demise of the B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society. The traditional welfare activities no longer seemed appropriate. Visiting the sick and distributing Christmas baskets were viewed as condescending in the new environment that emphasised equal partnerships. Lobbying efforts, such as drawing attention to the need for better roads or water systems on the reserves, could be undertaken by Native people. Major welfare programs had become the responsibility of governmental agencies, rather than private philanthropies. The membership proposed that the term ‘Welfare’ should be removed from the Society’s name. The need for public education had diminished. Information about the Aboriginal population in British Columbia was increasingly accessible in books and documentaries. Publishing houses were now more likely to accept Native authors and artists. The Society’s long, hard battle for university courses on archaeology, culture and language of the Northwest Coast Indians was finally won. As a result interest in the Society’s monthly programs on Native issues and history declined. In an attempt to reverse the poor attendance levels, lectures and films were offered on Mexican artisans and development programs in the third world. This new emphasis seemed, however, to deny the Society’s founding principles. By 1980, the Society had become moribund.

The Victoria Society established by Alice Ravenhill was the only successful, long-term philanthropic association in British Columbia concerned with Native hand craft production. Two branch associations were formed, but they lasted for only short periods of time. Mr. Millar and his wife, who were missionaries at Osoyoos, near the Inkameep reserve, formed a branch of the Society, which endured for several years. Like Ravenhill, the Millars were inspired by Anthony Walsh’s work and maintained close links to Ravenhill and to the Victoria chapter. They also submitted a brief to the 1946 Joint Committee on Indian Affairs, and formed committees that included local Native people. Several attempts were made to form a Vancouver chapter, but the lack of leadership seems to have prevented a strong, enduring association. In 1969, at the height of the Society’s activities and membership, the President called for the formation of other Societies in the Province. Unfortunately, it never happened.
The story of the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts covers the transition period in the commodification of traditional Northwest Coast material culture. At its inception the Society was a force that instituted a new perception of arts and crafts. Its demise was the result of outside forces, some of which it had helped to create.
Chapter Six – The Native Arts and Crafts Industry – 1940-1970

“The aboriginal art industry in B.C. is an integral part of the provinces’ economy. The industry is a creative blend of business art, tourism, heritage and culture, facing a huge industry with an exciting future in the global market. Participants to the industry include aboriginal organisations, trade organisations, retailers, wholesalers, suppliers and most importantly aboriginal artists” (Hunt 1995:5).

Interest in Native Northwest Coast arts and crafts reached its peak between the years of 1960 and 1980. During that time, the government and Native artists and crafts people assumed responsibility for setting higher product standards and developing broader and more stable markets. There was, among Aboriginal people, a growing sense of ownership of their own traditional culture. The role of private citizens, serving either as missionaries or as benefactors, began to fade as commercialisation of arts and crafts expanded. Discussions regarding handmade objects assumed the language of ‘industry’, as large scale production became the goal. It was also a transitional period during which arts and crafts were being transformed by curators and academics into fine art. The industry eventually split into three separate markets: high priced art objects sold in galleries; good quality crafts available in stores at mid range prices, and mass produced souvenir items sold in tourist shops. This chapter focuses on the Canadian government program to develop the arts and crafts industry. It also reviews briefly Provincial and Aboriginal efforts to promote the Native craft market.

**Federal Involvement in Arts and Crafts Production**

**Emerging Government Interest 1930-1950**

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Native people continued to peddle their products door to door. In the summer they set up roadside stands to sell to tourists and summer residents. If they had a car, or money for the railway, they took their family’s winter production of baskets, carvings and moccasins to nearby towns or to urban centres as far as 50 miles away. During this time period, Native vendors wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs complaining about the police who demanded to see their sale licenses or permits. The Department’s replies were usually
unsympathetic, responding that if Native people sold their products off reserve lands, they had to pay for the proper licences.

As noted in chapter four, the Canadian Handicraft Guild had established a separate Indian Committee, which was chaired by Alice Lighthall. In 1935 the committee requested that the Department of Indian Affairs conduct a survey of Native arts and crafts production. Questionnaires sent to Indian Agents provided the information that “although quantities were small, the traditional skills were still practised in Canada” (McLeod 1999:224). Moccasins and basketry were the main objects made for sale. Since hide tanning, sewing and basketry were traditionally women’s activities, the findings suggest that production of hand crafts was primarily a woman’s contribution to the family income.

Harlan Smith, a curator at the National Museum of Canada, was one of the few Government officials who were interested in promoting Native handicrafts. Smith had written several articles and prepared a manuscript describing Indian designs. He hoped these publications would promote commercial production and wider interest in traditional Native material culture (Smith 1917; 1918; 1923). He encouraged production by Native people during his fieldwork expeditions, and kept note of the carvers, weavers and other artisans he met in northern British Columbia. Smith attempted to find a broader market for handcrafts by contacting stores and local shops. These activities were similar to the efforts of missionaries and Indian agents discussed earlier in this paper. In 1926, Smith suggested that the Hudson’s Bay company purchase samples of birch bark baskets. He was certain that the decorated trays, wastepaper baskets, pails and other small and large baskets would ‘find a ready sale’ in their chain of company stores across Canada. Smith’s arguments combined elements of business self-interest, national identity and social welfare.

“If you do this you can perhaps make profit on the baskets. Then the woman who sells the baskets to your store at Hazelton will never reach the door with her money, but will spend it for sugar, tea, calico etc in the Hudson’s Bay store. On these groceries and goods you will make another profit.... you will be doing two services. First you will be giving the Indians an opportunity to make the money with which to buy necessary food by keeping alive among them a dying industry, the making of birch bark goods. Second you will sell these souvenirs of the Hazelton country, they, although probably only in a
small way, will nevertheless be advertising the country and so drawing foreign money to our railroads, steamships, hotels etc. Another advantage, this would give work to crippled Indians and those unfortunate in various ways who are not able to do regular or heavy work and it would give work in seasons which are unfavourable to other kinds of work” (Department of Indian Affairs, Smith to Lecky November 12, 1926).

The Government gave little attention to these efforts by private individuals, associations or Aboriginal entrepreneurs until the late 1930’s. The growing demands on the federal budget for welfare relief finally created an interest in the potential of an arts and crafts industry. A newspaper article preserved in an Indian Affairs departmental file, stated that the fiscal demands for Indian welfare and relief amounted to million dollars in 1936. Such expenditures were expected to increase annually. Other costs of providing education and medical care to the Native population were already almost 3 million dollars a year. Even more alarming, the current Indian population was 112,000, and was increasing between 1,300 and 1,500 a year. Changes were needed so that “the Indian population could be placed on a more independent economic basis” (The Ottawa Citizen Sept. 3, 1937).

During this same time period, wealthy philanthropists at the Canadian Handcraft Guild and various church organisations were increasing their demand for governmental involvement for improvement of Native welfare. In 1934, the United Church’s Conference of Indian Residential School Principals passed a resolution calling for the formation of a Canadian Indian Arts and Handicraft League. The Board of Home Missions proposed a partnership with the Department of Indian Affairs, by offering space in one of its hospitals to market and display Northwest Coast arts and crafts (Department of Indian Affairs, Beatony to McGill March 8, 1934). The Rev. G. H. Raley, a retired residential school principal in Vancouver, called for the Department of Indian Affairs to establish a new craft industry for the Native population. He was supported by the Arts and Crafts Club, the Board of Parks Commission and the United Church of Canada. Raley suggested that “Complete success would solve the Indian economic problem by bringing congenial occupation and a sense of accomplishment to a discouraged race and it would save Indian design as Canada’s most original contribution to the world of art” (Department of Indian Affairs, Newspaper clipping, June 1935). During this same time period, Indian
agents informed the Department that, although the demand for hand crafts was increasing, the supply of new material was not growing. Nevertheless “a great deal of money” was being made through Agency sales (Department of Indian Affairs, Taylor to Scott December 1936).

The Canadian government was also aware of the growing interest in Indian arts and crafts in the United States. In 1936 Maria Chabot,38 wrote to H. W. McGill, the Director of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs. Her letter noted that “Government employees, anthropologists and private individuals in many parts of the world are contributing time and thought to the problem of encouraging Native arts and crafts” (Department of Indian Affairs, Chabot to McGill 1936). She requested that the Canadian government participate in an international journal by contributing articles and information. The list of the 10 purposes for this journal indicates the broad goals and international nature of the Arts and Crafts Movement at that time. The Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe was hoping to create international awareness and support for hand work by Indigenous groups in Asia, Africa, America, Australia and Oceania. Potential readers included government administrators, educators, researchers, missionaries and private charitable groups. It was thought that the journal could be a forum for scientific discussion of issues surrounding the development of arts and crafts, particularly the techniques required to develop the product, the markets and issues of merchandising. Some articles would encourage the production of fine art objects of museum quality that were in danger of disappearing. Others would offer advice on how to adapt traditional objects for a modern market. The magazine could also serve as a central source or clearing house for reviews and announcements of exhibits, publications and various notices. Finally, “when usefulness of the publication is proved and funds are

38 Charbot was a member of Santa Fe’s “city of women”, but unlike the wealthy White sisters and other Ladies Bountiful promoting south western crafts, she had to work for a living. She was employed by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board to establish co-operative marketing programs on reserves throughout the West. She became head of the New Mexico Association of Indian Affairs, an Indian advocacy group “with the goal of bringing a broader awareness of the artfulness of Indian crafts” (New York Times Obituaries, Sunday July 15, 2001 pg 42).
available, it is conceivable that it should be expanded to include other problems of native administration” (Department of Indian Affairs, Chabot to McGill 1936).

The Department of Indian Affairs had no interest in writing such articles. The Government was concerned with finally becoming involved in the development and promotion of Native handcrafts. In 1937 one-third of the Native population was dependent on welfare. The Department, therefore, established a separate administrative branch called The Welfare and Training Service. This Service was regarded as a relatively short-term program - not more than one or two generations. Its purpose was to create a Native population that would be “proud of their racial origin and cultural heritage, adjusted to modern life, progressive, resourceful and self-supporting” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1937:194). These goals were to be achieved by various activities including the encouragement of subsistence gardening, propagation of muskrats and other fur-bearing animals and promoting the production and sale of handicrafts.

R. A. Hoey was appointed the new manager in charge of the Welfare and Services Division. He began by asking privately owned and operated businesses at tourist sites to market Indian handicrafts. To support these private sales efforts Hoey offered displays of sample baskets, carvings and beadwork to the Superintendents at Canada’s national parks. The display cases were to be built as a shop project at one of the Residential Schools.

Organising new marketing opportunities was only the beginning of Hoey’s work. He first had to procure a dependable supply of reasonably priced craft objects. Tourists, particularly during the Depression years, were looking for souvenirs at prices less than dollar. Japanese, German and American manufacturers could produce souvenirs for a mass market using very cheap labour. The Japanese imported Canadian wood, carved souvenir totem poles, shipped back the cargo and were still able to charge less than the price asked by Native Northwest Coast carvers. The large-scale importing of novelty items from these three countries undercut efforts to introduce Native Canadian handmade objects into the tourist market. Moreover, raw materials such as moose and deer hides, porcupine quills and certain types of woods were
difficult to obtain and frequently expensive. Indian agents had also reported that
Native crafts people often failed to fill their orders and commissions. The basket
makers, knitters and moccasin sewers were usually women who had many
responsibilities including caring for their families and finding seasonal employment
in the canneries and hop fields.

The Division of Welfare and Training Service arranged for local hand craft
industries to be developed on several reserves in Ontario and Quebec. Native people
produced a variety of basketry containers and trays, wooden souvenirs of tomahawks
and model canoes and other novelties such as tepees and bows and arrows. The
Division also organised weaving centres for making scarves and bags, and developed
various items of decorated leatherwork. Such mass-produced items were – and still
are – popular souvenirs for the tourist trade. Hoey was now able to offer potential
middlemen a steady source of objects of a standardised quality.

One of Hoey’s promotional activities was a display of typical Indian crafts in the
House of Commons. The items supplied by British Columbia’s Indian
Commissioner included wooden totem poles, silver jewellery, a Cowichan sweater
and some argillite carvings. The costs on the itemised price list ranged from $2.50 to
$7.50. Hoey believed that such prices were too high for the market.

“I am inclined to think that there will not be a market for wooden totem poles
at the prices which apparently are paid the Indian in British Columbia. They
do not seem to be made entirely by hand, and I am inclined to think that
Eastern Indians would be very willing to make them at a much lower cost”
(Department of Indian Affairs, Hoey to McKay, February 15, 1936).

Hoey later suggested that cheaper eastern style baskets would sell well in British
Columbia. He also thought that a market for Northwest Coast articles might be
created in the East. However, he never followed up with on his offer to promote
Northwest Coast objects. Instead, the Department concentrated on developing craft
production and marketing in Eastern Canada, particularly in Ontario and Quebec.

The Division of Welfare and Training Service continued its work during the 1940s
and 1950s. It focussed on vocational training in the schools, promoting sales of the
finished articles and securing new markets. In 1942 the Department’s Annual Report
noted the growing number of classes in British Columbia, which were designed to teach girls to spin wool and knit Cowichan sweaters and socks. Other courses taught dressmaking, crochet and home management. Boys were instructed in Indian arts and crafts, as well as boat building and auto mechanics. Photographs from the annual agricultural fairs during this period of time show displays of woodworking, sewing and paintings beneath banners naming the residential school. Furniture decorated with traditional designs dominate the rows of carved totem poles, paintings and needlework (see Appendix 1).

Annual agricultural exhibits and Indian fairs, such as those described above, had received financial support from the Department of Indian Affairs beginning in the late 19th century. In the 1940s funding from Indian Affairs was expanded to include the International Folk Festival in Vancouver, and the Canadian Handcraft Guild in Montreal. In addition, the Department of Indian Affairs exhibited Native hand crafts in Montreal and at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto and Winnipeg. Handicraft sales at these last two locations totalled $10,000. These annual fairs and agricultural exhibitions were also held in many towns in British Columbia. Indian Agents encouraged basket weavers and other crafts people to submit their work and to compete for ribbons and monetary prizes.

In the pre-war and early war years, European manufacture of Canadian tourist souvenirs decreased. The Welfare and Training Division moved to fill the vacuum by contracting two wholesale houses to distribute the items manufactured on the Ontario and Quebec reserves. Individual crafts people were also receiving larger orders and were shipping directly to their customers. The Department of Indian Affairs also supplied souvenirs at wholesale prices to the Native entrepreneurs who set up shops and stands on reserves or near tourist attractions.

Throughout the war years, Native craft production decreased even though the Annual Reports stated that demand for souvenir objects remained high. The reasons behind this discrepancy of supply and demand are unknown. Native people may have found more profitable forms of employment. Many Aboriginal men joined the army, and their pay helped to support the family at home. Native women may have also found
new jobs during the war years and had little time for hand work. Moreover, they would no longer need to supplement their family incomes, since they, or other family members were steadily employed.

