

## **TENUOUS LINES OF DESCENT: INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS OF THE RESERVATION PERIOD**

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### **ABSTRACT/RESUME**

Over the past century notable changes have taken place in the appreciation of Indian arts and crafts in Canada. From a period of repression when all elements of Native cultures were discouraged, through occasional encouragement by craft organizations, to the present, Native art has survived, grown and developed.

Au cours du siècle dernier, des changements remarquables ont eu lieu dans l'appréciation des arts autochtones au Canada. A partir d'une période de répression quand tous les éléments des cultures autochtones étaient repoussés, et à travers l'encouragement intermittent par les corps de métier, jusqu'à présent, l'art autochtone a subsisté, s'est agrandi et s'est développé.

They were robbed by law or circumstance of most of the old, and they have been prevented by the same forces from acquiring the new.<sup>1</sup>

This sentiment expressed in 1949 by the Federation of Canadian Artists in a brief submitted to the Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences, characterizes a time of transformation of the cultural life of Canadian Indians. During this period the material culture also changed: from a strict cultural context, to curio, ethnography, and art.

In the years from the 1870's to the 1950's there were rapid changes and developments in the relationship between the Euro-Canadian and the Native Canadian: social, political, economical and cultural. In those 80 years the Indian people had to survive overwhelming changes, moving for better or worse from a dependence upon the land and sea, and their own resources, to an economic base similar to that established by the Europeans, which brought with it commercial attitudes founded upon possession, profit and achievement, and which ruthlessly undermined Aboriginal customs and values. Forced to abandon the old way of life after several unsuccessful attempts to retain it, Indians became so increasingly isolated from the rest of Canada following the early fur trade that they soon became heavily dependent upon traders and the government. Further isolation and dependence occurred when Indian people were placed on reserves as wards of the government, following the establishment of the Indian Act of 1876. This Act was not substantially revised until 75 years later in 1951. This period will now be referred to as the "Reservation Period", with implications of imprisonment and the extinguishment of religious and cultural freedom.

### The Object Transformed

During the 19th century many European travellers and explorers had a penchant for collecting objects from foreign lands, especially souvenirs. Often objects created by Indians for traditional purposes were highly valued, and found their way into many European public and private collections. Both the 19th and 20th centuries, the era that Bazin called "The Museum Age" (1967:193), saw the development of conservation and the growth of museums, for which voluminous quantities of material were collected and studied under the three rough divisions of art, history and science. Art collections were usually confined to European cultures and their historical antecedents. It was the museums of natural history that found room for the study of African, Oceanic, and North American Native collections. Rather than attempt to assess these objects primarily for their artistic merit, the Na-

tive arts were judged according to their ethnological value. But the arbitrary categorization of the material went even further than that.

During this time some museums, such as London's Victoria and Albert, acquired examples of Canadian Indian artifacts for collections of commercial materials made of animal products. These objects provided little interest to the ethnologist, however, because of their non-traditional nature. Their significance lay in the fact that they were examples of objects made during the early period of assimilation into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture, and thus documented the process of cultural change.

Indian people quickly adapted foreign-made materials to their needs. When tourists demanded authentic artifacts, however, the Indians responded quickly to provide them. To the Indian, the importance of these artifacts lay not so much in whether they were ethnographic or artistic, but rather, that they were commodities, which is what they eventually became. Subsequently, the production of these commodities became an important business to many Indians across Canada, as early as the mid-19th century in the Maritimes, and later in the rest of the country. Since they were usually small items, the returning traveller could easily pack them.

Traditional objects were unquestionably transformed. No longer did they symbolize the pride of generations of utility and significance but, rather, they became commercialized objects, evaluated within a wholly alien, western framework as artifacts which were "exotic," "primitive," "original," "decorative", etc. The very concept of tradition grew problematic as a result of such influences. From the Indian perspective artifacts of this kind - produced to be sold, often accommodated to the tastes of the foreign purchasers and lacking any cultural context (e.g. masks without ceremonies or dances) - appeared frequently "in-authentic." Ethnologists and western connoisseurs by contrast often preferred "artistically" formed works for reasons of personal taste; the authenticity of such artifacts could be substantiated, among other considerations, by the fact that in them Indian aesthetic attitudes, themes and forms were developed to the maximum possible degree. Obviously, therefore, concepts such as "tradition" and "authenticity" thereby lost clear meaning.

Of prime interest in this connection is the transformation of the traditional artifact into a souvenir. This process is important for the issue of the reception of Indian art, as in Canada these are available largely on a regional basis, without much distinction between (often clichéd) handicraft products and art proper. Art and handicraft alike have come under the influence of western dealers, western culture and western ways of thinking. The two major influences, pervasive and affecting changes at every level of Indian society, were the government and the churches, with their programs of directed cul-

tural change. Beginning with an amendment to the Indian Act in 1884, the government forbade freedom of cultural expression and instead enacted a program of assimilation.<sup>2</sup> The government also gave churches the responsibility of educating Indian children. Most Indian children were removed from their families and sent to church-run boarding and industrial schools to become "civilized," which deprived them of the chance to have a traditional education. Other issues that affected major changes in Indian arts and crafts at that time were industrialization, with virtually everyone influenced by the new technologies; mass production (although Indian artists, in company with other artists, found it difficult to compromise to achieve low-cost mass production) and westernization, the social developments of which have carried the Aboriginal artists into the general traditions of Western European art. Global factors also proved to have a major effect: the Depression and two World Wars affected the societies and artistic activities of Indians just as they did the whole of the western world. Indian people, moreover, lacked the experience and money needed for the active organization or cultural development of market-oriented artifacts which took such outside influences as Native traditions into account. Indeed, the gradual proliferation of imitation, counterfeit, and "made in Japan" objects took business away from Indian artists and crafts people.<sup>3</sup>

It is in this context that a brief history of the Indian art and craft movement of the 20th century will be given. Three main institutions have played an essential role in this connection. The Department of Indian Affairs and two private lobby groups, the Canadian Handicraft Guild and the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society were moving forces behind the rise of Canadian Indian arts and crafts during the first half of this century, although the latter's activities, beginning well before the Second World War, were confined to British Columbia. Brief histories of the first two bodies follow in order to present Indian arts and crafts during the Reservation Period into its context. The subject will then be examined on a province by province

### **The Department of Indian Affairs**

The government's involvement in the Indian art and craft industry, which began in the late 19th century, has continued until today. At first, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Department's interest in Indian arts and crafts was minimal. Their policies stressed acculturation rather than the preservation of Indian cultures.

