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"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870. By Sylvia Van Kirk.

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federate to localized government, the social disorganization that attended the loss of prestige and waning power, and the impact of land transfers and timber cutting on a hunting and horticultural economy. The documents themselves are most interesting and the Granger Collection is crucial for interpreting other collections bearing on the period.

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"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870. By Sylvia Van Kirk. Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980. 301 pp. \$19.50.

"Many Tender Ties" is an original and innovative study of women and their roles in the fur trade of western Canada between 1670 and 1870. Drawing upon intensive research in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and in many other primary and secondary sources, the author presents a rich, sensitive, and sympathetic account, primarily of the Indian and mixed-descent women who became involved in fur trade economic, social, and familial relationships, and also of the white women whose arrivals in the west after 1820 helped so drastically to reshape and undermine previous patterns of native-white interaction.

The book is built upon two main theses. First, it "supports the claims of theorists in women's history that sex roles should constitute a category of historical investigation" (p. 5), emphasizing the fur trade roles of women as "active agents" rather than "passive victims" (p. 8). Second and more specifically, it has the major concern of showing "that the norm for sexual relationships in fur-trade society was not casual, promiscuous encounters but the development of marital unions which gave rise to distinct family units" (p. 4, see also p. 27).

Both these points have fundamental implications for our understanding of post-contact North America. Older "frontier" history was largely men's history, with occasional bows to pioneer white women and, more rarely, to some unforgettable Indian—Pocahontas, Sacajawea. Other native American women, leaving no or very few records themselves, became the "passive victims" of bias and neglect in historical research, whatever their actual roles as

victims or active agents. And their relations with white men were often either over-romanticized or viewed solely as transient affairs initiated by exploitive males.

Van Kirk's book shows vividly how this ignorance and misunderstanding have limited our views and reconstructions of the past—in domains that reach well beyond women's history *per se*. Native women played important and sometimes remarkable political roles in mediating between their peoples and the fur traders, as did the Chipewyan Thanadelthur in the early 1700s. In quieter ways, their domestic bonds with traders, complementing their kin ties with their own communities, placed them in unique positions as forgers of links of trade and friendship between Indian groups and Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company personnel. Their contributions in this domain were well recognized by the Montreal traders; the Hudson's Bay Company, with its formal rules against intimacy with Indians and a London directorship remote from its field operations, was slower to acknowledge their helpfulness.

The older historiography also usually passed over the concrete economic and labor contributions of native women in the fur trade. Company records, however, when examined for data on this topic, prove rich in information on women as guides, interpreters, food gatherers, trappers of small game, preparers of skins, and makers of snowshoes and moccasins. Their skills, as the traders realized more fully than most later historians, were essential to the trade and often to the survival of the white men conducting it. It might seem that their assistance, normally rendered without pay as such, exemplified their "victim" situation. But Van Kirk argues convincingly that these women themselves often found advantages in taking up fur trade-post life, with the access it gave to material goods and a more secure means of support. Some not only welcomed but also sought out traders as partners on their own initiative. Their continuing of traditional female subsistence activities as an adjunct to the fur trade was rewarded by a better standard of living, and sometimes, a social position rather higher than what they could have expected in their own communities.

Nonetheless, exploitation also occurred; much of Van Kirk's data shows that women could indeed be victims as well as active agents. Women were sometimes taken, held, or bought and sold against their will, seemingly more by North West than by Hudson's Bay Company traders. Indian ideals about wife exchange and

lending sometimes were perverted by Europeans too ready to treat such practices as excuses for prostitution.

With the merger of the companies in 1821, the subsequent economic changes and pressures, and the arrival of settlers with white women and clergy in the west, new forms of victimization arose. Although numerous traders maintained their "many tender ties" with their native wives (by now mostly of mixed descent) and offspring, others took advantage of a changing social scene in which racial consciousness and ideals of "civilization" were both on the rise, to set these bonds aside and either leave fur-trade life or bring into it new standards of "respectability" that country wives and mothers, unchristianized, uneducated, and unmarried by clerical standards, could not meet. The decades of the 1820s to 1850s were painful for many women as their older productive "in-between" status as brokers and mediators yielded to the marginality of being caught between cultures and in the midst of rapid change. Those women who became somewhat educated and "quite English in their manner" might feel this marginality the most—isolated from their Indian kin and ancestral communities, yet unable to win full acceptance or feel at home among incoming whites, or in traders' home societies if they happened to travel there.