In the late 1940s the Welfare and Training Division reported that the “demand for Indian products throughout the year has again far exceeded production” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1948:708). A new feeling of Canadian pride and nationalism was emerging at the end of the Second World War. Tourist offices, hotels, summer resorts and large mechanising firms were searching for items that reflected Canada’s history and unique identity. The Welfare and Services Division, however, was understaffed and unable to respond to the growing market. “Very little has been attempted in the way of promoting the marketing of the finest Indian arts and crafts, but in many sections of the country a local market is available and the workers themselves are able to sell directly to the consumer” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1947:217). The Division did try, however, to provide the remote communities with raw materials and to support marketing efforts. The lack of standards and steady supply were discouraging. The Report noted that the Division was involved with a very small proportion of the total handicrafts produced in the country. It argued, nevertheless, that its presence held prices at a steady level and prevented exploitation.

The Welfare and Services Division continued to supply raw materials to the craft producers and maintained its wholesale sales of baskets and novelty items. These craft items were made by Native people at Lorette and Pierreville in Quebec and Manitoulin Island in Ontario, chiefly during the winter months, and then shipped to warehouses in Ottawa. Tourist and other retail shops usually sent their purchase orders in the early spring and summer. The Annual Reports regularly noted that the demand for craft and souvenir items exceeded supply, and several orders for the more specialised baskets had to be refused. Dealers submitted approximately 300 to 400 purchase requests every year. However payments to the crafts producers steadily decreased from $26,857 in 1950 to $11,500 in 1958. The Department concluded that production of hand crafts could not provide sufficient income for full time employment, but was instead, a suitable supplement to other family earnings. It
should also be noted that throughout this decade the Welfare and Services Division showed little effort or interest in developing Northwest Coast hand crafts.

Although trade in the arts and crafts market had declined, there were efforts made to improve the economic and political environment for Native people. The Indian Act was revised and an increase in responsibility and control was transferred to the Aboriginal community. Some Band Councils were permitted to have governing rights similar to those given to rural municipalities, which allowed them to establish by-laws and to determine fiscal priorities. A number of reserves had new sources of revenue from oil and gas contracts, and from sales of timber, land and right of ways. Gradually Native people were included into Old Age Pensions, Family Allowance, Disability and other welfare payments. All of these resources increased personal income. They also had more educational opportunities once Indian Affairs encouraged students to attend non-Native schools.39 Classroom attendance increased and more children remained in school to complete higher grades. Some students went on to attend post-secondary institutions. The Indian Act’s restrictions were lifted and Native people could leave the reserve to participation in rodeos, wild west shows, sundances and other ceremonies with out first obtaining the Indian Agents' approval. Northwest Coast people could now openly participate in the potlatch.

People who had been living and working off-reserve during the war years, (particularly Aboriginal Veterans), demanded new economic opportunities. A loan fund had been established in 1938 to help Native farmers buy livestock and fishermen buy boats. This fund was broadened to include other categories for potential loans. In one year, (between 1956 and 1957), the demand for loans increased threefold (from 58 to 168). In response, the Department of Indian Affairs tripled the fund allotment to one million dollars (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1957:51). The variety of work available to Native workers also

39 In recent years the trend has been to take Native children out of public schools and create Native schools on the reserves. These institutions allow more control over curriculum, the teaching of the traditional language and the employment of Native teachers and elders. It was also hoped that such schools would provide a more supportive environment and reduce the continuing high drop out rate among Native children.
changed, and more people left the reserve to find employment. The Welfare and Training Division hired additional staff to assist people in their job search. However, the Division continued to emphasise manual labour (crop picking, road and railway work and construction) as suitable work for Native people. Nevertheless, an increasing number of people were being placed (after careful screening) in trades, business and other professional positions.

A major change in the relationship between Native people and the government was increased consultation and communication with Aboriginal communities. Since the 19th century, delegations of chiefs and tribal representatives had visited Ottawa, (and England), to petition government officials regarding issues of land claims and self-government. In the 1950s the Indian Affairs Branch initiated meetings between Indian representatives and high-level department officials. They also organised conferences that brought together Native leaders and spokespeople from across the country. The Department published a newspaper which, it suggested, “created a community of interest among Indians in all parts of Canada” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1955:45).

This was a period of relative improvement and growth on the Indian reserves. Increasing responsibility had devolved to the community level. Water systems, roads and electrical transmitters were constructed. New housing, schools and administration buildings were built, using new funding sources as well as traditional federal grants. Parents were encouraged to become involved in their children’s schools, on and off reserve. The number of Parent Teacher Associations, Home and School groups, and Native School Advisory Committees increased. Among the various self-help groups on the reserves, the Women’s Institutes and Homemakers Clubs were perhaps the most important. The Department considered this latter organisation as the foundation for a cottage industry. The government supplied fabric for women to sew into hospital gowns that were sold by the Department of Indian Affairs. The profits from this program averaged a $10,000 a year, and $3000 was returned to the Homemakers Club program. Regional and national conferences became important components of the Homemakers Clubs and its members soon assumed responsibility for national and local projects. The role of this women’s
organisation in the development of the arts and crafts market will be discussed later in the chapter.

The most important change for the future of the Native arts and crafts market was the growing interest by the general public in Aboriginal people and their art. Letters requesting information from the Department of Indian Affairs increased. The Department also produced a film entitled “No Longer Vanishing”, which showed the current lifestyles and various contributions of Native people across the country. Canadian centennial projects drew attention to the country’s Aboriginal heritage. One such project in British Columbia commissioned new totem poles for the main ferry terminals. Money was also available for restoring old poles. The Indian Pavilion at Montreal’s Expo 67 was an important venue for presenting Native art to an international audience. It was a time when a new interest in Indian art and crafts, and in the artists themselves coincided with emerging Native entrepreneurship and the availability of new sources of funding Native-operated businesses. The stage was set for a resurgence of handmade Native Northwest Coast art and crafts.

Changes in the arts and crafts markets appeared within a very few years. By the late 1960s, the estimated production value of Native arts and crafts was more than $1 million and growing by almost 17% a year. The Welfare and Training Division obtained a more warehouse space and created a new staff position for a full-time handicraft specialist. The government began to supply a Made-in-Canada tag showing a maple leaf design for Indian handicrafts.

Native communities across the country shared in this new market. Traditional articles of beadwork, porcupine quill and basketry were being sold in new outlets in Montreal, Toronto and the United States. There was a two-year waiting list for full-size birch bark canoes made on Ontario’s Golden Lake reserve and the production of 6000 snowshoes at Quebec’s Loretville reserve was not sufficient to meet the demand. In its first four months, the Yukon Craft Co-operative sold material valued at $10,000. On the Northwest Coast, crafts people had “firmly re-established the production of totem poles, masks, precious jewellery, silverware, cedar and cherry root basketry…. The market has turned full circle and is demanding many of the
traditional crafts whose obituaries were written a decade ago” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1965:31).

Most of the production and development of new sales markets arose from efforts by individual crafts men and women and from Native business people who opened outlets and shops on their reserves and in urban centres across Canada. The government’s involvement was limited to promotional activities, which included displays and loans from its craft collection. It also bought raw material in bulk and sold it at cost to crafts people. The Department of Indian Affairs also continued to offer loans, give technical advice to Native people, and fund feasibility studies. By 1968 it had established a national marketing program in which the annual sales grew to $132,400. The following table shows the revenue and number of participants in its marketing program by Province. British Columbia had the second largest number of participating artists and the largest sales revenue in the country.

Table 5: Arts and Crafts Participation by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Revenue (dollars)</th>
<th>No. of Outlets</th>
<th>No. Participating</th>
<th>No. Trained</th>
<th>Dept. Assistance</th>
<th>Loans (dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime</td>
<td>60,700</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,7001</td>
<td>6,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>108,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10,225</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>308,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32,800</td>
<td>29,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>125,770</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>34,500</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sask</td>
<td>129,450</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>90,800</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>622,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,1000</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,444,720</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5,720</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>111,025</td>
<td>41,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Government of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1968-1969:52)

Growth of the arts and crafts markets continued throughout the 1970s. However, the Department of Indian Affairs’ programs shifted to support other elements of Aboriginal cultural life. A new Cultural Development Division was established. It provided grants to communities and individuals to “discover, retain, promote and project distinctive cultures” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1970). Native people could apply for funds to support cultural activities (e.g. pageants, Indian days and pow-wows). A peer review committee composed of knowledgeable Native cultural workers adjudicated the funding. Money was also available for a
literature program, which included publication of an Indian magazine, tribal histories, and related writings and film productions. In an effort to prevent the extinction of traditional languages, subsidies were provided for schools and to support ‘salvage ethnography’ projects. The department also established a new fine arts collection with an exhibition program. Its purpose was to recognise Native artists who used silkscreen prints, oil and other European materials to express Aboriginal themes.

The Department of Indian Affairs continued to maintain its industrial style production of souvenirs and inexpensive arts and crafts. Now modelled on ‘corporate lines’, it was expected to be self-supporting and had an annual sales figure of more than $400,000. The program employed local agents who bought from the producer and then sold directly to shops and stores. The Department continued to provide funding to train artists and crafts people and to develop crafts, while emphasising the role of co-operatives and ownership by the producer.

The emergence of a higher quality of arts and crafts led to a new interest by collectors. With the increasing value of the market, the Department began to reassess the role of ‘handicrafts’ as anonymous cottage crafts. Its staff assumed a broader educational role, and conducted research on the history of arts and crafts. It also published a directory of producers. The publication of a ‘prestige’ book, Indian Arts in Canada (Dickason 1974) was part of a new categorisation of the traditional commodity of arts and crafts. The Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, and the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs worked together to protect the Native producer and the public from “the problem of non-authentic art and craft items and the unauthorised reproduction of authentic Indian works” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1973:47). All authentic objects would now have a tag illustrating a stretched beaver pelt. The new program was announced in a media blitz of television, radio and magazine advertisements.
In 1969 it was decided that the Government’s arts and crafts program should be transferred to Aboriginal control. The Department felt it had accomplished its work. Sales at the Central Marketing Service was more than a million dollars. Legislation was being developed to protect Native hand work from competition and a media campaign was established to inform the public about authentic Indian products. The current environment with its emphasis on art, rather than souvenirs, had shifted the role of the Central Marketing Service. The Department now saw its goal as endeavouring “to assist Indians in building reputations as high quality producers of arts and crafts. With the assistance of the Economic Development Branch Indian people have become more aware of their cultural history as well as techniques, design and aesthetics of Indian arts and crafts” (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report 1974:48).

It should be noted that Indian Affairs, by the last quarter of the twentieth century, had achieved many of the objectives suggested by James Teit some 60 years earlier. Local government agents began to serve as middlemen between the producer and the dealer. The Central Marketing Board provided raw materials to crafts people at nominal prices. The buyers and the dealers had access to reliable information about the history and significance of the traditional material culture. Although its funds and staff allocations had always been small, the Department of Indian Affairs had consistently supported display venues such as agricultural fairs, craft shows and folk festivals. It also provided funding to the Canadian Handicraft Guild, and money to encourage Native people to display their best work in various competitions. The Department promoted the sale of objects by providing displays at trade shows and by lending examples of contemporary objects from its collection. It also continued to supply good quality arts and crafts for sale at low wholesale prices.

Despite these achievements, government programs to support Native arts and crafts fell short of its potential. A comparison with Inuit arts and crafts, its associate program, suggests what might have been accomplished. Although the population base in the North was significantly smaller, northern co-operatives had sales totalling

---

40 This transfer was completed ten years later.
$2.5 million, as compared to the $1 million for artists in the south. Inuit carvings had been quickly commoditised into an art form. As a result the monetary returns to the artist were significantly higher. Inuit objects were also promoted to a wider (often an international) market. An exhibit of Inuit art for example, was sent to Leningrad, London, and Philadelphia.

**Provincial Picture**

“The tourist stores are full of gimcracks from novelty manufacturers; the trays contain birch bark canoes, tips and bisque dolls dyed brown, trimmed with feathers. Plastic totem pole pins and photo albums stamped with a feathered Indian head are the usual fare offered to the traveller who would be eager and interested to learn about the Indian” (Hawthorn 1958:263).

Although federal reports indicated that Native people had made steady progress on all fronts, the situation at the local level was viewed differently. The report by Hawthorn, Belshaw and Jamieson on the status of British Columbia’s Indians in 1958 described the economic and social life on reserves in the province (Hawthorn et. al. 1958). The level of poverty in these communities appeared unrelieved by the growth of the general economy in the post war years. The author’s detailed case studies portrayed generally unsuccessful attempts by the community, and by individuals, to undertake new business initiatives. They also described efforts by families to provide food and clothing so children could attend school, as well as various personal struggles to meet the demands of daily life. Despite the increased availability of federal funding and training opportunities for Native people, their lack of education, experience and on-going sources of revenue prevented successful outcomes.

The Hawthorn, Belshaw and Jamieson report briefly reviewed the state of arts and crafts in British Columbia. Its conclusions were based on a survey that had been undertaken in the early 1950s by Harry and Audrey Hawthorn. Their results do not differ significantly from the reports of Indian agents to Duncan Campbell Scott almost half a century earlier. Coastal communities produced basketry, knitting, weaving, silverwork, argillite and woodcarving. Interior groups manufactured basketry and leather moccasins, gloves and jackets. Many of these craft activities
were reported as becoming extinct. This statement of affairs was not dissimilar to the 1918 status reports sent to Scott, and the 1935 survey by the Canadian Handicraft Guild. Woodworking was reduced to one or two well-known carvers. Only a few elderly men continued to make argillite sculptures. This lack of interest was blamed on the current state of the market. At the time of Hawthorn’s survey argillite carvers were selling their work for $5 an inch, whereas the dealers were receiving $10 an inch from the buyers. Totem pole carvers were encouraged to make inexpensive often poorly constructed poles at 35 cents apiece, rather than high quality objects selling at $1 each. The report quotes Ellen Neel, a Kwakiul artist and member of an important carving family:

“Totems were our daily fare, they bought our clothing and furnished our food. There was no problem of sale, since his [Charlie James’] work was eagerly sought. Now the situation is different. Curio dealers have so cheapened the art in their efforts to satisfy their desire for profit, that I doubt if one could find a single household where the authenticity of the work is important to them. I have striven in all my work to retain the authentic, but I find it difficult to obtain even a portion of the price necessary to do a really fine piece of work. This being so, I do not blame my contemporaries for trying to get enough for their work to live on” (Neel quoted in Hawthorn 1958:259).

Hawthorn states that objects which once brought pride to both the maker and the buyer have now fallen between the “indifference of the White and the confusion of the Indian” (Hawthorn 1958:264). However he had hope for the future because there was still “an impressive amount” of craft production and a significant number of people who retained the knowledge of traditional techniques. Another encouraging sign was the presence of crafts people who valued the work for more than its monetary return. The existence of buyers, such as museums, collectors and some shops continued to reward fine craft work. In general the authors were optimistic about the future of hand crafts and of fine crafts in particular. Their suggestions for rescuing arts and crafts production repeated earlier proposed solutions and added a few innovative proposals. Museums were asked to host traditional craft exhibits and demonstrations and to promote the acceptance of contemporary design of traditional materials. Hawthorn also suggests that more craft outlets (managed by Native people), should be established on reserves.
Native Initiatives in British Columbia

While the government was conducting its surveys and initiating programs, Northwest Coast Native people were also engaged in saving traditional knowledge. One of the most active agents in the local communities was the Homemakers Club. This organisation was established with support from the federal government and local Indian agents. The Club was perceived as a means of introducing European values of cleanliness, nutrition and domestic crafts. If a community decided to start a Club, it would apply to Indian Affairs for sewing machines, yardage, needles, thread and other materials. As noted earlier, the Department supplied some Homemaker Clubs with extra fabric to produce hospital gowns in an effort to establish a cottage industry.