During the 1920's the Department grew very active in organizing and supervising Indian exhibits at industrial and agricultural exhibitions, such as those in Brandon, Regina, Calgary and Edmonton. This involved encourag-

ing Indian students from industrial and residential schools to participate in the production of arts and crafts. One role of the Indian Affairs' agent (to ensure that these Indians were being "civilized", i.e., becoming good farmers and tradesmen), was to exhibit their products to show their civilized qualities rather than their traditions, assuming that this would instil a Euro-Canadian spirit of competitiveness and motivation. Beneath the veneer, however, lay the chilling fact that the Indian was a showcase for the Department's policy of assimilation.

The whole controversy about how Indian art was to be supported and promoted can be gauged from the diverse ideas put forward about how Indians were to present themselves on such occasions. During this time, at many provincial industrial and/or agricultural exhibitions, it was common for many of the organizers and entrepreneurs to have local Indians appear in traditional costume (Figure 1). One Indian agent, J.A. Markle, said that their "participation was demoralizing and seriously interfered with the Department's work among them." The promoters retorted that "they are not prisoners like other men..., and they will come to the exhibition, pageant or no pageant." Another added, "They are free people and will take their holidays as anyone will. The government cannot corral and imprison them"



**Figure 1:** *Plains Indians at the provincial exhibition, Brandon, Manitoba, early 20th century.*

(*Edmonton Bulletin*, 1910b: July 15). In another incident, Duncan Campbell Scott, the Superintendent of Indian education for the Dominion, said authoritatively, "They come to the fairs when they should be on their farms.. Our purpose in educating Indians is to make them forget their Native customs and become useful citizens of the Dominion... when it comes to encouraging them to act like uncivilized heathens I think it is time to draw the line." (*Edmonton Bulletin*, 1910a: August 9).

The Department's interest in Indian crafts soon developed due to the active interest and participation of private associations and clubs. The first association to influence the Department was the Canadian Handicraft Guild of Montreal. In the 1930's the Department began receiving letters from private organizations, such as the Guild, urging them to establish an organized system of collecting and marketing Indian arts and crafts. In response, the Welfare and Training division was created in 1936, headed by Dr. R.A. Hoey, who was responsible for "the creation and cultivation of subsistence gardens and the extension of agricultural operations; the purchase of livestock and equipment; [the] encouragement of arts and crafts and the sale of handicraft products."<sup>4</sup> This program was intended to give Indian people an economic self-sufficiency.

Concentrating its efforts in the east (most notably with the Indians at St. Regis, Kanawake and Pierreville, Quebec, and Muncy, Ontario <sup>5</sup>, the Division organized the Indians to make handicrafts according to a set list of items, with catalogues containing price lists. These mass-produced objects were then marketed in both east and west in such places as Hudson's Bay Company stores, provincial exhibitions, and small tourist shops in national parks. In 1939, Dr. Hoey, at a conference on the The North American Indian Today, gave a number of reasons for the decline in handicrafts, and explained how his program would improve the Indian's economic status. There was no mention of product authenticity. Instead he said

... It is the intention and policy of the Department to encourage high-quality production and by the establishment of a central warehouse at Ottawa to assure continuity of supply to the wholesale and retail trade (Hoey, 1943:204-205).

The nullifying result was the beginning of a period in which productivity took precedence over quality. Indian artists and craftspersons were persuaded to produce only what was economically practical, overlooking authenticity. The result was a handicraft that began to take on an homogeneous appearance. Indian artifacts increasingly became indistinguishable. The context had changed their appearance and significance.

Tom Hill, Director of the Woodlands Indian Museum, noted that In the Department, "very few changes were made in program objectives over the years" (1984:18).

### The Canadian Handicraft Guild

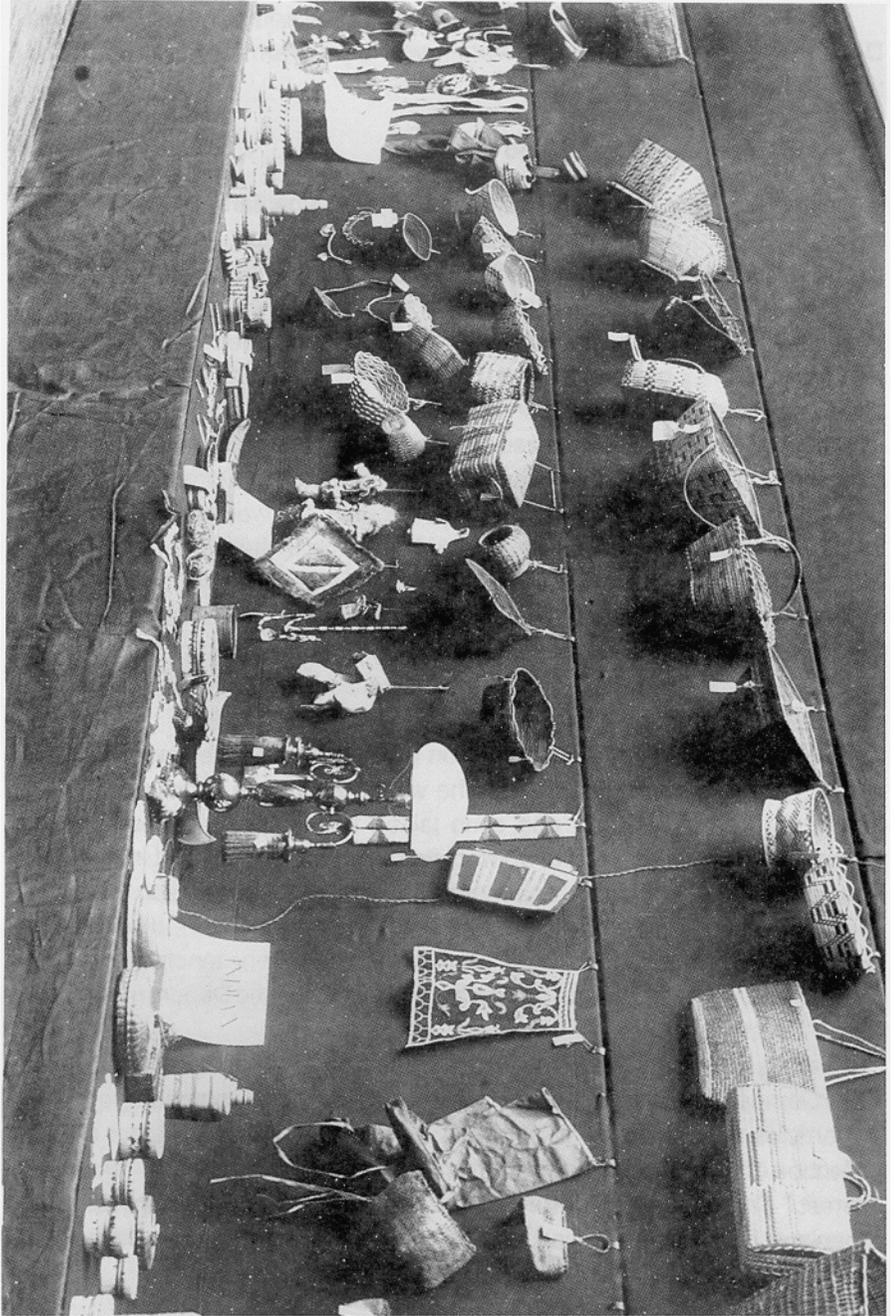
During the first half of the 20th century the Canadian Handicraft Guild was opposed to the Department's policies on assimilation, and through their programs attempted the reestablishment of the ancient arts and crafts.