But newly arrived white women in the fur trade country were also victims of their situation. Van Kirk's chapter on these "lovely, tender exotics" details their problems of adjustment as traders' brides to life in the northwest and their loneliness, isolation, and subjection to rigid nineteenth century standards of propriety and domesticity. Social rivalries among these women, and with their native-born peers, reinforced tensions that sometimes flared into conflicts—as in the Foss-Pelly scandal of 1850 when a leading mixed-blood wife became an object of suspicion and slander in the young settlement of Red River (Winnipeg). In later times, these kinds of stresses faded, but for a number of years, they affected the lives of women, both native and white, in the growing communities of the northwest.

The complexity and fluidity of the fur-trade social scene over two centuries and in a variety of company and ethnic contexts are challenges to interpretation and generalization. Van Kirk's analysis is clear, cogent, and beautifully expressed and documented. Apt examples in the text and vivid nineteenth century portraits and other illustrations greatly enhance the book. On a few points, however, we may agree to disagree. HBC Governor George

Simpson's characterization of Indian-white relations in 1857 (pp. 9-10) seems a little too rosy to take as fact; dependence was more one-sided than mutual by that time. And in viewing the HBC as winning the struggle with the North Westers (p. 2), the preeminent positions that the latter retained in the new firm are worthy of remark.

More broadly, I am somewhat uncomfortable with the designation of the fur-trade as a "society;" the term suggests a more bounded, unitary entity than in fact seems the case for the dual-origin company enclaves and the Indian communities they interacted with in the west. The usage of "society" also fosters a tendency to present the "custom of the country" as perhaps too encompassing and unitary a gloss for the unions of traders and native women. More emphasis might be given to the fact (noted in the text) that, underlying this popular term, there were a variety of customs and much diversity of understandings and attitudes, going back to the differing social and cultural origins and company relations of both the traders and their Indian associates. This diversity led nineteenth century traders to differ considerably in their treatment of native families, and it emerged sharply in the conflicting legal testimonies over the country alliances of old North Westers Alexander Fraser and William Connolly. Rather than speak of one "norm for sexual relationships in fur-trade society" (p. 4), I would note that there was never a sufficiently unified social entity underlying "the custom of the country" to establish a complete consensus on its meaning. For many, the custom did indeed give rise to "distinct family units"; but fur trade sexual relationships were also sometimes governed by the norms of European prostitution, of European mistress-keeping, of Indian hospitality, or simply by short-term trade expedience. Many ties were indeed tender, but others of a different quality were common enough in certain fur-trade sectors to be described as customary and even normative.

Setting such questions of interpretation aside, however, I would stress that this book is an invaluable contribution. It advances our understandings not only in the areas of fur-trade and women's history, but also in North American Indian studies and ethnohistory. It will serve as a major resource for scholars and students investigating personal relationships and interactions among Indians,

people of mixed descent, and whites during a critical two-century period in the history of northern North America.

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Lakota Belief and Ritual. By James R. Walker. Edited by Raymond DeMallie and Elaine Jahner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, in cooperation with the Colorado Historical Society, 1980. 329 pp. \$21.50.

Until now, access to James R. Walker's copious field notes, interviews, essays, and photos has been limited to his major text, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota*, and to several journal articles. These publications represent only a part of the wealth of information Walker procured during his years as physician among the Oglala on the Pine Ridge Reservation (1896-1914). Editors Raymond DeMallie and Elaine Jahner have assembled the totality of Walker's papers (courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society) and selected from them the material for a projected four volumes of which *Lakota Belief and Ritual* is the first. The first three volumes will present Walker's papers in a broad thematic fashion: volume one deals with the beliefs that form the foundation of Lakota way of life; volume two will discuss Lakota mythology; volume three will examine Lakota social organizations and the Lakota conception of time and history. Volume four differs in that it plans to contain the translation of George Sword's personal account of the traditional Lakota way of life (Sword was one of Walker's principal informants). Volume one is the only volume currently available.

Lakota Belief and Ritual (hereinafter cited as *LBR*) is divided into five parts, the first part containing introductory remarks by the editors and two essays by Walker; the remaining four parts contain primary sources.

Part I begins with the editors' biographical introduction to Walker and his papers, focusing particularly on Walker's uncommon personal approach to a study of Indian culture. Unlike other anthropologists of his time (most notably Clark Wissler), scholarship was not the final end of Walker's studies; the doctor did not