In the late 1960s, the Homemakers Clubs gradually assumed new roles. Typically, the women on the reserve would meet once a month to knit, sew, embroider or crochet and have a social get-together. In addition to their domestic handicrafts activities, the Club members would discuss the need to help children or elderly people in the community. They formed subcommittees to undertake different responsibilities. Some women helped to clean up yards or neglected areas on the reserve. Others visited people’s homes to check on its cleanliness and offer assistance. Once a year they held a tea and bazaar for the community. Funds were raised by charging an entry fee, by selling cookies and setting up a concession stand. The women also sold handicrafts, such as pillow slips, doilies and other handmade objects they had produced during the year. The proceeds from these sales were used to buy new fabrics for the coming year, or to support events such as children’s parties at Halloween, Christmas or Valentine’s Day.

Every year the Department of Indian Affairs sponsored a regional Homemakers Convention which was held in different districts in British Columbia. The President of each club and one or two other delegates were invited to attend. Each delegation reported to the assembly on the club’s fund raising efforts, how the monies were spent and what was happening on the reserve. Academics, social workers and
nutritionists gave lectures on a variety of topics and, over time, the women became increasingly knowledgeable homemakers. The delegates then began to request presentations on specific topics such as canning with pressure cookers, gardening and information on maternity issues. For years things went well.

Gradually, however, the women’s demands became increasingly political. They requested that topics for discussion at the annual convention include information on government housing, social welfare and education policies. The convention delegates began to feel that the Department was not responding to their questions and requests. More importantly they believed that the government was not responding to the needs of the communities and demanded action. From the delegates’ viewpoint the government’s support of the Homemakers Club now represented a conflict of interest. They believed that the topics they wanted discussed were not considered acceptable by the Department of Indian Affairs. During the 1950s the Presidents of the Clubs rallied together. “The women became stronger and more determined because DIA (the Department of Indian Affairs) would not answer their questions” (Bolton 2001). As a result they increased their political activity on the reserve. The Homemakers established an ‘intervention policy’ in which members of the Club could be called in at a moment’s notice if the government or police were taking actions on the reserve that the Indians did not approve. Such actions included the removal of children to foster homes by a social welfare agency or Children’s Aid employees. Homemakers might also intervene when police made arrests on reserve lands. By 1968, the group registered as an independent non-profit Indian Homemakers Association of B.C. This status removed them from government control and also allowed them to apply for funding. The women fought for higher welfare, improved housing, drug free reserves, and free medicines.

The Homemakers Clubs continued to organise and provide new services through the 1960s. Anyone on the reserve could call the Homemaker’s office and ask for help. Typical problems included trouble with the law, encroachments on the reserve, problems with the Department of Indian Affairs or disputes with child welfare

41 I am indebted to Rena Bolton for the following description of Homemakers Clubs
agencies. Homemakers would send delegates (club members, chiefs or other strong leaders) to discuss the problem. They also established the Native Court Workers of B.C., an organisation to help Native people accused of committing crimes. Bolton noted that Native people charged with a criminal activity too often pleaded guilty unnecessarily. The court workers showed the accused how to defend themselves in the justice system. Homemakers Clubs also established a newspaper, the Indian Voice. This publication began simply as a means of distributing minutes of their meetings. After applying for funding, they developed a newsletter that was available to all the Native communities. This communication link allowed them to share problems as well as solutions among all of the reserves.  

The B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts Society was another important organisation undertaken by the Homemakers Association. This was a different entity than the group established by Alice Ravenhill. The Club’s interest in arts and crafts arose from the increasing number of artisans who brought their work to sell at the Homemaker Conventions. These women requested a separate area at the Convention where they could sell their wares. At the same time, craft production on the reserves was increasing. Older women were attempting to preserve traditional knowledge for their children and grandchildren and to involve young people in cultural activities. Several dance groups were formed in different communities, for example Rena Bolton among the Salish and Millie Gottfriedson among the Seweepmux (Shuswap). The Homemaker Club’s Arts and Crafts Committee also recognised the difficulties artists had in selling their work. They thought that it was degrading to go from shop to shop, or door to door and face rejection or bargaining. Many women did not regard themselves as artists and did not demand payment that adequately reflected the value of their work. The proposed Society was designed to establish prices and to set standards for the quality of the work. Bolton and others planned to market and

activities in the late 1960s in the B.C. Fraser Valley and south western B.C.

42 Perhaps the most important contribution by women involved in the Homemakers association was their instigation of the formation of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. Bolton noted that it was not right that women were forging ahead and showing leadership, but the men and chiefs were not. “It was easy to organise women, but getting men organised was hard. They have too much ego. We thought we are going to have to organise men…. We set them up and let them go” (Bolton 2001).
control the quality of Northwest Coast Native arts and crafts by means of the Homemakers Association.

The proposal by the B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts Society included development of cottage industries on various reserves with craft material centralised in district warehouses. Managers would be hired to supervise production and maintain appropriate standards. Orders would be processed at a central office and the crafts would be delivered in a timely fashion. The proposal was presented to Jean Chretian, (then the Minister of Indian Affairs), but the Department of Indian Affairs instituted its own program for centralised marketing. Some Native people considered the Department’s program to be a failure in many respects. The main complaint was the unwillingness by the Department of Indian Affairs to develop a viable market for finely crafted objects. Local agents hired by the Department had only limited funds for the purchase of individual items.\(^{43}\) Production of higher quality objects and recognition of work by better-known carvers were not encouraged. Instead, crafts people were asked to make thousands of inexpensive items. One such project was to string dried berry and seed necklaces, which would be given away by gas stations as ‘genuine’ Indian artefacts from B.C. Although some people participated in these mass production projects, many others preferred to find their own markets.

**Conclusion**

The government’s effort to develop an industry of handmade mass-produced items for the souvenir market was one more attempt to transform Northwest Coast arts and crafts. It was hoped that the sales of such items would provide an adequate income for Native people. A number of individuals participated (and continue to participate) in the large-scale production of inexpensive items.

The integrity of well-crafted objects, however, continued to occupy many Northwest Coast producers of traditional material culture. Producers and collectors were closely intertwined in the building of a new market. When the carvers, weavers or jewellery
makers began to publicly value the history and craftsmanship of their work, collectors responded. As Rena Bolton noted, "It is a funny world. As soon as I put higher prices on my baskets, people started to buy" (Bolton 2001). It was a concept that the Department of Indian Affairs appeared to have learned early in the marketing of Inuit art. However, crafts people on the Northwest Coast had to develop this awareness on their own.

43 I am indebted for this information to Cliff Bolton who acted for a period of time as a local purchasing agent for the Department of Indian Affairs in BC.
SECTION THREE – ARTS AND CRAFTS TODAY
Chapter Seven – The Contemporary Marketplace

“Northwest Coast Native art is ambiguous, imaginative, unstable, poetic, endlessly variable, changing and productive of the new, the unexpected” (Halpin 1994b: 6).

This chapter on current Northwest Coast arts and crafts discusses the self-perceptions of Native crafts people and of the sellers of their products. Archival research has provided considerable information on Alice Ravenhill and her Society, as well as on government programs for arts and crafts promotion. There is, however, limited data on crafts people and dealers during this same time period. Relatively few letters, newspaper interviews and personal statements are available in archival collections. Information on the role of the producers and dealers must therefore be derived primarily from my interviews with participants in the contemporary Northwest Coast marketplace and from data provided in recent secondary sources. Resources on Northwest Coast Indian art has considerably increased at the end of the 20th century. Documentary films, interviews and web pages, (often created by the Native artists themselves), provide personal statements and biographical sketches (see for example Cranmer 1999; Duflik 2000; Black 2000; Outer Island Productions 2000). The comments and experiences of contemporary crafts people described in this chapter may offer insight into an earlier period of production, as well as an understanding of the current marketplace.

The Contemporary Producer

Crafts people living on the Northwest Coast today are members of communities which differ widely in regard to their practice of traditional culture. This variability is due, in part, to the banning of the potlatch\textsuperscript{44} in 1884 by the Federal Government.

\textsuperscript{44} The potlatch is a public gathering, which was held to announce new chieftainships, marriages, and the naming of children. Missionaries and Indian agents often considered this important social event to be an obstacle to the successful integration of the Native population into Canadian society. The redistribution of family wealth associated with elaborate feasting and gift giving was seen as particularly objectionable.
Some villages, particularly among the Kwagiulth, continued to hold potlatches in secret. Other communities discontinued the practise completely, or transformed this practise into an acceptable guise of Christmas parties and ‘give aways’. In 1950, the ban against the potlatch was deleted from the Indian Act legislation, resulting in the renewal of this activity in some communities. During the past 20 years, traditional style feasts, ceremonies and potlatches have become more common in many Northwest Coast communities. The events usually combine the display of handmade objects of traditional material culture with the recitation of oral traditions, and the use of traditional language, music, dance and potlatch protocols. Crafts people on these reserves are often benefited by their involvement in this strong and visible artistic tradition.

The snowball technique used to obtain my interview sample, provided information from respondents who had a wide range of cultural experiences. Some of them were raised in cities and had few, if any, ties to a large native community. Others had lived on reserves for many years, and had enjoyed a traditional lifestyle including hunting, fishing, and the gathering and preparation of traditional foods.

“I had a great childhood. I had a lot of fun, got some lickings just like any other kid. I had the great pleasure of going jigging and joining other kids on the herring skiff, playing on soccer teams, basketball. Whether you wanted to be part of anything or not had nothing to do with it. They would just come and grab you and you would be playing soccer whether you wanted to or not. I have a lot of great memories of growing up in Alert Bay” (Whonnock 2000).

Several respondents noted that their grandparents were their primary care givers since their parents worked off reserve in the canneries or were away fishing for long periods of time. The use of traditional objects and associated activities were frequently part of the childhood experience. One basket maker recalled, “My grandmother and my aunt wove with cedar bark, but I remember as little kids when we went to pick blueberries…the baskets were just in the corners [of the house]. …they were all over our house and we just used them to pick blueberries. I just think back now and how we were so careless” (Ryan 2001). Even if the traditional culture was not practised on the reserve, information regarding traditional activities was often handed down to the next generation through family or community stories.
“I grew up in my grandfather’s house, my sister and I, because it was
traditional then to have one of the siblings, or two of the siblings to go live
with the grandparents if they lived on their own, to help with the tasks, and
just be company for the grandparents. So I was raised that way. I was
influenced quite a lot by that lifestyle. You know they had their group of
friends who were all the same age. My grandfather was somewhat of a
storyteller, and so we had constant rounds of tea that would involve hours
and hours and hours of discussion - be it the language, or trapping or what
ever the topic of the day would be” (Reece 1999).

Some informants in my “snowball” sample of interviews had been raised in a non-
Native environment. Many of them were the children of a Native and non-Native
marriage. Their parents had chosen to move away from difficult social problems
often encountered on the reserve or had moved to find better economic opportunities.

“The Native people didn’t have a voice, it was not like now. It was as if that
transition was beginning. And so they didn’t have that respect from people.
And I was a half-breed, so to say, I guess. So, I wasn’t one or the other. I
didn’t have an identity for myself. And there wasn’t the cultural teaching at
that time either. Everyone was just lost, really” (Helin 2001).

Today, Native people, who are searching for their ancestral culture, have easier
access to traditional knowledge. The efforts of missionaries, residential schools, and
governmental agencies to suppress traditional language and culture had not only
destroyed much of the knowledge, but also denigrated its value. The current
revitalisation of Native culture is casting traditional activities in an increasingly
positive light. As well, a recent change in Canadian legislation has returned ‘Indian
status’ to Native women who had married non-Native men. As legally restored
members of their Aboriginal communities, the women and their children may now
live on reserve lands, gain access to health and education benefits, and vote in tribal
elections. This newly expanded population has brought an increased enthusiasm and
interest in traditional knowledge and activities. Young people, particularly those
interested in art and craft, have more opportunity to learn.

“The thing is I never grew up on a reserve so it was just that I am meeting
most of my people now in the last few years through carving. But it is not
something that totally bothers me, it is just I never grew up around them so I

4 Before the change in the legislation, Native women who married non-Native men
lost the right, and the right of their children, to be considered members of their
Aboriginal communities. Native men who married non-Native women could
continue to hold their ‘Indian status’.
never knew them. Now I’m starting to go to the Big House to meet people” (Marston 2001).

Training Opportunities

Respondents discussed informal as well as formal opportunities for developing their craft skills. Informal training usually occurred in a family setting that often expanded into an apprenticeship with a more professional or highly skilled relative or family friend. Formal training was usually acquired by attending school classes or workshops. The following section discusses these various training venues.

Many of the artists I interviewed had learned their craft at an early age from members of their family. Native people who wished to learn the art of carving were particularly fortunate since traditional Northwest Coast carving techniques had not wholly disappeared. Woodworking skills and the associated knowledge regarding various types of wood and tool usage had been transferred to trades such a boat building and general carpentry. Some of the traditional wooden objects, including masks, rattles, bowls and spoons, continued to be carved for the tourist market as well as for museum and private collectors. Other items, such as model totem poles, letter openers and wall plaques, were made primarily for quick sales to tourists. In areas where potlatching continued in secret, carving skills and traditional designs were maintained within a few families. The manufacture of these objects transferred carving skills to later generations, along with the knowledge about Northwest Coast art forms and the marketplace.

In 1970, Bill Holm identified the ‘rules’ of Northwest Coast design in his book, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*. His analysis showed the relationship between the traditional elements of primary and secondary lines, ‘U’ and ovoid shapes, and the application of the red and black primary colours. Holm’s work became the standard for judging all Northwest Coast design. Carvers frequently referred to their use of this book, particularly when they discussed their early period of training. They also noted that they continue to spend a great deal of time reviewing or reading books on Northwest Coast art, particularly catalogues of
museum collections. One carver described the influence that one of Holm’s other books had on a group of fellow carvers.

“We developed a style there more of a Willie Seewid style. In the book Smoky-Top by Bill Holm, there was pretty much all Willie Seewid in there. I used to call it my Bible. That was a new and profound beginning for me” (Whannock 2000).

Argillite carvers often referred to C. Marius Barbeau’s publications (Barbeau 1953; Barbeau 1957). As a curator at the National Museum of Canada, Barbeau conducted fieldwork on the Northwest Coast between 1920 and 1930. His richly illustrated volumes on the major argillite carvers show sculptures held in public and private collections. One contemporary carver stated he would “no more start a new piece of argillite without reference to Barbeau, then he would take out his fishing boat without his sea charts” (Collinson 2002). All of the carvers I interviewed said they visited museums and art galleries and spent time in museum storerooms whenever they could gain access to the collections.

For an artist-in-training, close contact with a skilled teacher was more important than reading books or visiting museums. Respondents, discussing this subject, frequently related their childhood experiences when they watched or helped other family members producing traditional objects.