The Guild was created in Montreal in 1902 as the Woman's Art Association, following the success of the arts and crafts movement in Great Britain and Europe. They opened a shop that year with "a few webs of homespun, a few hangings, and a few Indian baskets" (*The Argus*, 1904). Incorporated in 1906, the Guild was "organized to encourage, retain, revive and develop handicrafts and home art industries throughout the Dominion, and to prevent the loss and deterioration of these crafts."6 It was primarily in eastern Canada that their work began by selling artifacts in the shop, then preparing exhibitions at the Art Gallery in Montreal (this was the Art Association of Montreal, which later became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) (Figure 2). Early efforts by the Guild to establish a widespread market for Indian work were undermined by the curio hunter who limited the market with quick purchases.

The Guild sent Amelia M. Paget on a trip to Saskatchewan in 1912 to revive and conserve Indian crafts. She visited women in various reserves, Indian children in schools, and even talked to the Chiefs of four Bands, reporting, "They all seemed to appreciate the efforts of the Guild in trying to perpetuate their handicrafts, and realize how much depends upon their own efforts to attain these ends" (Paget, 1912). Upon her return, through the Guild, she recommended to the Department that someone teach handicrafts at the Lebrét (Saskatchewan) Industrial School, which the Department eventually agreed to do.

During their early years the Guild sponsored an Annual Exhibition and Prize Competition, urging their "workers throughout the Dominion [to] send [in] articles of handicraft." In addition, in 1924 they pulled together a loan collection of Canadiana (Figure 3) from each of their members, to "enhance interest." The annual report for 1931 stated that a special loan exhibit was organized of "Western Indian and Esquimaux" works, after realizing the paucity and availability of authentic objects. The report said

[With] the rapid decadence of Indian crafts, the Guild feels [it] to be a matter of grave concern to the whole of Canada, and every effort should be made now to arouse interest in preserv-



**Figure 2:** *Canadian Handicraft Guild, exhibition, 1905*

ing what can be saved of them. Herein lay the reason for gathering this special exhibit (Lighthall, 1931).

In the following year, 1932, an Educational and Technical Committee was formed to study why Indian craftwork was slowly diminishing. They discovered that the market for Indian artifacts in Canada functioned within the international context of commercial competitiveness and thus, ironically, could only be satisfied by means of import controls. As a result, the Guild proposed "to approach the Federal Government in an endeavour to obtain protection for the local work in the form of taxation on imposed Indian work" (Durnford, 1932). The reference here seems to mean the Japanese. The Government never did respond, and any question of copyright protection was never assessed. That year the Guild formed an "Indian Committee" headed by Miss Alice Lighthall.

Politically, in the early 1930's, the Guild tried to counteract the Indian Act, which stated that Indians could not participate, "in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant in aboriginal costume without the consent of the Superintendent General or his authorized agent." There was, however, an exception: "...any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat." Clearly the government wanted to abolish tribal costume and custom, preferring instead to show the products of an assimilated or 'civilized' Indian. The Guild, on the other hand, was interested in the reestablishment of the ancient arts and crafts.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1935 the Department cooperated with the Guild by sending out a questionnaire to enquire about the state of Indian crafts in Western Canada. It yielded some facts: craftwork was becoming less available; designs were becoming non-traditional; younger people were no longer interested; and there was a lack of marketing facilities.

The Guild stepped up and expanded its activities, generally however against the tide of official government policies. In 1937 it suggested to the Department that a central marketing system be established to gather and distribute crafts. The following year the Guild sensed a general shift in government thinking when the quality of handicrafts became secondary to economic productivity. As the annual report reads, the Welfare and Training Division's work was only in its infancy, and:

...it must stress the economic side, - sometimes above the artistic, - in order to prove its value to our harrassed legislators. But it is work eminently along the right lines, and under the only authority by which it can be adequately developed (Lighthall, 1938).



**Figure 3:** *Canadian Handicraft Guild, Joint Loan Exhibition and Prize Competition held in 1927 of Canadian made handicraft*

It was 1940 and the Guild was becoming more involved in work with the Eskimo. The Guild also announced that the name of the "Indian Committee" would become the "Indian and Eskimo Committee." The War had interrupted many of the Guild's plans. As the 1942 annual report noted, "Indians all over the country have found increased employment, many of the men being in the Army, while others, as well as women, are in war industries, or replacing others in civilian work."<sup>8</sup>

Following the War in 1946, the Guild was busy organizing exhibitions and competitions, fearing that Indian arts would be "swept away in one great surge of commercialism," leaving nothing worthy to exhibit. After an unsuccessful exhibition in the spring of 1947, another show appeared that fall, this time successful. With the arrival of James and Alma Houston in 1948, the Guild shifted its emphasis nearly totally from the Indian to the Eskimo, much of its work having been taken over by the Quebec Indian Homemakers Clubs (Green, 1967:110).

