

BOOK REVIEWS

Henry Pennier, *'Call Me Hank': A Stó:lo Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson and Kristina Fagan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

The Canada in which Henry 'Hank' Pennier was born in 1904, and the one in which he died in 1991, were very different places, both for his Stó:lo community and for the newcomers who (mostly) displaced them. A retired logger living on his family's homestead east of Vancouver, Pennier was approached in the early 1970s by the linguist Wyn Roberts, who sought cultural information about the Aboriginal people of the Fraser River. Certainly, Pennier was qualified to provide this; he was descended from noble families with high ceremonial and territorial status throughout *S'ólh Téméxw*, the Stó:lo homeland. What Roberts primarily received, however, was a series of stories about Pennier's life as a 'halfbreed' (Pennier's term) who spent much of his life working in the woods. The resulting manuscript, published by a small local press in 1972, enjoyed some local notoriety before it was largely forgotten.

Since then, historian Keith Thor Carlson and literary scholar Kristina Fagan have worked with Pennier's family to bring this account of a twentieth-century Stó:lo life to the wider audience it deserves. In addition to the original manuscript, Carlson and Fagan have written a new introduction that sets Pennier's life within its Stó:lo context, added a glossary of logging terms and a biographical profile of Pennier's rather mysterious Québécois grandfather, and included a brief interview with Pennier from just after the original book's publication. This new material provides opportunities to explore the ways in which Pennier understood himself as a Stó:lo person. For example, Pennier was always loath to provide Roberts with detailed traditional cultural knowledge; he did not see himself as an expert, despite his lineage. The tension between Pennier's genealogy and his self-penned account asks us to consider what is not shared with outsiders in such life accounts as much as we consider what is. The editors' introduction also makes explicit Stó:lo perspectives that might otherwise be missed by the uneducated reader. Pennier's commentary on the virtues of small-scale timbering versus mechanized logging, for example, is couched intriguingly within a discussion of Stó:lo attitudes regarding fair play between human and non-human beings.

"*Call Me Hank*" was first published at a time when books like N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* emphasized traditional culture and/or exposed the effects of colonialism in everyday Aboriginal lives. Such works spoke to the politics and cultural anxieties of the day, and so were extremely successful. Readers searching for an auto-ethnography or an explicit polemic of resistance here, however, will be disappointed; Pennier shares little of Stó:lo teachings and only rarely mentions experiences with racists (includ-

ing those who ran the residential schools, the *ne plus ultra* of Canadian genocide). And near the end of his narrative, he even questions the value of ethnicity itself: “Why shouldn’t there just be people now? No Indians. No Eskimos. No whites. Just people” (86). As Carlson and Fagan note, this sounds alarmingly like the scandalous, ‘colour-blind’ White Paper of the Trudeau administration, unveiled only three years earlier. It isn’t. But it also bears little resemblance to the essentialist identity politics that have tended to dominate discourses about Aboriginality. The sense here is that Pennier was more than aware of the debates about Indigenous identity happening throughout Stó:lo territory and elsewhere, but that he saw them as bearing little relevance to his own experience.

For those of us who teach Aboriginal history, “*Call Me Hank*” is a valuable insight into First Nations encounters with industrial capitalism, and it is a provocative counterpoint to more familiar narratives of Native political awakening such as Campbell’s *Halfbreed* or Lee Maracle’s *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*. For scholars of labour history, Pennier provides a rare Indigenous voice on physical labour, masculinity, and how working men lived, played, and died in the early- and mid-twentieth century. For environmental historians, Pennier opens up fruitful veins of inquiry into the relationships between Indigenous people and the land during a period of radical ecological and economic transformation. Carlson and Fagan have made a significant contribution here.

Pennier’s account is also simply fun to read. Take this gem, for example: “The world is all right. It is the people who are cruel. One of our troubles are the jones, keeping up with the jones that is. It will be very hard to eliminate all the jones and it will take more years than I will know” (84). In such clever turns of phrase, Pennier breaks the fourth wall; he knows he has an audience. In fact, he felt compelled to share his life story, perhaps because of the pain, physical and otherwise, that he carried with him. “I am glad I was born,” he writes. “I am glad of all I learned and the way I worked and what I worked at and I am glad to see the sun come up still and the night time to bring the night sounds. I am glad I had enough schooling to be able to write these words on paper. I feel better now because it all isn’t a weight on me any more. (86) Pennier did carry great weights in his life, but he was a survivor, and his narrative only alights briefly on the struggles of being Indigenous in twentieth-century North America. While not a jeremiad against colonialism, his story offers insights into the ambiguities and small victories of a life relatively well lived without ignoring the inequalities faced by a man who, it must be remembered, was never officially an Indigenous person in the Canadian government’s eyes. Or, as Hank put it, “it has been a complicated world and in some ways it still is I guess. And the damn government hasn’t helped any” (4). Indeed.