“I got my first scar when I was five years old in my very first attempt. I was carving a car, I started very early whittling and carving with my Dad in the shop. I did a lot of drawing and painting designs, and I guess probably when I was about 11 or 12, is when I first started to carve rattles and small masks and get into making three dimensional things out of my carvings rather than just carving cars” (Newman 2000).

As the child grew older and developed more skills, greater attention was given to the quality of his craftsmanship. Instructors would explain the purposes of the differently shaped knives, and demonstrate various techniques for using them. They would also discuss the art forms and tell the stories and characteristics associated with each crest or figure. One technique used to teach carving was to have the apprentice copy a mask or wall plaque. The instructor would complete one side of the object and the
student would finish the other.\textsuperscript{46} Often, however, the respondents said they were allowed to work on their own - the instructor’s suggestions or criticisms were offered only after the project had been completed.

“My grandfather was in a lot of ways...really staunch when he was teaching me how to carve. One of the things I always remembered was he would make me carve a totem pole right through. Not make me, but I would carve a totem pole right through and he would be there beside me carving his own, and he would look over and see what I was doing. When I finished I would hand it to him and he’d looked at it and say, no this isn’t right, no that isn’t right. I would get so angry, because he watched me do this all the time and finally I would ask him. You watched me do it, why didn’t you tell me when I was making the mistakes. He said, if I told you then you would never learn where your mistakes were. Now you have to do it all over again and you are going to get it right this time” (Smith 1999).

Most carvers begin by drawing and designing on paper or other flat surfaces. They then progress to carving flat plaques or two-dimensional representations of bears, salmon, eagles and other animals decorated with typical Northwest Coast forms. One respondent noted: “Quite often I think everybody learns on plaques just to learn to cut the basic ‘v’ cut and learn the design...[from there] for most guys it would be a plaque and then a mask, other things like that. Stuff that is not totally three dimensional yet, maybe letter openers, smaller stuff, smaller poles maybe” (Marston 2001). Such objects are often crude and are made quickly for the tourist trade. Small totem poles made in this manner have been called “idiot sticks”. A derisive term which reflects on the taste of the buyer as well as the skill of the maker.

\textit{Training Opportunities for Women}

Access for training by family members in carving and design appears to be restricted mainly to sons, brothers, nephews and male cousins. Although a few women are currently working in gold and silver, their skills had generally been learned as adults from the men in their family who were well-established craftsmen. One woman I interviewed had been encouraged by an older brother to change from being a sales

\textsuperscript{46} This technique of finishing one half of the carving is also generally used for large projects, i.e. totem poles, that require a team of carvers. The artist-in-charge roughs out one side of the pole and the other carvers follow his designs on the other half. As the lead carver refines and finishes one side, the team follows the pattern on the other.
person in his gallery to become a designer in his workshop. Initially, she helped him complete his jewellery pieces by polishing, soldering pin backs, cutting out the forms and shaping them. Over time, she learned the rules of the forms and the associated stories

“I started from the raw production of it, to then designing. A lot of the artists, I believe, go the other way. They learn how to design the drawing, the shapes, the animals, and on a large scale. My scale started out, you know, maybe a one-inch piece. So now I’ve been doing this for ten years” (Heilin 2001).

The sale of women’s traditional craft work, i.e. weaving, basketry, sewing and knitting has provided supplementary income for generations of Native women in many regions of the Northwest Coast. Young people usually learn basketry and knitting skills from their mothers, aunts or other older female relatives. In recent years, Native women have been teaching basketry to Native and non-Native students in workshops and in classes held in local schools and community centres. It is, however, often difficult to find traditional designs of women’s products. Although illustrations of masks, rattles and other carvings are frequently published, relatively few museum catalogues and research studies include examples of sweater designs or basketry patterns.47 Museum collections are often rich in basketry materials, but only a small number of them are usually displayed. There have been moreover, few large-scale exhibitions of traditional women’s work. The main source of reference material is usually found in people’s homes, since examples of earlier basketry and knitted sweaters are often considered to be family heirlooms.

Contemporary production of basketry has also been hampered by a limited supply of the required raw materials. Spruce and cedar roots and various grasses are increasingly difficult to find because of clear-cut forestry practices and increasing urbanisation in the Province. The production of sweaters has been eased by increased access to commercially produced roving. Moreover some knitters are also moving away from the traditional use of thick yarn (in the natural colours of white, grey and black) to experiment with different weight of threads and a wider range of brilliant dyes. Tourists and collectors continue to buy Cowichan sweaters and small baskets.

47 The exception to this is Haberlan and Teit’s in-depth study of Thompson basketry (Haberlan et. al., 1924).
but the Native market has been reduced by increased competition from Japanese and Asian mass production.

Native people wishing to learn the techniques of weaving, (particularly the Chilkat, Ravenstail and Salish blankets) have difficulty finding teachers within their own families. Although a few elders remember watching their mothers or grandmothers weave, these skills were not usually transferred from one generation to the next. There was no occasion for the display or ceremonial use of robes and blankets during the years when the potlatch was banned, and, because they usually required a year or more to weave, these items were too expensive to be sold as tourist art. Non-Native scholars are responsible for the revitalisation of weaving in some areas of the coast. Oliver Wells (1969), Paula Gustafson (1980), Cheryl Samuels (1982; 1987) and staff at the Museum of Anthropology at University of British Columbia have studied and documented traditional weaving techniques. They organised weaving classes for Native people, which were often funded by federal, provincial and private grants. Native weavers are now establishing their own research and teaching projects. Crafts people working on Ravenstail and Chilkat blankets have co-woven several blankets and recently organised an exhibit and produced a film (Cranmer 2000). Weavers, like carvers, frequently turn for inspiration to the blankets stored in various museum collections.

“Now the one we did for the museum here we spun ultimately as fine as we could. We actually copied that one from the museum in Smithsonian, which is where the original blanket is. We didn’t want to copy it. We followed it and there was places in there we couldn't copy because we didn’t know what they were doing. So we intentionally [made it] so they should be very different and unique” [Sparrow 2001].

Perhaps the strongest learning resource for Native crafts men and women is derived from the current production of traditional Northwest Coast objects by skilled contemporary Native artists. A thriving network of apprenticeships, family relationships and shared studios brings crafts people into close, almost daily contact, with each other’s work. This pattern of intergenerational and intra-familial sharing
appears to be present in remote communities, on the reserves, and in urban centres. One carver outlined a reasonably typical training experience that included various members of his family, such as cousins and brothers, as well as close friends.

“My first cut I got was with my cousin Joe Peters. … that was when I was about 6 or 7. Later when I was 12 my cousin George Hunt Jr. was teaching a course … and I got put into that because I was quite artistic. … From there I had my own set of knives and continued to carve off and on, not too really seriously. I started again quite seriously … [working in a group] with my cousin Sandy Johnson from Gilford Island and my brother Tom Simpson and myself. Then I worked for my cousin Beau Dick, Wayne Alfred and on the canoe in Alert Bay with Sean Karpas, Rupert Scow and Alfred Scow and Leonard Scow and [others]” (Whannock 2001).

**Carving Studios**

Although many crafts people learn their skills from their immediate family, two important teaching centres, (one in the south and another in the north of the Province), have played a vital role in revitalising the Northwest Coast art form and culture. In the late 1940s, the Provincial Museum opened a carving shed on the museum grounds. The first carvers were Mungo Martin, his stepson Henry Hunt and Henry’s two older sons Richard and Tony (Jacknis 2002). They recreated masks, poles and other traditional objects. Over the years, the opportunity to work in the carving shed attracted artists from all areas of the coast. It continues to be used by young carvers working or living in Victoria, and is now under the auspices of the local Native friendship centre.

A second carving centre, ‘Ksan, was established in the northern part of the Province near the small town of Hazelton (‘Ksan 1972). Proposed as a tourist attraction for northern British Columbia during the Canadian Centennial, it was opened in 1970. The reconstructed historic village consists of a series of traditional houses with exhibits on different aspects of Tsimshian culture. A carving program brought experienced instructors (from both southern and northern cultural groups), to train a

---

48 There has been some controversy over non-Native weavers teaching and using traditional designs and techniques. See Henrikson 1992.
49 Tony Hunt also formed a dance group that travelled throughout North America and internationally, performing at folk festivals, museums and community events.
new generation of artists. Teaching staff included members of the Hunt family, Robert Davidson and scholars such as Bill Holm. The local Gitksan community also formed a dance troupe, and the participants made their own regalia, drums, and rattles.

Workshops and Technical Training Courses
Several of the Native interviewees stated that their craft training was the result of government-sponsored workshops, as well as programs offered by local schools and colleges. Federal and provincial governments provide funding to tribal councils and friendship centres for craft classes and workshops. Designing and sewing button blankets, carving, weaving and basketry programs are offered by qualified Native and non-Native instructors. Some informants also mentioned classes they attended at local community colleges, art schools and universities. Such courses included jewellery-making, designing and small business management. These workshops and classes provided craft producers, (especially those who did not have access to family-based information), an opportunity to acquire useful artistic and business skills and knowledge.

The Contemporary Role of the Traditional Object
A portion of the interview questionnaire was designed to elicit data regarding the role of contemporary production of traditional material culture in Northwest Coast Native communities. The information thus obtained is presented in the following three sections: the question of art versus crafts; the role of the crafts person in cultural revitalisation; and finally innovation and creativity.

Art versus Craft
The distinction between art and craft, although useful in western society (and also for this research study), does not seem to have the same importance in Northwest Coast culture. During the interviews, the question asking for a definition of art versus craft often elicited frustration, and occasionally anger. The prevalent attitude of the crafts
person can best be described by a comment by Louise Profit-Leblanc during a
conference on Native art and artists in Canada.

“People have tried to put us in a craft section all the time. The thing that was
foremost in our minds was that we had Art that was being looked at as Craft.
We had performing arts that were being looked at as cute, little … pagan
dances if you wish. And these stories were not stories of legacy and heritage,
but were cute little children’s stories. And so we consulted with some
elders…Now all of these elders had these skills, but nowhere were they being
recognised [after] years of training and developing their art” (Profit-Leblanc
1999).

Traditional material culture remains in a state of transformation. Masks and rattles
were the first artefacts to be shifted by curators and gallery owners into fine art
gallery venues (Ames 1981). Buyers purchase these objects primarily because they
represent a form of sculpture, even though they are aware of the object’s ceremonial
functionality. Prints were always intended to be a product for the art market and are
frequently used by Native and non-Native buyers as gifts and as home décor.
Weavings and button blankets have only recently appeared in galleries as two-
dimensional art forms. Very large or monumental textiles, having traditional motifs
and colours, are now commissioned for architectural spaces and are shown in
museum exhibits. There is also a new and growing demand for Northwest Coast
designs to be applied to clothing, furniture, household furnishings and dishware.
However, baskets, sweaters, decorated clothing and jewellery continue to be
categorised more often as craft, or fine craft, rather than art.

When the respondents were asked, “what is art and what is craft?”, they occasionally
attempted to make up their own definitions. One carver suggested that the idea of
crafts is related to domestic handwork. His mother, for example, could be regarded
as a crafts person because she knitted socks. He, however, considered her to be an
artist since she designed her own knitting patterns. A crafts person, he suggested,
was someone who uses patterns published in hobby magazines and books. Other
respondents made similar distinctions based on the display of creative imagination.
By their definitions, crafts people do repetitive work or copy pre-made patterns,
whereas true artists explore new ideas and designs.
Native respondents also distinguished between art and craft based on the absence or presence of cultural knowledge. Traditional knowledge provides a crafts person the power to become an artist because it widens the imagination. By such definitions, persons engaging in producing traditional material culture should always be considered an artist.

“As far as the general perception of the two words now, art is elevated above craft. From Aboriginal or First Nation’s view point the meaning of art and craft changes. What we do is properly called art whether it is basket making or carving or jewellery. It is art because there is a whole culture behind art, which surrounds it” (Newman 2000).

One respondent initially accepted the definition of the culturally based artist described above. He argued, however, that people who have cultural knowledge associated with singing, dancing, carving or traditional lore can move the art to a higher form of creativity. Later in the discussion, however, he rejected the western categories of art as well as craft and identified himself simply as a carver.

“For myself, I don’t consider myself an artist. I am able to create carvings and paintings and to have that ability...I am titled as an artist from my peers or people. As far as somebody being titled as an artist, I have those qualifications. But for myself I’m a carver and a painter. I carve and I paint. It is not until I understand the language, that I think ... then I will have full understanding of what I am creating out of wood or paper” (Henderson 2000).

Thus, the distinction between artist and crafts person offered by several respondents is related to the degree of the producer’s cultural knowledge. The line between craft and art lies in the indefinable creativity of the individual, which in turn is derived from that individual’s grasp of the traditional culture. Artists are therefore defined more by their activities and acceptance within the traditional society, rather than by their position in the marketplace.

Role of the Crafts Person
In discussing their role as “cultural agents” the respondents articulated two main commitments. The first goal was to revitalise the culture through self-learning and

---

50 This contemporary understanding of the role of the artist is also found in the traditional role of the carver who was expected to know the history of lineages and the associated rights and privileges (Shane 1984).
sharing of knowledge. For some respondents, sharing such knowledge extended to the non-Native communities as well. They believed that through their own efforts, a Native presence would become a visible part of the wider Canadian culture. The second commitment was to respect and reinforce the traditional culture. This required adherence to the established rules of traditional social organisation and recreating objects based on traditional knowledge. This attitude was strongest among those respondents who had been raised in communities where traditional information was accessible from knowledgeable elders and teachers.

Sharing the Knowledge

The crafts people in the interview sample often regarded themselves as important participants in the continuation and revitalisation of a cultural tradition.

“It has only been the last few years, the last, maybe, ten years, or maybe longer that I realise that I could play a role, and I am, playing a role in replacing some of these artefacts, also to inject something into Tsimshian society and into society as a whole - representations of who I am, and where I come from. My focus is and has been to educate and to give people a sense of the meanings of how a life evolved and how a society evolved in terms of living in Hartley Bay and growing up around those mountains and those massive rivers” (Reece 1999).

Some respondents considered the role of all artists and the place of art itself as a means of revitalising the Native community. For these people, it is the process as well as the product that becomes the focus of identity. Contemporary Northwest Coast art provides a source of pride for Native identity today. Its prominence as art objects at the airport, in galleries and museums, and in everyday clothing (such as T-shirts), creates an impression of shared value by the Native and non-Native community. “I think there are a lot of people, especially Native people who don’t know who they are. And for us to remain strong as we are, a lot of it is because of the art. It brought back a lot of pride. A lot of things came together. I am very positive about the future” (Smith 1999).

Several crafts people viewed their role as an opportunity for revitalising their particular cultural heritage. Among the Coast Salish, for example, only a few examples of traditional art are available for study. The religious and ceremonial components of the culture had been hidden from Indian agents, missionaries and
collectors. Many of their ritual objects had been destroyed and few masks, rattles or other carvings are available in museums or private collections. Photographs and ethnographic descriptions are rare. Artists and carvers from this particular community speak of creating their own stories and developing art forms to fill the vacuum of cultural imagery.