#### Other Interest Groups

Following World War II there were other individuals and interest groups who were equally concerned about the rapid decline of Indian arts and crafts. Some, like Mildred Valley Thornton, saw how tenuous the traditions were becoming:

Our problem today with regard to Indian culture is not what we shall salvage, but how best we may salvage it. How can we cut loose from the old traditions which are backward and retrogressive and at the same time conserve and promote the very things that lay at the very throbbing core of these practices? We must restore to the Indian that pride in his traditions and in his Native gifts which has been largely lost through the painful process of assimilation; in so doing we shall build up confidence, self respect and happiness which would surely attend recognition of his natural capacities (Thornton, 1949:23).<sup>9</sup>

When a Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences was appointed in 1949, it received 16 briefs and presentations on Indian arts and crafts. One submission included the Sculptors Society of Canada. They indicated a projected activity of theirs was the

development of relations with Indian and Eskimo sculptors as colleagues, and the encouragement of their Native talents in ways not possible from the paternalistic handicraft or museum points of view (The Sculptor's Society of Canada, 1949:2).

The Federation of Canadian Artists recommended "that the government make very special efforts to encourage the cultivation of the fine, and the practical, arts among the Canadian Indians" (1949:29). The results of the briefs were published in the Royal Commission's Report, 1949 - 51, with 13 recommendations. Douglas Leechman, of the National Museum of Canada, submitted a report to the Department on the state of Indian handicrafts in Canada in 1952. He stated,

there seems to be a very general feeling that Indian handicrafts should be encouraged and not allowed to die out. Many efforts have been made to attain these ends, with a degree of success achieved believed by some to be out of proportion to the effort expended. Perhaps the time is ripe for a reconsideration of the problems involved and an examination of the present situation.<sup>10</sup>

By now, all across Canada, Indian and non-Indian organizations had pressured the government to change its policies. A year before, in 1951, the Indian Act had been revised, finally granting Indian people religious and cultural freedom. However by that time many generations had passed. The government's cultural genocide had taken its toll. Thus ended the Reservation Period of Canada's Indians.

### **Development In The Canadian Provinces**

Within the larger Canadian context, provincial arts and crafts movements had equally interesting histories during the first half of the 20th century. With the exception of the Northwest Coast, highlights of each province will be discussed, beginning in the west and moving eastward.

#### **Alberta**

The following account provides an insight into Indian activities that were closely bound up with the annual flood of tourists visiting the National Parks:

In mid-July each summer a colourful pageant which recalls vividly to all old-timers the clays when Indians and buffalo roamed the plains of the Northwest, undisturbed by advancing civilization, is witnessed at Banff in the heart of the Canadian Rockies...Little does the summer visitor...realize...that he is gazing upon the remnant of a once powerful tribe, long prominent in the history of the frontier" (Godsell, 1934:179).

Banff was Canada's first National Park, created in the wake of the railroad in 1885. Tourists, a Victorian phenomenon, arrived on the first scheduled trains (Whyte, 1985:62).

In the summer of 1889 the Banff Indian Days became an important festival for the Stoney (Assiniboine Indians) of Morley. They had already been on reserves for twelve years, and this now provided them with an opportunity to practice and enjoy their "Indianness" (Figure 4).

Indian Days provided the Stoney with an opportunity to reveal their proud past. It became an annual event for Indians and tourists, until the 1930's when the government began to order restrictions on the number visiting Banff, to which "the Stoney replied they all came or no one came. They all came. The Stoney held firm[ly] to their convictions, and little changed for three decades" (ibid:77). It is questionable that the Stoney sold their crafts directly to the tourists because in the town there were stores selling Indian arts and crafts as far back as the early 1900's - albeit at "Mackay and Dippie" (1900 to 1935) and "The Sign of the Goat" (1905 to 1960) mostly alongside stuffed animals.<sup>11</sup> Numerous pieces purchased and sold were post-traditional material, i.e., objects made during the early Reservation Period (Figure 5).



**Figure 4:** *Indian Days at Banff, Alberta, probably 1930's.*

Illustrations of authentic Plains Indian art began to appear in such magazines as the Ladies Home Journal. In it Frances Roberts discussed the revival of beadwork as a fashion and how it could be reproduced from old forms, suggesting that the modern craftperson could update its function: drawings indicated that old needle-cases could become pencil holders or a knife-sheath became a scissors case (Roberts, 1903:24).

With their traditional costumes, and customs such as dances, the Indians themselves became a kind of objet d'art attracting the interest of out-siders. By the 1920's the Indian people were considered "civilized" and, "no longer a threat to the security of the surrounding whites. Yet despite exposure to schools and missionary influence...a large number of traditional beliefs, practices and attitudes still persisted" (Standefer, 1964:18).

Perhaps it was this fact of persistence which attracted many artists and writers west to paint and write about Indians.<sup>12</sup> Among the well-known artists who used Indians as subject matter was the German, Winold Reiss. His Art Deco painting style interpreted the characteristics and customs of the American Blackfeet, creating a new though somewhat romantic reality, around this "noble redman" (Wunderlich, 1972:3). A young Canadian Black-foot artist named Gerald Tailfeathers first came into contact with Reiss in 1935, working under his tutelage during the latter's summer art schools at



**Figure 5:** *Indian displays at the Hudson's Bay Company store, Edmonton, Alberta, May 4, 1920.*

Glacier National Park, Montana. Tailfeathers' early work showed the strong influence of Reiss. 13

In the late 1950's, John Laurie of the Canadian Handicraft Guild, Calgary Branch, reported great changes had taken place in the Indian craft market. Many of the fine old pieces were in museums. "Today Indians use commercial beads and threads and even this is becoming a lost art as hides are scarce and beads hard to obtain and expensive."<sup>14</sup> In the course of time such assessments grew more differentiated. Professor George Glyde, head of Fine Arts at the University of Alberta, lectured as follows to the Friends of the Indian Society in 1958:

The mission schools have not been a good influence on Indian art. They suppressed the creative instinct of the Indians and introduced a Europeanized art...The modern Indians should use the same basic forms but the designs should change because their experiences are different...each artist is a product of his period...the 20th century Indians cannot see their environment in the same way their grandfathers saw it (The Edmonton Journal, 1957:May 22).

