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## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

Living the Sky: The Cosmos of the American Indian. By Ray A. Williamson

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/80p5f1gw>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 8(3)

### ISSN

0161-6463

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### Publication Date

1984-06-01

### DOI

10.17953

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find no flaws in these two volumes. I feel that this series is ethnology at its best.

Paul B. Steinmetz, S.J.  
St. Gerard Majella Church

**Living the Sky: The Cosmos of the American Indian.** By Ray A. Williamson. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. 366 pp. \$19.95 Cloth.

Ray Williamson is an astronomer by academic training (Ph.D., University of Maryland, 1968). For the last fifteen years he has lived in Annapolis where he was a member of the St. John's College faculty between 1969 and 1979. *Living the Sky* is grounded in the newly emerging interdisciplinary science of archaeoastronomy and the significance of celestial events for pre-Columbian Native American groups. It is one of only a handful of books to address these topics and should establish itself as an influential and useful volume in forthcoming years.

*Living The Sky* fulfills a number of important functions in the developing science of archaeoastronomy (a discipline that attempts to merge anthropological theory and methods with the astronomical study of the cosmological beliefs and practices of pre-literate Peoples). It serves as an introductory text to archaeoastronomy in North America. More importantly, it provides the next generation of archaeoastronomers with what has been called a "program statement" for the continued pursuit of their collegial enterprise. Finally, it levels well-placed criticism at some of the field's early work, and this can only contribute to the growth of critical interchange that all intellectual schools require to survive.

*Living The Sky* describes and explains the importance that American Indian groups attributed to solar, lunar and stellar events in their daily and sacred lives. The volume records, at great length and in sufficient detail, the existing anthropological and astronomical data available on the American Indians' study and use of the sky to orient their earthly existence. Williamson effectively presents and documents his principal theme: Native Americans living before the advent of European colonization were skilled and knowledgeable sky-watchers who constructed their dwellings and lived their lives in accordance with their astronomical and mythic interpretations of the heavens. In the process he recounts dozens of exciting stories of scientific

discovery and numerous Indian tales of the creation of the universe and the meaning of life.

One story he tells concerns the series of mysterious, large, stone, wheel-like structures attributed to the Plains Indians of Wyoming, Montana and nearby states. They are most often made up of lines of loaf-sized stones laid out in a pattern that converges toward a central pile of rocks and therefore resembles a wheel. These structures may approach 60 yards in diameter with the central pile as much as three to four yards high and ten yards across. What were these forms made for?

By examining and photographing the constructions astronomers and archaeologists confirmed that the wheels were laid out with alignments corresponding to celestial events. Additional piles of rocks surrounding the structures were used as siting points to demonstrate that the location and construction of the forms was based on heavenly observation and tied to ritual as well as practical use. At the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming studies show that the summer solstice sunrise and sunset account for two of the positions of rockpiles in terms of the central hub. Furthermore, the number of spokes—28—corresponds closely to the length of a lunar month. Other siting points are aligned with stars that could have been seen by the naked eye during the period when the wheels were most likely in use.

Williamson's book is not so technical that it cannot be read meaningfully by the average reader, although one's introduction to the mysteries of scientific archaeoastronomy does require some willingness to learn a new "language." It is an example of that rare phenomenon: a learned discussion that is not so complex and abstruse that it cannot be understood. The book is filled with helpful illustrations and photographs.

*Robert C. Hauhart*  
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**The Sons of the Wind.** Edited by D.M. Dooling. Foreword by Vivian Arviso One Feather. New York: Parabola Books, 1984. xix + 136 pp. \$8.95 Paper.

"Anything that has a birth must have a death," Finger, an Oglala holy man, once told James A. Walker, the physician who lived among the Oglalas at the Pine Ridge Reservation from 1896 to