“I would like to see more Salish artists doing a Salish style of design in treating new masks. The only thing that people say is that the Salish only had one mask, the swaihwe, and then I talked to Simon and he says that he remembers when he was a kid there was a lot of masks that the Salish had. My Mom says the same thing and they were burnt, destroyed. So sometimes I say that to my Mom, you know, there’s no masks there for us to carve and she says, Luke you’re an artist you should just dream your dreams, carve what you want to carve. Dream new dreams. The culture before, there was always song composers and there were the artists who created the masks and made them. So to say that you can only do stuff that is reproductions of pieces that were done in the past is – it is always good to do them of course, to keep them alive, - but to say you can’t do contemporary ones is something I don’t agree with. I think all artists should make new ones” (Marston 2002).

The process of revitalisation and innovation is not directed solely to members of the Native community. Some of these artists see a role for themselves in developing new relationships with the Canadian public. These efforts, which are designed to breach cultural boundaries, are particularly important in the current political climate in British Columbia. Recent decisions by Canada’s Supreme Court supporting the rights of Aboriginal people to claim land and resources, (such as fish and timber), have, at times, created fear, anger or resentment in many non-Native communities. In my interviews, people often spoke of a need for cross-cultural understanding and communication. The Native respondents believe they are helping to educate the general public when they display and sell their work at craft fairs, or work in gallery demonstrations and museum carving sheds. One weaver stated her intention to reach beyond the Aboriginal community and make a political statement through her work.

“... that’s always been my goal ... to have the city of Vancouver recognise its First Nations people. I think that they’re ready. I said I want to blanket Vancouver in warmth. That’s what I want to do. I want Vancouver to know that they are an ancient city, not a new city. They should be proud, not embarrassed, or not angry, at land claims. It all goes together in the end. I said some people start from the bottom or from the top... but I said I am starting from the bottom - the foundation - and as I build my way along I can probably reach far more people than a politician... They’ll ask me why we
don’t weave anymore. They will ask me what happened and I’ll tell them all the same things that a politician will, but they won’t listen to a politician because they already got their wall up. But if we approach it from this angle where you know our blankets are there and its visual and it’s beautiful, it’s non-threatening. We’re not trying to be threatening in the first place you know. We’re trying to defend our honour and the blankets are very much part of that. They were our whole community. They were our life; they were our warmth, our utilitarian objects. They were our wealth. They represented every aspect of our community” (Sparrow 2000).

**Following the Rules**

Aboriginal respondents, who see themselves as having a role in continuing Northwest Coast traditional cultural practices, talk about adhering to certain rules. One precept emphasises acquisition of the knowledge associated with the images they create. Another is to acknowledge and respect the restrictions on the crest figures they are permitted to carve or weave. The following section presents the interview findings.

When carvers talked about how they learned from their fathers, grandfathers and uncles, they mention the stories that they heard or were told as they sat and watched the elders carve. Such stories included information on the cosmological framework of the culture, the relationship between the natural and supernatural, and the traditional social organisation. As discussed in chapter three, the hierarchical structure of families within a village or across villages included access to hunting, fishing and gathering grounds. The status of a lineage in a community was increased, or maintained, by public displays of power and wealth. The position of a particular family in the community was validated through the telling or dramatisation of traditional stories. Even the Native crafts people, who grew up off reserve or outside the traditional culture, recognised and emphasised the importance of Northwest Coast mythology. They read ethnographic texts and collections of mythologies or became involved in ceremonial activities. The ritual objects they made thus become imbedded in a wider cultural context for themselves, their community and, by extension, to the non-Native buyer. As noted earlier, interviewees often defined good artists as those who are not only skilled in creating the art form, but who are knowledgeable about their own culture. Such artists are respected for their cultural
experience, their ability to speak a Native language and their involvement in traditional activities.

Many of the respondents noted that another aspect of maintaining the cultural heritage was to respect the restriction placed on using crest figure designs. Among the Haida, for example, families are divided into 2 groups (moieties): the Ravens, (said to be the original inhabitants of the islands), and the Eagles, (said to be later arrivals from the mainland). These two groups were exogamous, and provided ritual services for each other, such as burial activities and the carving of certain poles and masks. Missionaries and Indian agents ignored the traditional moiety system. They encouraged new converts to marry each other regardless of their kinship affiliation, thus disrupting reciprocal understandings between lineages. Respect for the moiety system is slowly returning to the community. Some Haida now believe that a ‘Raven’ should not carve an eagle figure, or vice versa, without obtaining permission from a member of the opposite clan.

Crafts people, who follow the traditional system, say that they respect the ownership of crest imagery. These restrictions may extend to many figures including the moon, killerwhale, dogfish, and various supernatural manifestations of natural phenomena. Some carvers are more fortunate than others in their access to lineage crests.

“I have ...a wide variety of masks that I can choose from, because my family had access to a wide variety of dance masks. I am allowed to do a lot of things, therefore I don’t have a lot of limit. I don’t know what the situation would be if I was in that [situation]. I think that I would go crazy in that situation. I wouldn’t not carve, I would either find out how to get permission or I’d carve sculpture” (Newman 2000).

Some carvers reject the concept of ‘crest figure ownership’, and state that they are moving the art form forward through creative exploration (Vogstad 2001). They argue their contributions should not be limited by ancient traditions maintained by a few families. Nevertheless, most artists attempted to remain within the ancestral prescription.

“I feel comfortable portraying crests that I have the right to use. I pass that feeling on to my son. We do abstract because abstract is the middle ground, where anybody can do abstract. The crests that we use basically are the crests that we are entitled to use. I guess when it comes to what we do, it’s who we
are. It identifies who we are. I see artists in Seattle who are white artists. I can see that they do beautiful, beautiful work, but it means nothing. To them it means nothing. It means drawing and going through all the motions, but there is something lacking there. When I do it, I feel it. It feels right. I guess that is why I chose this to do” (Smith 2000).

**Innovation and Creativity**

One of the objectives included in my research was to consider the relationship of the production of contemporary arts and crafts to traditional material culture. To define this relationship, interviewees were asked how they developed their ideas for new designs. As noted earlier in this chapter, the respondents said they studied the rules of the form lines, (as analysed by Bill Holm, 1979), and examined objects in museums, galleries and studios. They worked closely with family members, took art lessons and craft courses, and participated in the community’s cultural activities. They also relied on family stories and drew from Native culture, its language, practices and history.

“When I’m doing sort of the traditional stuff, I do a bit of research on them. I look. I try to make sure that I’ve seen several different versions of any given mask that I am going to do. I try to at least hold one of them so I can look at the dimensions. I have lots and lots of books that I look through. But then I like to hold one and look at it, flip it around. See what it is like when I am about to carve one. That is just to get everything correct as far as tradition is concerned” (Newman 2000).

Creativity for many of the artists was, at times, a mysterious force, often associated with the supernatural. In the process of creating an artistic object, some of the Native crafts people felt that they were operating in a spiritual state. The repetitive movements involved in chipping away the wood from the carving, weaving the basket, knitting or sewing, associated with an intense focus on the pattern, seems to lead to a spiritual experience. They may also have a sensation of relating closely to their natural surroundings. Carvers, working on large totem poles, say that eagles are attracted by the sound of the adzes on the wood and settle on nearby trees. The birds appear to keep them company. Crafts people expressed a sense of companionship with nature, with members of the community and particularly with ancestral spirits.

“Well in a way I feel that it was passed on to me through a generation that I didn’t see physically, but I believed in spiritually - from the old people through me. I feel very, very gifted that way. It has always been a passion for me. It’s been a passion for the fifteen years that I have worked, and it will be
a passion for the rest of my life. That is how I work. It is very important to
me to maintain that integrity for our people that existed. Not even so much
for the ones that exist now… somewhat of our spirit is back there when were
working on it [the blanket]. I think that is the connection that we see happen
or feel happen when working alone in our kitchen [weaving]. We know we’re
thinking about the old people. We are thinking about Aboriginal people that
made those beautiful blankets before contact period or during contact period,
and, yeah what were they thinking, what were they feeling. You become a
part of that time frame” (Sparrow 2001).

The information obtained interviewing contemporary crafts people suggests that the
current production of material culture lies within both a modern and historical
context. The tools used by these crafts people include saws, chisels, shuttles and
knitting needles, often purchased from local stores. Such tools however, are often
modified into traditional forms to better fit the hand of the crafts person. They may
also be decorated with imagery representing the vision of the crafts person. Artists,
even those who closely conform to the traditional cultural practises, feel comfortable
exploring new media, such as printing on paper, embroidering images on clothing,
dyeing yardage for upholstery or sculpturing glass. As one carver noted, “Some
people feel it isn’t right to carve imported stone and I tried imported soapstone. I
don’t think that we should put restrictions on that sort of thing for ourselves because
then you are just building walls. You are putting yourself in prison. As far as being
an artist you don’t want to be restricted in that way” (Newman 2000).

Reinvention, reinterpretation, and revitalisation all go hand in hand to maintain an
understanding of inherited cultural traditions. Today, handmade objects, (whether
they are worn daily as jewellery, or rarely as ceremonial regalia), reinforce Native
identity at this critical period in Northwest Coast history. Commodification of such
objects for the non-Native market is discussed in the following section.

The Dealers

“…art traders are not mindlessly moving goods from one place to another,
they are also mediating between art producers and art consumers – adding
economic value to what they sell by interpreting and capitalizing on the
cultural values and desires from two different worlds” (Steiner 1997:14).
Consumers can purchase Northwest Coast art and craft from different venues: the tourist market, gift shops and galleries. The producer either sells directly to the buyer, or sells to a middleman or dealer. Historically Native producers created their own market places by going directly to the tourists. Blankets were spread on street corners, along piers and wharves where tourist boats docked, and at railway stations. They also welcomed buyers into their homes and shops on the reserve. Some of these practices continue today. Native carvers sit along the wharf area in front of the Empress Hotel in Victoria and sell small carvings and beadwork to summer tourists. Crafts people from many areas on the coast, take large numbers of plaques, masks, and engraved earrings and pendants to Alaska to sell to passengers on the tourist boats and seasonal cruise ships. Studios and stores on reserves advertise to attract local buyers and collectors.

Crafts people also continue to work with dealers and middlemen. As noted in chapter three, in the late 19th and early 20 century, crafts people took their products to the Hudson’s Bay Company or other trading stores on the reserve, or sold to curio dealers who came to the community. Today producers take their work to different shops and galleries, trying to sell their material at the highest possible price.

At the beginning of the 21st century, new types of markets are available for the sale of Northwest coast handmade objects. Artefacts made in the late 19th century, as well as the arts and crafts of the early 20th century, are currently viewed as ‘Aboriginal Art’ and ‘Folk Art’. These ‘collectibles’ have increased in value by thousands of dollars. Art markets also exist for a small number of internationally recognised Northwest Coast artists. The new evaluation of Northwest Coast objects of traditional material culture has attracted new Native (and non-Native) artists, as well as new dealers to the marketplace.

My interviews focussed mainly on the marketing of Northwest Coast material culture in higher priced galleries and the shops that sold works of art and craft at a middle range of prices. The interview questions requested information regarding the history of the shop, the interviewee’s definition of arts and crafts, and the role that the shop and the dealer have in marketing the work. It soon became clear that the
dealers played an important role in transforming the object from arts and crafts to art. Their efforts considered the expectations of the consumer and at the same time provided the producer a profitable income. The following sections of this paper present an overview of the marketing relationships between the shop or gallery owner and the craftsman or woman.

Creating the Market
In their essays, written two decades ago, Aldona Joinatis (1981) and Michael Ames (1981) discuss the rapid transformation of Northwest Coast carvings from artefacts to art. Jonaitis regarded these changes as one outcome of recent research in Native art by art historians. The resulting academic discourse reassured collectors of the intellectual value of their monetary investment. Ames ascribes the change in category to the work of museum curators who had prepared a large number of art exhibitions and one-man shows in a relatively short period of time. Such presentations of Northwest Coast artefacts as art objects influenced the perception of museum’s visitors. The carvings’ sculptural qualities were now appreciated as examples of fine art. Neither author referred to the earlier work of Ravenhill who presented Native products as art and as craft, a necessary transformative step in the valuation process. As well, neither of them discussed the efforts of gallery and shop owners to establish a viable, stable, collector’s market for contemporary Northwest Coast art.

In the last quarter century of the 20th century, dealers and middlemen created an active market that raised the prices of Northwest Coast handmade products. As a result, they were more effective than most government agencies, artist’s cooperatives, museums or cultural centres. Their interest in providing a sustainable business for themselves, resulted in an effective promotion of public education and a dependable production of Northwest Coast objects made for sale.

Art Versus Crafts
The dealers I interviewed rejected the idea that they were selling ‘arts and crafts’, or even ‘fine craft’ objects. In this regard, their responses were similar to those of the Native producers described earlier in this chapter. Many of them defined crafts as
something children do on rainy afternoons, or as utilitarian objects having decorative elements. One respondent described craftsmanship as a skill, similar to that needed for making stone tools in the pre-historic period. It became clear from these negative opinions, that ‘Northwest Coast craft’ has little or no place in the lexicon of the contemporary Northwest Coast market. These dealers were convinced that the products they sell in their shops and galleries are to be regarded as art objects. Some gallery owners, moreover, classified the work as fine art.

“Very rarely do I think of it as craft. ...The way I think of it is as a piece of art from a Native artist. I think the people that buy it from me think, “Oh what a beautiful piece of art”. I hear it all day long. I never would think that they think it is a piece of craft. I think that when it is craft it is altogether different in my opinion. ...[When] I think of the Native artists, - they are grown men, they are fifty years old. I think they would be very hurt if I said, “Oh you brought me some crafts” (Lattimer 2001).

Only a single dealer emphasised the importance of the object as having a utilitarian purpose. He, however, avoided the use of such terms as craft, or arts and crafts. He pointed out that in western terms, craft is defined by its utilitarian aspect. Art is a unique commodity, one that traditionally is not recognised in Northwest Coast culture as a separate aspect of daily life. He saw, for example, little difference between the art painted on a utilitarian object, such as a box, and the same art design painted on canvas or paper to be hung on the wall. Thus, he felt that one cannot talk about art versus craft, but should use these terms interchangeably when dealing in the current market. He noted:

“I have always tried to encourage artists in the area of working with wood. I have always tried to encourage them to actually put native carvings on items that can be used. For example letter openers, items that can be used in an office setting, which goes back to Native culture itself, where there was no distinction between the daily use of items and art. The way that we’ve evolved is that we’ve taken art as something that has migrated to a place where you go to see it, such as a gallery. When in fact in Native culture, not just in Native culture, but in any early culture, really art and life are one. As part of my role as an agent, I think I’ve found myself facilitating that process of reclaiming that. It is very convenient as well from a marketing point of view, because if you can combine the aesthetic with the practical then obviously, you’ll get more sales as a result” (Sbragia 2000).
This dealer’s comments, however, were an exception. The other middlemen in my interview sample clearly distinguished between art and craft. Indeed, all of them dismissed the use of the word craft, and regarded the term as insulting or irrelevant.