That same year Tom Hall, Indian Director, Calgary (Alberta) Stampede, 15 stated, "The decline in the famous crafts [is] one of the prices paid for [by the] integration of the Indians - the closer they come to the white man's way the farther they go from their own old way."<sup>16</sup>

### Saskatchewan

With the exception of northern Saskatchewan, this province has not been a mecca for tourists. The relative isolation of the reserves and the changed lifestyles may explain the low production of Indian arts and crafts, although during the 1920's and 1930's, the Regina Agricultural and Industrial Association included exhibits from the various Indian schools. Three categories of Indian work were shown in the 1921 exhibition: (1) "beadwork" or traditional material: beaded suits, vests, shirts and leggings, porcupine quill, and silkwork moccasins, firebags, gauntlets, etc; (2) "School work", which reflected Europeanized activities such as sewing, crochet, drawing, woodcarving and weaving; and (3) "farming"<sup>17</sup> (Figure 6).

In 1931, Mary L. Weeks, of the Guild's Regina Branch, reported the marked decline in the production of headwork. The Indian woman's prestige, she said,

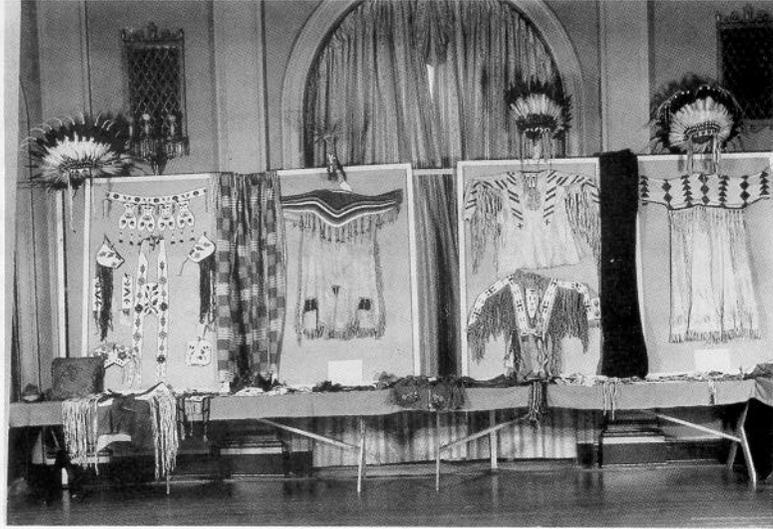
... was no longer determined by elaborate beaded decoration of her deerskin dress. The styles of the white woman had aroused her interest and also her envy...The styles for the men



**Figure 6:** *Display of Indian handicrafts, File Hills, Saskatchewan, 1906-07.*

of the tribes had likewise changed... Council meetings were discouraged, consequently there was no demand for ceremonial costumes. Happily of late, however, the demand for beadwork by collectors, who are unable to find the old pieces, are turning their attention to reproductions, is causing the Indian women to take up this old-time handicraft with fresh interest...Every year collectors from other lands visit the prairie provinces in search of Indian curios taking away some of the finest examples to enrich the museums of other nations ..In encouraging the reproduction of this old time-handicraft, the Women's Art Association is playing a valuable part. It is preserving one of Canada's most primitive and original forms of art - that of the aboriginal (Figure 7) (Weeks, 1931:26-27).

In 1932 the arts and letters committee of the Local Council of Women, Regina, were equally concerned about preservation. By 1938-39 Mrs. Weeks had helped organize competitions in Regina to improve bead and quill work, in conjunction with the provincial government as a new marketing plan (Lighthall, 1939). No more was heard from this program except that some of the pieces had been placed in the Regina Legislative buildings.



**Figure 7:** *Display of Plains Indian beadwork, probably at the Hotel Saskatchewan, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1927.*

Plains style art and craft has survived. A big demand for traditional style objects comes from those Indians who regularly participate in the modern powwow circuit. Tourists, both Indian and non-Indian, are still the major buyers, proving that some traditions still survive.

#### The Yukon and Northwest Territories

Douglas Leechman (1952:4) reported that handicrafts were not particularly important

...in the economy of the Natives, though there has long been a steady demand for articles of Indian origin. During the big Gold Rush in 1898, miners found time to acquire Indian curios in addition to the Indian-made leather gloves, jackets, and moccasins, which many of them wore. There has been as well, a constant tourist traffic, particularly in Whitehorse and Dawson and, in the last few years, along the Alaska Highway and many of these visitors buy souvenirs of either Indian or white manufacture. The Natives of northern and central Yukon are noted for their exceptionally fine beadwork, but comparatively little of this

reaches the "outside" and, in recent years the difficulty of obtaining beads has been a serious handicap. In the southern part of the Yukon, the women make moccasins, gloves, and jackets, and the men derive some income from making toboggans and snowshoes for local use.

Amelia M. Paget of The Canadian Handicraft Guild reported meeting a Mr. D. Cadzow, 18 of Rampart, Yukon, on her 1912 trip to Saskatchewan

...who trades with the Indians in that isolated part of Canada, and who was in on his annual purchasing tour. He promised to do all he could to interest the Indians in keeping up the standard of their work, which he assured me was of the best. He will endeavour to supply them with only such materials as will conform with the rules for good workmanship (Paget, 1912).

Possibly Indian craftspeople sold their works to tourists who were on Canadian Pacific's "Alaska and the Yukon Princess Cruises." A 1939 C.P.R. brochure announced a trip through the mountains by Yukon Railroad to Carcross, where they were met by "Bishop Bompas, pioneer missionary, and local Indian Patsy Henderson, Yukon lecturer".

## Manitoba

The handicraft movement in Manitoba was largely a product of work by the Manitoba Women's Institutes which began in 1910 as home economics societies. They were initially the responsibility of the Manitoba Agricultural College (Green, 1967).

World War I brought money from the federal government into the provinces for an expanded rural education program. The Women's Institutes provided an ideal vehicle for this program in Manitoba and a rapid expansion occurred in the teaching of craft skills to rural women. By the 1920's the Canadian Pacific Railway and The Canadian Handicraft Guild of Montreal had become involved in the Manitoba craft scene, after co-producing a successful exhibition in Quebec City. This resulted in the creation of the Manitoba branch of the Guild.

Although the Depression severely curtailed the government's financial support to all programs, the Women's Institutes carried on, with the support of public and private sponsorship (Ibid: 148-149). During this period the Indians, relegated to the reserves, were largely forgotten.