Such discussions, however, led to the identification of two other newly emerging categories of commodification dealing with traditionally handmade Northwest Coast objects. One storeowner recognised the new and growing market for Northwest Coast material culture as a form of folk art. This recent trend, (called a ‘secondary market’), is now being created because objects, which were originally sold in the two decades following 1950, are returning to the marketplace. The original owners are reaching retirement age and are moving into smaller homes. They are settling their family estates, or attempting to recover their initial investments in, what is now, an attractive retail market. These early works command good prices.

‘...they’re getting fairly good dollars for those pieces because they really are part of the Folk Art Movement that has been very popular in the last few years. And those pieces blend very well into those décors. So it’s introducing a lot of customers who normally wouldn’t have invested in Native Art for Native Art’s sake, but are investing in it because of their interest in the Folk Art Movement. And they see the same patina to those pieces as they see to older pieces of furniture, or other collectible pieces that they’ve had. So there’s a real blending of that interest. And I think it’s opened the Native Arts and Crafts up to a whole new group of collectors who are now appreciating the art form that formerly wouldn’t have for that reason” (Hill 2000).

Another secondary market now emerging, focuses on rarer items of Northwest Coast art and craftsmanship. This new market includes valuable gold and silver jewellery, rare prints, as well as masks, poles and rattles made by an earlier generation of artists. Such pieces, like the Folk Art objects mentioned above, are returning to the market since these items often command high prices. The names associated with them (Charles Edenshaw, Bill Reid and Robert Davidson), are considered “master artists”. Their work, moreover, has been the subject of academic papers, exhibitions and publications. Many of the objects, now appearing for resale, are not displayed in the galleries or shops, but are offered privately by dealers to selected clients, patrons or collectors. It is difficult to identify this category of commodity. Unlike public auction sales (such as Sotheby’s or Christies, or smaller auction houses such as Skinners or Seahawk), these transactions consist of private sales of materials that are
neither artefacts, antiques, folk art, nor contemporary art. These ‘old master’s works’, nevertheless, help to establish the prices in current art market.

The Changing Marketplace

One of the questions on the interview guide related to the changes the interviewee had observed in the Northwest Coast market. Several of the dealers I interviewed had worked in retail or wholesale markets for almost 25 years. These dealers mentioned several significant changes, the most noteworthy of which, was the spectacular rise in prices. Dealers also recognised the rapid growth of a broad customer base and more knowledgeable buyers. This growing interest has led to the development of new shops, galleries and Web sites selling Northwest Coast art.

Increased Prices

Research on the valuation of works of art has a well-established body of literature (Bourdieu 1984; Plattner 1996). The value of an object usually reflects current economics, perceptions of personal status and, in some instances, the consequences of the dealers’ efforts. One artist noted that a dealer had urged the artist to double his asking price. When the dealer’s commission was added (again doubling the price), the object was then considered to be appropriately valued for an exclusive sale aimed at a group of wealthy collectors. Other dealers said that they would, at times, urge crafts people to increase their asking price. They indicated that the work was good and that the market would bear the expense of both a higher return to the maker and the increased commission to the dealer.

The dealers’ attitudes regarding the high prices of individual works of art sometimes differed. One dealer suggested that it would be better to sell several masks in a day for a total intake of $10,000, rather than offer a single mask for a similar amount of money. She believed that the turnover of her stock of art objects along with the promotion of different artists in a given shop was a more suitable outcome of her marketing philosophy. The promotion of a single artist associated with a slower sale of high priced items, related more directly to the philosophy of an exclusive art gallery.
**Quicker Sales**

Many dealers expected a fairly high volume of sales. In recent years, the West Coast has had a strong economy and a large number of tourists. The proximity of Vancouver and Victoria to the ‘silicon valleys’ of Seattle and California has attracted wealthy people, many of whom own or work for new ‘dot.com’ and start-up computer companies. Dealers discussed their standing orders from collectors willing to spend tens of thousands of dollars on special Northwest Coast items as they become available. When such objects arrive, the dealer phones the collector and sends a digital image by email. These objects are often sold immediately, before other possible purchasers can make an offer. Multiple sales are sometimes made following a single phone call. In one instance a wealthy yacht owner wanted to decorate his boat with Northwest Coast masks of supernatural sea creatures. The store selected five or six items and shipped them out for approval. Another such example described a dealer who took a truckload of masks to a client’s home, helped to arrange them on the wall and expected to make a sale of half a dozen masks in an afternoon. Although these examples may reflect the strong, (even overheated), economy in the past decade, they do indicate the large scale, rapid sales of high priced objects during this time period.

**Broader Customer Base**

Dealers often talked about the shifting population of buyers over the years. One individual, who has been closely involved with the sale of Cowichan knitwear, said that the Japanese tourist had provided the strongest market for the sweaters, mitten, slippers and toques. In recent years, however, this particular market had faded and German and American tourists and collectors had become the latest buyers. These tourists were less interested in the knitwear, (although it was still selling strongly), and more interested in carvings, poles and ceremonial art pieces.

A new market also grew among the local population. As more money became available in the local economy, particularly in Vancouver and Victoria, Native art was increasingly considered appropriate for home decorating, and gift giving. Northwest Coast motifs appeared on clothing, particularly on fleece jackets and caps, but also on formal evening wear, ties, women’s suits and vests for office workers.
Jewellery with Northwest Coast designs has become common, especially small silver earrings and pendants, or large gold bracelets. Wedding rings with symbols of animals representing various symbolic attributes have also become popular items to be commissioned from Native artists.

"First Nation’s art used to be a very eclectic, weird… You’d go into someone’s house and they’d have a print. But now we’re finding, more and more, that it’s an accepted West Coast art. And you don’t have to have a great deal of information about it. And you don’t have to be a big-time collector. You can be someone who just appreciates it, because it’s so ‘everywhere’ now" (Nelson 2000).

More Knowledgeable Buyers

Gallery owners and dealers noted, with some surprise, that the number of knowledgeable and sophisticated buyers has grown significantly. At one time, clients frequently chose objects to match the décor of a room or the colour of the wall. New buyers, however, seem to be familiar with names of the crafts people or artists, their cultural styles, and at times had sufficient enough ethnographic knowledge to recognise the figures represented in the carvings.

"In the last ten years I’ve seen more mainstream acceptance of First Nation’s art, certainly, a broader customer base, and more acceptance. I mean you just have to look at the Vancouver Airport to see the Susan Point. Ten years ago if I’d mentioned Susan Point’s name no one would have known whom I was talking about. I collected her prints ten years ago – started buying her prints. No one had heard of her. I did a lecture, a week ago, and I said something about Susan Point, and everyone nodded in the room. Now, they were all Vancouverites, but they all nodded. ‘Oh yes, Susan Point.’ You know, so there is a lot more recognition for it” (Nelson 2000).

Other dealers noted that wealthier and better-educated tourists had a similar degree of sophistication. Foreign visitors buying Northwest Coast masks and other objects at galleries, museum stores and the more expensive shops were either tourists or collectors. They chose to bring back Native art and in so doing often invest thousands of dollars.

"I still see the European and the German market very strong. I’m constantly amazed at how informed they are. They come here, they know the different Native groups, they’re familiar with their style, they’re familiar with the mythology, they’re familiar with the types of masks that they do. They’re very, very well educated before they come so they’re making educated
purchases. That’s exciting for me and quite refreshing. The Americans, I’m finding, … there’s still that big gap. But I think it’s closing” (Hill 2000).

When less expensive, handmade items were available, educated purchasers tended to acquire several examples of the smaller forms of tourist art, such as plaques, six or twelve inch poles or miniature masks or baskets. Clients, nowadays, are attracted to the more expensive galleries and shops where they indulge in “one serious piece” (Hill 2000). Such larger investments of money required a greater investment of time to learn the history of the piece and its artist. Even the less wealthy clients are now acquiring objects of artistic value, such as small examples of the traditional art form, rather than anonymous, or mass-produced objects.

Wealthy buyers also appear to be more willing to take risks with their purchases. The early market in prints was a comfortable art niche for people who liked Northwest Coast imagery. Such prints are a recognisable, well established art medium, and a ‘run’ of a hundred copies of the same image suggested affordability and as well as a “fellow” buying public. In recent years, however, Northwest Coast print imagery has become commonplace, and is reproduced on thousands of greeting cards, posters, and small art cards. Buyers are now choosing to invest the same amount of money (perhaps $100 or $200), for a “one-of-a-kind” carving that appeals to their personal taste and knowledge. Such buyers appear to be more sophisticated and more willing to trust their own judgement.

Larger Numbers of Retail Outlets
The increasing interest in Northwest Coast art and the larger numbers of better-educated buyers have encouraged the development of new galleries and shops. Some of these outlets are appearing as individual studios or shops Vancouver and Victoria, and others are on reserves, in small communities, and at airports, ferry terminals and tourist sites.

A spectacular growth of mechanising has recently appeared on the internet, where individual stores, galleries and museum shops promote their products. This medium displays and offers for sale a backlog of items from earlier shows, or recently acquired items. A growing number of ‘web-only companies’ are selling Northwest
Coast masks, carvings, jewellery and prints on line. These “shops” avoid the costs of exhibit openings, staffing, advertisement and overhead. By reducing their mark-ups they can effectively compete with the older, established “store-front” galleries. Families of artists and individual artists are also beginning to market themselves online. Their web pages offer background information on the family’s history, training and show various objects available for commission or sale. Native dealers also find it easier to offer their services on-line as a go-between, or “middlemen”, to potential buyers. The wealth of background information regarding the history of the artists, the symbolism of the imagery and the ability to display a wide range of styles, objects and quality of work all improve the consumers’ education.

Dealers and gallery owners who have ridden the crest of interest in Northwest Coast handmade objects have had a difficult balancing act. They needed an almost intuitive understanding of where the wave was going, and, if possible, guided it to their self-interest. At the same time they had to provide the material to sell in sufficient quantity and quality to meet demand. Finally they had to define and hold their own market share, while building new audiences and clientele. The next section of the chapter reviews the relationship between the dealer and the producer. The final section of this chapter discusses the dealer’s self-perceived role as a middleman between the artist and the buyer.

**Acquiring The Product**

The initial step for dealers wishing to sell Northwest Coast objects is to acquire the material. Native producers, who discussed their relationship with shop owners or dealers, frequently spoke of it in negative terms. For many of them, the joy of their work was in creation of the object. In contrast, marketing their artwork was described as time consuming, often ineffectual and frequently depressing. Crafts people who are not well established in the marketplace must go from dealer to dealer, or gallery to gallery, offering their work for sale. Some carvers noted that shop owners try to bargain down the asking price, or make negative comments as to the quality of their work. They also perceived some buyers as being disrespectful, (perhaps even racist), in their dealings with First Nation artists. One carver stated that he never takes his work to a dealer on a Friday, since it was assumed that Native
craft people were simply looking for money for a weekend of partying. He found that better prices and a more respectful attitude for his artwork were offered when he went to see dealers earlier in the week. The carver also felt he needed to present the dealer with large, complex carvings, since smaller items of jewellery or small carvings were not viewed as serious works of value. Another carver commented:

“You go into these places with a carving to sell. … It is hard. You go through all the trouble of creating something and you want to create the price that you want. Then you go to this gallery and they say I don’t want to pay that. They chop the price down, a percentage or whatever” (Henderson 2000).

Some of the gallery owners and dealers interviewed acknowledged and deplored the existence of this attitude among some middlemen.

“There’s been a lot of garbage that’s gone on between First Nation’s artists and gallery owners. Stories of consignment stuff being ripped off of a gallery and the gallery owner going, … and no compensation. … You can’t do that kind of thing. And things like bartering down. I would never dream of it …. I buy coffee mugs from a company, I would never dream of saying, “I don’t want to pay $4.50 for them. I’ll give you $3 for them.” But a lot of gallery owners do that” (Nelson 2000).

Finding the Producer

A major problem from the dealers’ point of view was finding producers who could reliably supply material for their shops or galleries. Different middlemen often sought specific products. One dealer required artists who could provide sizeable amounts of small items to be sold at craft fairs and markets on college campuses. He admired a particular Coast Salish artist who supplies a large numbers of small boxes and pendants for sale to tourist shops. In collaboration with a non-Native manager, this artist designs the item and then hires members of his family to cut, sand, paint, glue and finish each component of the object. Hundreds of these “handmade”, “mass-produced” Northwest Coast products are sold in shops all over British Columbia.

Other dealers, particularly gallery owners, seek out only unique pieces i.e. items that could qualify as fine art. These middlemen profit mainly from retailing the work of established artists, however, they also spoke of the excitement of discovering new talent.
“Of course I would love to have artists that already have a name for themselves associated with this gallery. But I don’t want to limit myself to that. I want to have artists that are just starting to build a name, and for me to be part of that process, promoting them so they some day will be well known. Actually it’s more interesting to have an artist who does not yet have a name, and you being part of the process of promoting him and building that name than having somebody who’s already at the top, and you just have to show him and people will come. It’s much more interesting to have a new artist than having an artist that already has a name and has nothing new to develop. Although there’s never a limit for developing. But what I mean is, the artist already has a name built and somebody else did that job” (Patrick 2000).

Galleries and stores differ as to the quantity, (and sometimes the quality), of objects they offer for sale, yet, the dealers all shared similar problems in finding appropriate items to sell. Gallery walls usually display a limited number of masks, and have only a few showcases containing carvings. In contrast, the medium priced stores are often full of showcases with multiple examples of jewellery, carved objects, painted paddles, baskets and prints. Their walls are lined with rows of masks of various quality and size. Such widely dissimilar establishments, however, often depend on the same producers.

During the interviews, the dealers often mentioned the small numbers of reliable producers. One individual compared it to a pyramid. At the narrow pinnacle are a relatively few expert, master carvers. Such artists have international reputations, and earn large annual incomes derived from commissions, royalties and sales. In the middle section of the pyramid are the artists who produce good quality work, but did not yet have international or national stature. These artists produce the bulk of the objects sold in stores, studios and some galleries. At the broad base of the pyramid are artists who work part time, or whose products are not highly valued. This informant suggested that an artist’s position in the pyramid rarely fluctuated. Occasionally, however, a talented, novice carver would rise towards the top as he or she gained more experience and recognition. A mid-range carver could move into the elite group of carvers, if he or she is chosen and promoted by a gallery, museum or academic researcher. Downward movement on the pyramid was also possible. Other respondents did not draw such a pyramidal analogy, but there was generally some recognition of different categories of producers.
“Most of the artists still do it piecemeal. They have three or four other jobs, they fish, they log, they do other things, they have other family commitments, and carve part-time. I have, I think probably twelve or fourteen jewellery carvers who make a really good living at it and do it full time. You know, the Bill Reid’s and the Robert Davidson’s are not the rule. They’re the total exception. ... The majority of artists don’t make that kind of money and they don’t get that kind of recognition in their lives” (Nelson 2000).

“There are very few people involved in this. ... It is not like going to the reserve and seeing all the Native people there working and getting these prices. I think it is probably 10 to 15 people. I could probably name who they are.... Not that many people” (Lattimer 2000).

As noted in the quotations cited above, most dealers believe that only a relatively small group of artists are engaged full-time in the production of quality work. One dealer defined it as a two-tier system:

“There’s the artists that are approaching the carving in a professional way that are evolving, that are growing, that are creating a business, but also showcasing the history and mythology. And then we have probably an even larger group that aren’t as concerned about that. They see it as a market that they can participate in that will help subsidise their incomes. It’s something that’s portable. It’s something that they can move around; they can take with them. It doesn’t matter where they’re living they can find a place to do it. It doesn’t matter how transient they are” (Hill 2000).

Hill’s group of ‘occasional’ carvers, is sufficiently large, and adequately skilled, to produce enough material to supply market demand. Dealers working with these transient artists, however, have a number of practical problems. Many of these crafts people move frequently, (from city to city, or between the city and the reserve), and often fail to remain in touch with the dealer. Phone numbers are usually unavailable, and contact can only be made through a network of family members or fellow artists. Some of these producers may also suffer from the problems of drug or alcohol addiction, poor education and recidivism that have been present for many years among the Native population.

Successful dealers usually have well-established networks of reliable producers. Such shop or gallery owners may have worked for many years to build their working relationships with Native crafts people. Dealers monitor established relationships,
and make new contacts by following the configuration of apprenticeships and family connections. One shop manager, who had transferred to a new company, distributed stacks of business cards to artists coming into her store with a request that the cards be passed to other crafts people. This technique, (similar to the ‘snowball’ methodology), provided former producers with information on her relocation, and attracted new suppliers. Dealers sometimes find new producers when they visit artists’ homes where several family members are carving together. The grandsons and nephews of established carvers often take their work to the stores and galleries where older family members sell their work. New artists seem to appear continually. Many of them are young people who have come into town from the reserve and are trying to find a market for their work.

“Mostly, [they] just walk in with their piece. Call us up and say we’ve got something and haul it down; everything from a six-foot sun mask to an eight-foot totem pole just walking down the alley with them. Its great, I love it. You never know what is coming through the door here” (Ross 2000).

One of the problems associated with the number of new and transient producers is the occasional appearance of stolen work. Galleries, shops, studios and even the homes of individual artists are frequent targets of robberies. The stolen objects may be offered for sale to unsuspecting middlemen or shop owners. Dealers attempt to stay aware of such events within their own communities, and try to establish information networks that will help to safeguard themselves, their producers and their clients.

The middlemen who work with this diverse population of Native producers need to develop specific social and personal skills. Long-term working relationships must be built in a complex, emotional, political and social environment. The Province’s history of colonial practises is a backdrop to the current issues of land claims, sexual abuses in residential schools and unequal economic opportunities. Dealers are sometimes perceived as exploitative and racist. Native people are often stereotyped as alcoholic and unreliable. Nevertheless, personal relationships, based on trust, between the dealer and producer must be established.

“It’s a very small community. And the difficulty was we had hired a retail consultant... for the shop, who had incredible retail knowledge and great sense of business and was trying to organise this as a business, but had never
dealt with any First Nation’s art. And it’s not something you can walk into cold. There’s a great deal of nuance and a great deal of politics involved in it a lot of the time” (Nelson 2000).

One of the ways dealers build working relationships is by consistent dealings and long-term support of Native crafts people. An owner of a gift shop in a small community noted that local carvers often made masks specifically for his store. Although these artists had well-established reputations and long standing relationships with galleries in Vancouver and Victoria, they also wanted to have their work sold near their home. Such works were smaller and less ornate than those intended for the urban galleries. The prices asked for the carvings were also in keeping with the lower expectations of the local tourists and community buyers.

Stores in small communities are particularly interested in supporting and building a source of local artists. The dealer may offer financial assistance by purchasing the raw materials, or by giving an advance payment on the purchase price. They may also provide emotional support and encouragement, both as interested friend and as steady buyer.

“We have a young artist that works for us who amazes us every day at what he’s producing. But he is a young man, has a young family – four kids – living off of his income from carving. [He] finds it difficult to wait the length of time that he has to wait between producing pieces, larger pieces, it’s too big a gap with no income. And so we work with him. … We supply him with the wood, and then we give him a cheque once a week, while he’s producing the piece, so he knows that he has a steady income. And then when the piece is finished then we would just reconcile the difference on the piece. And that enables him to do the fabulous pieces that he’s able to create. Now that isn’t going to work with everybody. And not everybody needs that, you know” (Hill 2000).

Dealers may, at times, lose artists to other galleries. As the work becomes better known, the producer may change market venues, moving from the shop to a gallery. Store managers may also fail to recognise, or be unable to respond to changing artistic expectations. One dealer noted: “We could sell every twelve-inch totem pole he produced. But that’s stifling to him. And he wants to create three-foot poles and twelve-foot poles. And if we don’t have the market that will accommodate what he wants to do then he’ll find other people that will do that. He won’t stay loyal to just
us if we aren’t prepared to fulfil what he wants to do, artistically. … I think as a dealer you have to recognise that that’s fair.” (Hill 2000). Middlemen and producers may also be caught by differing artistic goals. In one report, a gallery owner had commissioned a mask for an exhibit. It immediately sold, and four other clients requested similar masks. The artist, however, declined to do the work, stating that he had no interest in carving duplications. Consequentially, the dealer had unfilled orders and disappointed clients.

Role of the Dealer

Gallery owners and store managers discussed their role vis-à-vis the producers. They saw their responsibility as managing the business aspects of the art market. The artist was thus freed to concentrate on creating the objects.

“…so you have to find a fine balance there because the artist’s main focus is to express himself and not be involved with material matters. An artist shouldn’t be caring about what it will do in the market, but what it will do for himself and what message, if there’s a message, how it will touch people’s lives. What is art? Which makes them think? So money shouldn’t be an involvement of what he’s doing, that is the job of the promoter of the gallery, or … the curator, to show that art to the world, that’s his job. So you have the media man, the gallery owner, has to find a good balance to not disturb the artist with material matters, and on the other side, promote this art and make the world be interested in it; as many people as possible” (Patrick 2000).

Although most dealers expressed this ideal of supporting the ‘artist’s muse’, the reality was more complicated. Three aspects of the middleman’s self-perceived task emerged from the interview discussions. First, the dealers needed to maintain their own business in the face of competition. They need to find their market position in the spectrum of tourist art to fine art. Secondly, as gatekeepers between the producer and consumer, dealers determined whose work should be promoted, and set its value by establishing the asking price. They also influenced artistic fashion and standards of craftsmanship. Finally, the dealers saw themselves as educators.

Creating the Producer

The establishment of artistic standards was one of the major functions of Alice Ravenhill’s Society for the Furtherance of BC Indian Arts and Crafts. As discussed in chapter five, the Society sponsored competitions and juried the work for its public
art shows and craft fairs. Many of the gallery and shop owners today, have assumed some of the same responsibilities in the current market. Although most dealers indicated that they disliked criticising an artist’s work, almost every respondent agreed that they would make comments to improve the work being offered for sale.

“I always feel a little uncomfortable, because you are critiquing someone else’s work. I even told someone this is what you will have to fix before I will buy it and he sat there all afternoon and finished it. That is really what it was about, finishing it, the last little bit, removing the last little scratches” (Stone 2001).

Much of the dealer’s criticisms are meant to help producers learn the values set by the current marketplace. The middlemen in my interview sample stated that they did not make an offer for the object, but always asked for the artist’s price. They then doubled the cost “in their heads”, and decided if it fell within the price range of their clientele. The art or craft object was then accepted or rejected. If the dealer simply did not like the piece, they would reply, “I don’t think I can sell that in my shop”. The artist in turn, has a number of options. He can either leave and try another shop or store, or he can argue about the object’s value, or he can lower his initial asking price. Most dealers indicated that they would not argue or bargain since they considered this action disrespectful of the artist and the work he produced. The onus is thus on the crafts person or artist, who must be aware of the value and quality of their work as well as current market prices. One dealer noted that most artists bringing in their work for sale were quite aware of recent retail and wholesale prices. One experienced argillite carver said he always “sticks to his asking price”, (often $15,000 for a midsize sculpture), knowing the dealer will put it on the market for $30,000. The carver will occasionally bypass the middleman, if he can, and sell a sculpture directly to a private collector. He almost always receives a higher price from the collector than from the dealer. In either case, this particular carver is generally content with the price he requests, and is usually happy to let the gallery owner find a purchaser.

Another aspect of creating a viable producing market was the dealer’s involvement in promoting a professional attitude by the crafts person towards his work. Not only must the artist meet a high standard of workmanship in making the object, but must
also engage in a high level of business practices as well. Objects should be produced in a timely manner, advances of money must be respected, and all dealings and expectations of performance must be met, if the business relationship is to be sustained. The suppliers also need to produce on a regular basis, and at the same time maintain the quality of the craftsmanship.

Although dealers emphasised the business relationship, they occasionally expressed feelings of friendship with certain of their Native suppliers. Respondents mentioned being invited to family events including feasts, potlatches and other ceremonies. It was also surprising that wealthy, (or at least well-to-do), well-educated dealers rarely spoke of themselves as creating a better economic life for Native people.

“But, no, it’s a business, and that’s something that I do talk about a lot here, is that I’m running a business and the artists I work with are business people. And that’s the level we really try to keep it at, because a lot of people get involved in other aspects of it. I’m very friendly with a lot of the people. And they’ve been very gracious and invited me to their homes. But, I’m not there to save people” (Nelson 2000).

Problems of Dealership

Establishing a profitable market niche for Native art and fine crafts is often a difficult problem for dealers and shop owners. The success of their business is based, in part, on the dealer’s financial resources, and in his or her understanding the local economy. Most importantly is the middleman’s ability to find and maintain a network of artists whose works are appropriate for the intended clientele. Success may also depend on the shop owner’s personal philosophy and goals. A number of dealers were very clear in their intentions to establish an art gallery rather than a shop or store.

The other thing that’s been really important to me, and was part of my business plan when I originally decided to open my business, and that’s that I wanted to see the Native Art displayed and offered first as an art form, and secondly as something that people that were travelling would choose to take back as a souvenir of their visit. And I think that most of the businesses, in the early years, were built on being souvenirs rather than being an art form. And it’s interesting to see how many businesses have opened in the last ten years that have opened as galleries, … showcasing the work as a true art form” (Hill 2000).
Managers and owners of non-gallery venues, purchase a variety of mass-produced articles. The quality and proportion of the clothing, plastic replicas of totem poles, bowls, boxes and household items with classic Northwest Coast motifs may vary depending on the clientele. Shops catering to tourists carry a large proportion of inexpensive “tourist art” in their inventory. Gift stores may combine the mass-produced items with a higher percentage of the handmade object.

Dealers responding to my interview questions emphasised that they saw nothing wrong with selling T-shirts and other inexpensive “tourist art” objects. Such items advertise British Columbia’s Northwest Coast and help to promote Native culture.

“Well I want to be a high quality gallery. … I could sell whatever I want to, but I don’t want to go into that market which is more massive, more directed to a public that is not that much interested in the art, but in just having a piece of the place they visited. And so T-shirts is a different market. …I’m not going to criticise it because it’s good. It’s going to expose this art because it’s cheap and the tourist that goes to that place will easily buy it without having to think. …I just want to stick to high quality art. And that’s my choice. … But there’s nothing wrong with making other choices. It’s a growing field, yes. It’s growing more and more. So it’s good. It’s good for everyone – for the Natives, for the city. Yes, that’s the best thing about this” (Patrick 2000).

Once the shop or gallery has opened, it must then establish its reputation and build a clientele by advertising and offering unique material. A few dealers commission art and fine craft work for a gallery show, or prepare an exhibition featuring a single artist. One such gallery is well recognized for its annual Christmas sale of miniature objects including thimble-sized baskets, and transformation masks carved as pendants. A small group of artists are invited to participate in this sale each year and new or young artists may submit works they hope will be accepted. In general, however, most of the objects shown in galleries and shops are unsolicited. Although dealers cannot control the supply of new works of art, they can manage the quality of their inventory by refusing to accept pieces that are above or below the price range and expectations of their clientele.

In addition to obtaining an attractive range of saleable Native objects for their shop or gallery, many dealers are occupied with the “practicalities” of marketing.

205
Respondents noted that their responsibilities include publicity, inventory management, creating biographies for individual artists, and developing networks of producers and clients. One middleman described the tasks involved in developing the clientele and supporting the producer.

“Of course there are the practicalities of classifying the various items, producing a wholesale list, having a policy in terms of delivery. There is a lot of care involved in nurturing what needs to be done in order to provide good service to the customer. Quite often, it is something that is fairly hard to do for quite a few artists. That is because the creative aspect of what they are doing uses one part of your mind whereas the business part is really the other half of your brain. For quite a few artists it is hard to make that transition and there is no doubt there is a need to assist them in doing that” (Sbragia, 2001).

Dealers as Educators

Several dealers noted that they played an important role as an educator. As middlemen they devoted considerable time explaining the meanings of the Northwest Coast images and symbols to their clients. The sales person usually provided brief descriptions of the traditional culture, particularly activities associated with masking. If the buyer showed interest, the dealer might also offer short historic synopses and discuss current issues involving Native people in British Columbia. Only a single gallery dealer could recall a visitor who expressed no interest in ethnography. Cutting her introductory remarks short, the visitor said he cared only about the aesthetics of the object. Most clients, however, seem to appreciate the learning opportunity. Consequently dealers gather interesting historic information on Northwest Coast culture, on the symbolism of the object, and personal data on the artist.

“...Cause it’s really important for a gallery owner, someone who’s showing art to the people, to know where the art comes from, and that means knowing the artist. The better you know an artist the better you can expose his work. It’s very different showing the work of an artist that has passed away and so you never knew exactly how his personality was, and then showing something of someone you’ve met and having a little bit of a feeling of how that person is, and you see that transferred to his work, or just what he thinks about things in life. So, yes, I think it’s important. The more you know the better it is to sell it” (Patrick 2001).
Some dealers regarded their educational role as a means of teaching more than the historical or cultural context of the art or craft object. Wider social and philosophical matters were sometimes considered.

"An important aspect of going out to the people has to do with my philosophy in terms of promoting Native art as well. I've always believed that Native art, or all art belongs to the people, and one should go out into the community; reach out to the community, so that it can be shared by the people. That is totally in tune with what Native art and culture is all about as well. The actual intrinsic message in Native art is really getting back in touch with who we are as human beings. I've found time and time again that the connection that people have with it is at that very basic level. Quite often we can't quite put the finger on it, but certainly from my own experience that is what I see time and time again. When you look at the meanings in the symbols as well, you find that it always connects back to that fundamental humanity. In fact if you were to put together the various meanings of the symbols, what you have is the whole person" (Sbragia 2001).

Every dealer who sells original handmade objects must create a complex network of successful working relationships with the producing artists. They are dependent on the Northwest Coast artist for fresh material to sell; for the timely delivery of the object; and for a standard of craftsmanship appropriate to their clientele. The dealer’s degree of dependency is determined by the proportion of mass-produced objects for sale versus the number of hand-made objects in his store. Thus the dealer’s success is controlled not only by the quality of the available work, but also by the quantity being produced. It is dependent, as well, on the artist’s professionalism in being able to fulfil dealer expectations, the artist’s understanding of the collectors need for “authenticity” or innovation, and the artist’s level of sophistication in setting prices, finding the right gallery, and selling his/her own work.
Chapter Eight - Discussion

“Borders don’t exist until you try to cross them”
(John Perreault 2002: 75).