In 1942 the Manitoba Pool Elevators developed a Rural Art and Handicraft Exhibit to encourage artistic ability in the agricultural communities of Manitoba. The Exhibit, to emphasize its rural nature, was placed under the auspices of the Provincial Exhibition in Brandon. However, it was not until

the 1950's that any Indian art or handicrafts were included in the Rural Art and Handicraft Exhibit (Ibid:158).

Leechman reported that handicrafts were being sold in the Fort Garry and Red River district having long "been an important source of income to Indians living in the immediate vicinity. Moccasins and gloves were the principal products and they are still made in considerable numbers. There is also some work in porcupine quills being done on boxes and other objects of birch bark" (1952:6).

#### Ontario

By 1900, the Indians of southern Ontario had developed a lively tourist trade, so much so that the Tuscarora began to act as middlemen for Indian crafts being sold in Niagara Falls (Dodge, 1951:1-5) (Figure 8).

...Iroquois souvenirs form[ed] the largest group of Native artifacts made for sale. Most of the Glengarries, pouches, and whimsies were made by the Tuscarora in New York and at Caughnawaga between the middle of the nineteenth century and the middle of this one. The Tuscarora still make Victorian style whimsies for sale at Niagara, which has a parallel in the production of factory moccasins at Lorette (King, 1985:15).



**Figure 8:** *Two Tuscarora women, Delia Patterson and her half-sister Elizabeth (Rihisakwad).*

The industrialization of southern Ontario attracted men from the reserves to work in cities such as Toronto, Sarnia, and Detroit, leaving the handicraft industry largely to women. Most Ontario Indians went home after the First World War to continue their previous occupations in farming or industry. The change from the traditional culture seems to have had more effect on the reserves in the southern part of the province, which were assimilating the culture of the nearby cities. The economic slump of the 1930s, but also the recovery of the following decade, likewise contributed for differing reasons to a further deterioration of the situation for handicrafts in many areas.

In 1942, N.E. Jamieson said handicrafts were still being practiced on local reserves while in danger of being lost in others. She said,

In the past twenty-five years, Indian handicraft has widened considerably...The Indian Fair (the Six Nations Agricultural Society)...which is celebrating its seventy-fifth birthday this year is unique in that it links the old with the new, the present with the past in the line of its exhibits depicting modern Indian handicraft and the relics of the remote past and planning for the revival of some of the lost arts (Jamieson, 1942:4-11).

The post-war period in Ontario brought a renewed interest in the arts and crafts. Florence Hill of the Six Nations Reserve was instrumental in organizing the Ohsweken Art Group in the 1950's, which later developed into the Six Nations Arts Council. Not only did it promote Indian arts and crafts, and introduce them to the world, but sponsored many exhibitions, including one at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and exchanged Native children's art with groups in Japan (*The Anglican Churchman*, 1987:5).

## Quebec

The ways of life of Quebec's Indians can be comprehended by the geographical location of the various tribes. The Montagnais-Naskapi and Mistassini of Northern Quebec, following a more traditional lifestyle, experienced very little European contact and influence until the early 1900's. This isolation created a favourable climate for anthropological and ethnographic studies (Speck, 1938; 1977).

On the other hand, the Huron, Mohawks and Algonquin of the south, in contact with Europeans for several centuries, had developed artistic styles, techniques and products influenced by European tastes (Speck, 1911; 1914). The Lorette Hurons (Figure 9) were known for their moosehair embroidered articles while the Kanawake Mohawks (Figure 10) and Algon-

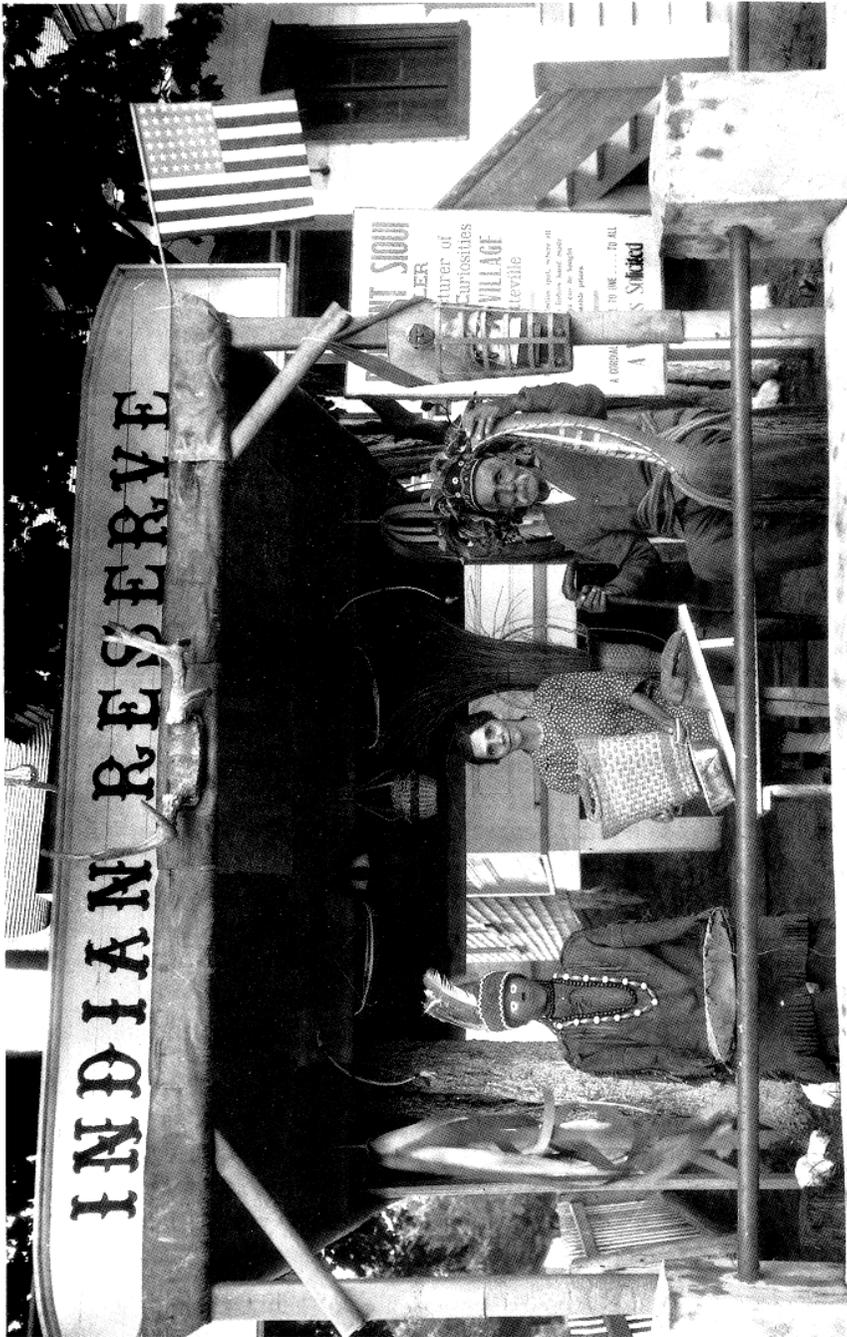


Figure 9: Sioui Family at Loretteville, Quebec (no date)



**Figure 10:** *Indians, probably from Caughnawaga, ca. 1906.*

quins of Maniwaki made beaded moccasins, pouches and baskets (Dodge, 1951:4)

The Depression years were especially difficult for the Indians of Quebec. Except for the steelworkers, handicrafts and relief projects produced the only income for many families. In the northern regions very little cash was in circulation, but a living could at least be made by bartering furs for supplies, while fish and game provided food for nomadic families (Canada: *The Canadian Indian*, 1973:31).

In 1935, Mary A. Peck, one of the The Canadian Handicrafts Guild founders, observed that at Kanawake, it was

...much more paying to do poor, cheap work than the fine old-style embroideries in porcupine quills, beads or grasses, now so rare. Even the moccasins of the Iroquois have lost their distinct character and cannot be distinguished from those of several other tribes (Peck, 1935:99).

As the general situation reverted to normal, interest in the plight of the Indians revived; certain individuals such as James and Alma Houston, en-

couraged by the Guild, in turn tried to encourage, develop and find markets for some of the northern Naskapi Indians. 19

### The Maritimes

The Maritimes, like the St. Lawrence Valley, were in a good geographical position for the marketing of arts and crafts. Often there were sales booths near the steamboat landing at Riviere-du-Loup, (Dodge, 1951:4), although Halifax was probably the most common centre because of its link with Europe. Micmac birchbark boxes decorated with quills and split roots, model canoes, boxes, and a wide variety of other objects made for Native use, were sold there (King, 1985:15).

Ruth Whitehead said that as early as the mid-19th century Micmacs were entering their work in the Nova Scotia Industrial Exhibition (1982:51). Quillwork pieces continued to be entered in exhibitions and became popular parlour furnishings. Its decline began at the turn of the century, because there were fewer craftswomen, and quality could not be maintained in economic terms.

During World War II the government reorganized the Micmac of Nova Scotia, closing the smaller reserves and relocating everyone to either Shubenacadie or Eskasoni (Gonzalez, 1981). The large influx of people overtaxed the employment situation and exacerbated the reserves' land problems. 20

The economic forces at work in the Maritimes influenced the lifestyle and art form of the Indians, as the agricultural land base and rapidly depleting natural resources of the Maritimes could not long offer employment for the Indians. When they turned to traditional lifestyles and handicrafts to earn a living, they rapidly depleted the reserves' raw materials (Gonzalez, 1981:86). The manufacture of baskets by the Micmac and Maliseet denuded large areas of forest, making the manufacture less economically feasible. 21 A birchbark blight, combined with a lack of interest, almost ended the manufacture of quillwork boxes, although there were still some practitioners of the art in the 1950's. 22

### Conclusion

in 1943 Teddy Yellow Fly of the Blackfoot tribe said,

Many changes have taken place to suit modern tastes....caused by the white man's idea of indian art and by the commercial demands for articles of indian design and manufacture. Nevertheless, it remains true that the indian has kept for centuries a heraldry of his own, a heraldry that records not only his achieve-



Figure 11: Canadian Pacific Railway newsstand, Calgary, Alberta, 1921.

ments but his thoughts, so that a Blackfoot design is really a record of the Indian's soul (Bonner, 1943:22-23).

These "many changes" were what led to full-scale commercialization of Indian arts and crafts. "The commercial demands for articles of Indian design" by the tourist trade resulted in a standardization. Thus was born the homogenous "Indian art and craft", similar to that sold at concession counters in the CPR stations (Figure 11). Demand and mass-production also led to the development of the 'miniature' as exemplified in totem poles, teepees, canoes, snowshoes, lacrosse sticks and dolls.

Competition from Japan infuriated purists, because Japan was continually flooding the market with their own brand of "Indian art and craft," through a superior production and marketing program.

Although Yellow Fly used his Blackfoot people as an example of a people who tried to protect many aspects of their culture, he gave a proud and eloquent invocation when he said, "the Indian kept...a heraldry."

Today Canadian Indians recognize the importance of this emblematic heraldry to their traditions and cultures no matter how tenuous have been the lines of descent, and modern Indian painting and sculpture are making use of it in their attempts to evolve an indigenous form of art which takes creative account of both Indian handicraft traditions and the artistic styles, as well as the art market, of the dominant civilization of the west.

### NOTES

1. Federation of Canadian Artists, Brief submitted to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, October 1949, p. 30.
2. An Act Further to Amend the Indian Act, 1880. S.C. 1884, c.27. (47 Vict.), section 3, reads:

"Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the "Potlatch" [sic] or in the Indian dance known as the "Tamanawas" is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any goal or other place of confinement; and any Indian or other person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian or Indians to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrated the same, or who shall assist in the celebration of the same is guilty of a like offence, and shall be liable to the same punishment."