This thesis has been concerned with the history and contemporary production of a particular group of commodities known as ‘arts and crafts’. Beginning in the late 18th century, objects of Northwest Coast traditional material culture have been sold as curios, artefacts, tourist art, arts and crafts, and art. Although the techniques, designs or materials used to make many of these traditional objects (e.g. baskets, masks, rattles, and ceremonial clothing) have not significantly altered, there has been a major change in their aesthetic, social and monetary value. This shift in the evaluation of handmade objects is part of the “politics” of commoditization. As Appadurai notes:

“What is political about it is the constant tension between the existing frameworks (of price, bargaining, and so forth) and the tendency of commodities to breach these frameworks. This tension itself has its source in the fact that not all parties share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parities in a given exchange identical” (Appadurai 1986: 57).

The history, or “biography” (Kopytoff 1986:67), of arts and crafts on the Northwest Coast comprises in effect two ‘interests’: one relates to a European context and the other originates in the Native community. These two viewpoints are in general linked. During certain time periods, an interest in Native artefacts by European buyers created increased production of such crafts by the Native community. At other times the lack of a market depressed the manufacture of these handmade objects. However the ‘interest’ in arts and crafts production and sale is also unique to the Northwest Coast Native community. The interests or goals in one community are not necessarily embraced by the other.

Before European contact, traditional material culture was an inherent component of daily life. Objects crafted from stone, wood or fibre were essential for hunting, fishing and gathering activities, for making dress and adornment, and for the expression of status, prestige and religious beliefs. Items which were surplus to these...
purposes were often used for intertribal trading. The arrival of European explorers, traders, and sailors opened a new global market. Furs were sent to Asia and curios were sold to European, Russian and American collectors. The articles recorded as sold or traded during this early period do not differ significantly from those now made for sale in the current marketplace. Spoons, paddles, masks, clothing, dolls, rattles, and baskets have found a steady outlet in art, craft and curio markets during the past two hundred years. The whistles, hunting and fishing equipment collected during earlier periods, however, are at this time, more likely to be considered as artefacts rather than art. The manufacture of traditional material culture never entirely disappeared, although its production became more tenuous during certain historical periods.

Appadurai (1987) notes that the exchange of objects is rarely a simple transfer of one item for another. Such transactions are accompanied by various social, political and cultural elements. In the late 18th century, for example the exchange of trade goods provided European explorers and traders not only with the objects themselves, but also gave them an opportunity to build alliances with Native chiefs. The possession of curios and other rare and unusual objects, moreover, gave explorers, collectors, as well as ship captains, enhanced social standing. The objects acquired by the Native community in this exchange process included knives, beads, kettles and cloth for family use or for subsequent intertribal trading. The possession of these rare and unusual objects of western manufacture gave Native chiefs important new social status and opportunities to build intertribal alliances.

By the mid-nineteenth century new crafts products had developed among Northwest Coast producers. Some of these new skills were associated with new forms of employment; others were related to European efforts of acculturation. Still others developed from the availability of new materials, new techniques and opportunities for new markets. Sewing was taught to girls in schools and was encouraged as a form of self-reliance for women as well as a source of income. Boys worked in carpentry classes and learned to make furniture and other household items. Boat building also became an important occupation in many coastal villages. By the end of the century, craft producers found new sales opportunities in the growing tourism market. The increasing number of museums, centennial expositions and World’s
Fairs also provided venues for sales of basketry and carvings. However, the European buyer as well as the Native community generally held these souvenirs and trinkets in low esteem.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that significant 'exchange values' returned to a portion of Northwest Coast material culture. The process was at first quite slow. Perreault’s statement, “To tamper with categories is to tamper with power”, quoted in chapter one, refers to his 20 year struggle to promote the recognition of crafts as art. This same aphorism could also be applied to the 100 year struggle to create a modest value for Native handmade objects as works of art, or at least, as fine crafts.

In the beginning, a change in status depended largely on individuals outside the Native community, particularly women who had access to power. The Arts and Crafts Movement, and the ‘Lady Bountifuls’ who helped to support it, introduced a higher value for Native arts and crafts. These individuals argued that aesthetics as well as function could be respectively combined in the hand crafted object.\(^{51}\) An appreciation of Aboriginal hand work was also derived from the nationalist aspirations in the United States in the early 20\(^{th}\) century. The development of the United States Indian Arts and Crafts Board, in particular, led to a re-valuation of Native handmade objects. Such nationalist sentiments spread later to Canada. Here the Federal Government focussed more on acting as a central marketing board for tourist souvenirs, rather than changing the perception of Aboriginal hand work as art or craft. The Canadian Handcraft Guild and Alice Ravenhill’s Society for the Furtherance of BC Indian Arts and Crafts were the only agents working to educate the public and to develop new markets.

For Ravenhill, (Canada’s Northwest Coast ‘Lady Philanthropist’ and Social Reformer), the value of Indian handiwork was its ability to help create a better world. At a personal level, she found (as an octogenarian), rewards from her early crusades for social reform. She engaged, once again, in a campaign for cultural and political change similar to that she had enjoyed as a younger woman in upper class Victorian society. At a broader level, she believed that a transformation in one

\(^{51}\) For a discussion of the Victorian woman’s support of Native women’s handwork see Phillips 2002:60-62.
domain would affect social change in another. Once traditional Northwest Coast material culture gained status among Western society, Native people would then gain pride in their heritage. A growing self-assurance among Aboriginal people would lead to economic and social development. Her work, and that of the Society, ultimately increased the value of Native handmade objects by providing opportunities for the non-Native population to see and learn about Northwest Coast culture and history.

Further research is needed to understand the role that Native people, themselves, have played in changing the value of arts and crafts in the later half of the 20th century. Several papers have been published on the role of particular cultural centres (Dawn 1981), on contributions by individual carvers (Jacknis 2000:137-172), and on the history of generations of craft-producing families (Wright 2001). Other publications have focussed on well-known artists such as Robert Davidson (Stewart 1979) or Bill Reid (Shadbolt 1998). However, there has been no acknowledgement of the contributions of the many weavers, carvers and other crafts people who recognised, early on, the value of traditional culture. These individuals persevered in creating works of art and fine craft during a period when the Department of Indian Affairs was urging people to make mass-produced, inexpensive items for the souvenir market.

Many questions also remain concerning the history of Native organisations in the development of a viable art and crafts market. This thesis has discussed the activities of the Homemakers Clubs in British Columbia in maintaining traditional hand crafts, and, particularly, their support of dance groups and workshops. The contributions of other organisations yet to be documented include such agencies as the Goldstream Cooperative, the British Columbia Arts and Crafts Society, and the British Columbia division of the Indian Arts and Crafts Central Marketing Board.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, there is, once again, a considerable trading of Northwest Coast items of traditional material culture. These products are sold in non-Native marketplaces, and are also being sold, traded or exchanged among people inside the Native community. Although there remains a wide spectrum in the
quality and prices of these objects, the finer pieces are highly esteemed in the Aboriginal, national and international communities. However, these communities differ in the values they place on such objects.

In Native society, importance is derived on the restoration (or reinvention) of traditional community and individual identity. The significance of such commodities is not the object itself, but the knowledge that is involved in its creation. This traditional knowledge includes how it is recreated, who owns the rights to use and show it, what are the languages and stories associated with the imagery and finally the symbolism of the imagery itself. The growth of potlach\textcopyright and other public ceremonies, such as graduations, weddings and canoe festivals, have provided new venues for the display and distribution of traditional materials. There is now an ‘exchange value’ for these objects inside the Native community, and a respect for the people who make them.

In the non-Native marketplace Northwest Coast handmade objects are variously termed fine art, folk art, or rare collectibles. Small boxes, pendants and poles continue to be mass-produced for the tourist market, and finer pieces of jewellery, baskets and carvings are made for the gift shops. Here the value of the handmade object is based on an appreciation of its aesthetics, its rarity and to some extent its ‘curio’ aspects.

A final note should be made here as to the methodologies employed to gather the information needed for this study. The use of the snowball technique to establish the interview sample, and of the interview guide proved to be fruitful techniques. The fieldwork in this study included discussions with crafts people and dealers in urban as well as rural sites, and in formal and informal settings. The formal interviews were recorded in order to provide data for later analysis. Casual conversations and observations of seller/buyer interactions were found to provide an informal, but useful context for this study. The major problem associated with these techniques was the difficulty in deciding when to discontinue the snowball survey, particularly when sufficient data had been obtained.
My research of the archival and library material required for this thesis had, at times, a snowball-like effect. Work on this research question uncovered considerable material in relevant government documents and reports. There were, moreover, additional informants who could provide useful oral historical accounts and personal perspectives on government and private activities related to the promotion of arts and crafts products. A wider view of the activities on the last fifty years of arts and crafts production requires a project beyond the scope of the initial question offered by this thesis. A study of Northwest Coast arts and crafts production between 1950 and 1990 through fieldwork interviews with crafts people would perhaps provide a different, but equally interesting project for future research.

**The Future of Arts and Crafts**

“As a genre, art becomes for the anthropologist an ‘actor’ positioned within a sea of social activity: at times the passive recipient of activities impressed upon it by human agents with specific ends in mind, while at other time the embodiment of a far more aggressive agency ‘acting’ upon a passive audience” (Campbell 2001:118).

At a recent “treaty table”, a Native negotiator described the plans his community had made for a new “cultural building”. In it there would be a small museum where visitors could learn about the culture and history of his Nation. A small archival section would be available to store early and current oral histories, photographs and research documents. Space would also be allocated for the sale and consumption of traditional foods. Finally, he said, there would be a shop for women to sell their ‘arts and crafts’. This last component was an important part of his plans. He evidently believed that the sale of these objects would not only maintain the current Native culture, but would also help to maintain a measure of economic viability for his community.

At the present time, Native communities throughout the Northwest Coast are building, (or planning to build), attractions for the tourist trade. The influx of such new financial support would perhaps help solve problems associated with the current rates of high unemployment, suicide, addiction and other community difficulties, all of which plague these Native societies. In all such plans, space is provided for a sales shop, as well as areas for demonstrating traditional art and crafts. In addition,
workshop areas are allocated for teaching carving, weaving and basketry all of which are envisioned as essential to the project.\textsuperscript{52}

It would appear that the Arts and Crafts Movement has come full circle. The concepts, which began as a late 19th century movement emphasising social change by means of handmade objects, are now re-emerging in many of the Native communities on the Northwest Coast. A contemporary Arts and Crafts Movement combines century-old desires of human betterment with the Native community's current need for reinvention, reinterpretation and reinforcement of the traditional culture. ‘Arts and crafts’, like art, appears to be a major player in the current ‘sea of social activity’ and hopefully will serve as an agent for future social changes.

\textsuperscript{52} One artist recently disagreed with the centralised workshop concept in his community. He considered the village as an entity within itself to be the museum. Visitors should visit the studios and homes of the various craft people to view work in progress, and to buy or commission objects they admire.
References


Collison, W. H. (1915), In the Wake of the War Canoe: a stirring record of forty years' successful labour, peril & adventure amongst the savage Indian tribes of the Pacific coast, and the piratical head-hunting Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands, B. C. Seeley & Service, London.


Dickason, O. P. (1974), Indian Arts in Canada, Arts and Crafts Development Services Section, Indian-Eskimo Economic Development Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 2nd printing.


Howay, F.W. (Ed.), (1941), *Voyages of the “Columbia” to the Northwest Coast, 1787-1790 and 1790-1793*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.


Jewitt, J. R. (1849), *Narrative of the adventures and sufferings of John R. Jewitt, only survivor of the crew of the ship Boston, during a captivity of nearly three years among the savages of Nootka Sound: with an account of the manners, mode of living, and religious opinions of the natives*, Mack, Andrus, Ithaca.


‘Ksan (1972), *Ksan: Breath of Our Grandfathers*, An exhibition of ‘Ksan art, Archaeology, Ethnology and Communications Division of the National Museum of
Man in cooperation with the Publications Division of the National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.


Mortimer, G. (1791), *Observations and Remarks Made during a Voyage to the islands of Teneriffe. Amsterdam, Maria’s Islands near Van Diemen’s land, Otahete, Sandwich Islands, Owhyee. the Fox Islands on the north west coast of American, Tinian, and from thence to Canton, in the Brig Mercury commanded by John Herny Cox, Esquire*”, Printed for P. Byrne, J. Moore, A. Grueber, W. Jones and R. White, Dublin.


Schrader, R. F. (1983), The Indian Arts and Crafts Board: An Aspect of New Deal Indian Policy, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.


**Manuscripts and Archival Materials**


B.C. Indian Art and Welfare Society (1947), *Submission Addressed to the Royal Commission of Senators and Members of the House of Commons Appointed to Inquire into all Phases of the Affairs of Canadian Indians*, Victoria
B.C. Society of Indian Arts and Welfare Archives (c.1940-1980), University of Victoria Library, Special Collections, Victoria

B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society President’s Reports (1957-1969), Vancouver Public Library Special Collections, Vancouver.


Convention Native Indian Brotherhood, (1945), Opening Statement of Native Indian Brotherhood, August 20, 1945, MS 1116, Box 2, File 2., British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria

Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1864-1990), National Library of Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada, Web Site http: www.nlc-bnc.ca.

Department of Indian Affairs, Indian Handicrafts and Home Industries, B.C. (1917-1918), RG 10, vol.7918, file 41203, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

Department of Indian Affairs Correspondence (1930-1980), RG10, vol. 6493; vol. 7551, file no.41.000-13, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.


Ravenhill, A. (1939-1940), Correspondence, Fonds AVIII A5/4, University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections, Vancouver.

Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts (1940), Ms1116, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria.
Appendix 1. A Machine for Making Authenticity

THE ART-CULTURE SYSTEM

A Machine for Making Authenticity

(authentic)

1. sponsors
   the art museum
   the art market

2. history and folklore
   the ethnographic museum
   material culture, craft

3. fakes, inventions
   the museum of technology
   ready-mades and anti-art

4. tourist art, commodities
   the curio collection
   utilities

(not-authentic)

(authentic)

art
original, singular

not-culture
new, uncommon

not-art
reproduced, commercial

culture
traditional, collective

(commerical)
Appendix 2. Map showing the Northwest Coast from the Ocean

From Flyleaf: Coast Salish Essays, W. Suttles.
Cartography and graphics by Cameron Suttles. Originally Published in 1985 by
Permission pending.
Appendix 3. Women’s Knitting Circle

British Columbia Provincial Museum Photograph, pn. 6637
Permission pending.
Appendix 4. Spinning Circle, Metlakatla

From a contemporary postcard, Garfinkel Publications Inc.  
Permission pending.
Appendix 5: Display Canadian Handicraft Guild, 1905

From: In Good Hands
Permission pending.
Appendix 6: Children Selling on the Reserve

Vancouver Public Library, photograph #13441
Permission pending.
Appendix 7. Selling Carvings and Baskets

Vancouver Public Library, photograph # 21775.
Permission pending.
Appendix 8: Alice Ravenhill

British Columbia Provincial Archives, photo # I-51527
Permission pending.
Appendix 9: Crafts Display St. Michaels Indian Residential School, Alert Bay

Vancouver Public Library, photograph # 9359
Permission pending.