3. Rev. G. H. Raley noted (1935:999) "the Japanese in particular are developing their trade with tourists in Canada in this way, at the expense of our Canadian wards. They have imitated indian designs, developed them commercially, flooded Canadian Stores with thousands of article and used them to increase their trade results ...it is easily understood that there are difficulties of legislation and international relations which might cause a government to proceed slowly in attempting higher tariffs to prevent the Importation of such goods."
4. Annual Report for 1936-37 Department of Indian Affairs, (RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 4) School Files.
5. See the Guild's Annual Reports for 1937 and 1938.
6. "What it Has Done," The Canadian Handicrafts Guild, Montreal, 1917. A catalogue summing up facts and figures of what the Guild had accomplished since its incorporation in 1906.
7. A meeting of the Guild's Sub-Committee on Indian Arts was held on March 6, 1933. The discussion was in reference to the Press article on "the Indian legislation at Quebec in regard to Indian customs and tribal costumes." A letter was drafted to the Prime Minister expressing the Guild's views. The government did not respond except that it later assisted the Guild in their questionnaire on the state of Canadian indian art and craft.
8. "Indian and Eskimo Committee," Annual Report of the Canadian Handicraft Guild, 1942.
9. The object of her discussion was the art of the West Coast, but her sentiments reached across the country.
10. Douglas Leechman, Canadian Indian Handicraft, report submitted to the Panel on Indian Research, Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration, Ottawa, May 19, 1952. File No. 1/25-1-1-1(E3). C.A.F. Clark, Secretary to the Panel said, "in the interval since this project was offered to the Panel there has come to hand a publication of the International Labour Office." the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour said, "that, pending the development of industrialization, handicrafts are of importance to many indigenous peoples in independent countries and that there is a real need to improve the social and economic status of indigenous handicraft workers."

11. Personal communication with Mr. Whyte, Curator of the Heritage Collection of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, Alberta, July 1986.
12. See George H. Gooderham, "I Remember - Artists, Writers and Others," autobiographical ms., Glenbow Museum Archives, M3850(D819.G649), for all the artists and writers who came to visit or stay with him.
13. In 1941 at the home of John Laurie, Tailfeathers saw the works of Charles M. Russel and Frederick Remington and other western artists and "the exposure to these and other artists gave him ideas to experiment with and develop his own technique...Between 1957 and 1959 he became concerned with the historical significance of his work, using his knowledge of his tribe to show events of the past. In 1958 he produced his first paintings on the style of Indian artists of the American Southwest, and he turned to cartooning to depict the Indians dissatisfaction with governmental involvement in their lives." Beth Duthie, "They Painted the Indians," Glenbow, (July/Aug. 1985), pp. 6-7.
14. "Indian Crafts Becoming Lost Art, Says Speaker," *The Albertan* [Calgary], October 5, 1957. The Guild was sponsoring an exhibition of handicrafts at the Hudson's Bay Company.
15. The Calgary Stampede is one private institution that has had one of the longest working relationships with local Indian people. Witness for example the recent opening ceremonies at the XV Olympic Winter Games. The promoters reason that the cowboy and Indian image is indivisible. The very least this does is help strengthen the tenuous lines with the past.
16. "Indian Crafts Disappearing," *Calgary Herald*, July 7, 1958. The Stampede, long interested in Indians of southern Alberta, and concerned with the swift disappearance of arts and crafts, created a prize competition. There were only two entries: one was a headdress made of turkey feathers, the other was a pair of moccasins. This prompted an idea that the committee would commission large quantities, "while there are still people left who know how to do the work."
17. Letter from W. M. Graham, Indian Commissioner, Dept. of Indian Affairs, to The Principal, R. C. Boarding School, Standoff, Alberta, May 27, 1921, with an attached official prize list of the Regina Provincial Exhibition, August 1-6, 1921.

18. In her 1931 article, Mary L. Weeks makes reference to a Donald Cadzow as being from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York. She said he, "visited the reservations and collected several hundred dollars worth of beadwork, also a peace pipe - the last of its kind among the prairie Crees - for which he paid five hundred dollars."
19. "Nascopies Turn to Art," *The Indian Missionary Record*, (April-May 1953), p.8. In a conversation with Miss Virginia Watt, Director, Canadian Guild of Craft, February 1988, she said the Guild had an exhibition in 1953 and again in 1976 in an attempt to help the Naskapi regain their old art forms, but "with the rush of industrialization, especially at Schefreville," the art was hopelessly lost.
20. Gonzalez, p.97-98. The industrial possibilities at both reservations were overtaxed by the influx of people. The Natives who had been moved lost their animals and tools. They were settled on small plots of rocky land which was unfit for agricultural use.
21. "Indian Basket Makers find Ready Market for Products," *The Indian Missionary Record* (October 1956), p. 3. Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Bartlett, a Micmac couple from Yarmouth, were making baskets of maple and travelling up to 100 miles to find a market for their wares.
22. They reported one woman over 65 and one under 50 doing quillwork baskets at Shubenacadie in the 1950's. Perhaps one of these women was Susan Sack, the sister-in-law of Bridget Sack, mentioned by Whitehead on p. 208.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Plains Indians at the provincial exhibition, Brandon, Manitoba, early 20th century. Glenbow Archives #NA-4630-15.
2. Canadian Handicraft Guild exhibition 1905. Photo courtesy the Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal.
3. Canadian Handicraft Guild, Joint Loan Exhibition and Prize Competition held in 1927 of Canadian made handicraft. Note the Indian woman, lower left, between the two others, demonstrating basketry techniques. Photo courtesy the Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal.
4. Indian Days at Banff, Alberta, probably 1930's. Canadian Pacific Corporate Archives #19010.
5. Indian displays at the Hudson's Bay Company store, Edmonton, Alberta, May 4, 1920. Glenbow Archives #ND-3-445. Note that two products are for sale, Indian artefacts and taxidermy.
6. Display of Indian handicrafts, File Hills, Saskatchewan, 1906-07. Glenbow Archives #NA-3454-21. Beadwork, miniature teepees and Red River cart, at an agricultural exhibition.
7. Display of Plains Indian beadwork, probably at the Hotel Saskatchewan, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1927. Photo courtesy the Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal.
8. Two Tuscarora women, Delia Patterson and her half-sister Elizabeth (Rihsakwad). The women are displaying the beadwork which they regularly sold to tourists at Niagara Falls. Photo courtesy of Clinton Rickard family.
9. Sioux Family at Loretteville, Quebec, no-date, selling handicrafts to tourists. Canadian Pacific Corporate Archives #22660.
10. Indians, probably from Caughnawaga, ca. 1906, selling handicrafts. Photo courtesy Kanawake Cultural Centre, Kanawake, Quebec, #370.
11. Canadian Pacific Railway newsstand, Calgary, Alberta, 1921. The curios are questionable as to whether or not they were produced by Indians. If they were, however, they were mass-produced, because the same types of items were sold at all CPR newsstands across Canada.