

# “Indians’ Bygone Past:” The Banff Indian Days, 1902-1945

*Laurie Meijer Drees*

**ABSTRACT:** Between 1902 and 1945, the Banff Indian Days and annual Indian Exhibition promoted by local Banff entrepreneur Norman Luxton, were a success both locally and internationally. Tourists came from around the world to attend the week-long festivities. The Banff Indian Days could be considered the Canadian equivalent of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. These Banff Indian Days form not only an undescribed part of Canada’s popular culture history, but are also an important source of information on the nature of Indian-White relations in the province of Alberta between 1902 and 1945 - a period and region relatively little investigated by historians interested in Native history. In this paper the structure and function of the Banff Indian Days are investigated using traditional historical methods as well as theoretical concepts borrowed from the discipline of Anthropology. The article concludes that the Banff Indian Days constituted a form of public ritual through which participating Indians were able to invent, assert, and have sanctioned, their separate and unique identities.

On a hot Sunday afternoon in July 1921, crowds gathered along the main street of Canada’s premier mountain resort town of Banff, Alberta to watch a parade of Indians wearing buckskin and beadwork. The mounted parade followed the town’s dusty streets to stop, finally, in the shade of the cool, granite facings of the Banff Springs Hotel. The parade marked the annual beginning of the Banff Indian Days, an internationally renowned event that attracted tourists from all over the world from the turn of the century until 1976.

The following article addresses the significant and peculiar popularity of the Banff Indian show during the pre- and inter-war years. Not only are accounts of the event surprisingly absent from the history of Canada’s popular culture, but scholars have also ignored the Indian Days as a significant source of information on the nature of Indian-White relations in the province of Alberta between 1902 and 1945. Following World War Two, the nature and motives of the public visiting Banff National Park and the Indian Days changed as the park became increasingly accessible.

Over the course of the last decade the disciplines of history and anthropology have increasingly crossed each other’s traditional boundaries in search of a better understanding of “past” and “culture.” Anthropologists have borrowed concepts from history,

though historians have seemed more reticent to borrow from anthropology.<sup>1</sup> Using a combination of historical data and anthropological theory, this paper reveals how the Banff Indian Days served to mediate contact between Indian and White cultures. The events provided a popular arena where Indian-White relations could be openly expressed, negotiated and, most importantly, manipulated. As a forum for the expression of Indian-White relations, the Days were an overwhelming success.

The interpretation of this paper stands in contrast to much of the current literature dealing with the history of Indian-White relations and Indian exhibitions in Alberta.<sup>2</sup> The history of the Banff Indian Days, surprisingly, shows that government policies did not necessarily reflect popular attitudes towards Indians in Canada; instead, it shows that White society was fascinated with what it perceived to be Indian culture, and that Native people in this period had a central and active role in the creation of their own destinies and public history.

The analysis of the Banff Indian Days presented here is informed by the theoretical writings of anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz and historian Natalie Davis. Davis has asserted that forms of associational life and collective behaviour are cultural artifacts that can be "read" as fruitfully as a written document,<sup>3</sup> while Geertz asserts a similar point of view: culture is an acted document.<sup>4</sup> Turner's theories, in turn, are concerned with public interaction between groups in a given society. Turner postulates that this interaction often assumes the form of ritual, or "social drama," where different groups act out their respective old and new positions in society.<sup>5</sup> At the Indian Days, Indians and tourists found themselves face to face; when read as a document, the Days reveal the relationship between people and cultural traditions, while the ritual of the Days shows how both groups defined, redefined, and then acted out their perceived social roles.<sup>6</sup>

The origins and early history of the Banff Indian Days are unclear. Dates vary as does the story itself. A popular version of the tale claims that the Days originated in one of 1889, 1894 or 1897.<sup>7</sup> In one of these years, the flooding Bow River washed out several miles of railway track leading to Banff and tourists staying at the new Banff Springs Hotel found themselves stranded. Since work crews were moving slowly and trains were departing neither east nor west, the visitors' stay in the Park was extended longer than expected. The desperate hotel manager contacted a local outfitter and guide for

suggestions on how to entertain the restless guests. The guide was familiar with the Banff region, its attractions, and with the fascination of tourists with Indians. His idea was to bring the Indians in to entertain the stranded tourists and he travelled to the reserve at Morley, located in the foothills not far from Banff, as the CPR's emissary. Having convinced the Indians of the benefits of his plan, the guide arranged for the Stoney Indians of Morley to ride up to Banff and perform in town. The Indians arrived and stayed for a week, engaging in all kinds of festivities. The resulting first "Indian Days" was deemed a resounding success. The hotel guests were so taken with the performance that the CPR, with the assistance of local businessmen, sponsored Banff Indian Days as an annual event. According to this version of the tale, the festival did not become annual until 1907, under the guidance of Banffites Norman Luxton, Jim Brewster, Sam Armstrong, and Tom Wilson.<sup>8</sup>

Other versions of the origins of the Banff Indian Days claim that the event grew out of more informal occasions. Throughout the 1890s Banff celebrated and held sporting events on Queen Victoria and Dominion Days. Over the years, more and more people from Morley came up to participate and by 1902 whole families were arriving to join in on the horse racing and other events, camping on the flats at the foot of nearby Cascade Mountain.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the discrepancies among the various accounts of the origins of Indian Days, it is clear that by the 1920s and 1930s the celebration had been established as a regular Banff event. The Days were an undeniable success, attracting huge audiences, many participants, and running for increasingly longer periods.

The earliest documents available relating the events of the Indian Days are dated from the summer of 1914. According to the handbills of 1914, which announced the twenty-fourth anniversary of Indian Day, the scheduled events lasted three days.<sup>10</sup> Typically, the Days included a July Sunday, with an afternoon service at the Indian Village located on the grassy fields at the foot of Cascade Mountain. There, Stoney language sermons and prayers and Native sacred songs inaugurated the festivities. Over the following two days, races, parades, and other gatherings provided many sights for the tourists.

The tipi camp, located on the Banff Race Track grounds on the outskirts of the town, was promoted as the focal point of the Indian Days. Here, the Indian families set up and stayed in painted, canvas tipis for the duration of the Days. The large meadow was viewed by

Indians as well as organizers of the Days as an ideal location for the camp. For the organizers, it allowed for the display of the tipis in camp formation and encouraged tourists to visit the Natives in a “natural setting” and view “typical Indian village life.”<sup>11</sup> For the Indians, the location of the site outside of town allowed them to maintain their own sense of community. For both, the meadow functioned well as a gathering place.

The standard day for visiting this Indian camp was Sunday, following the Sunday service, as there were no sports events on this day. On these “visiting days,” tourists would go to the tipi village to photograph, to look, and to buy crafts directly from the Indian artisans.<sup>12</sup> Tourists trying to enter the encampment before its official opening for public viewing were “arrested” by the Indians for the amusement of spectators. Showmanship penetrated every aspect and moment of the Indian Days much to the delight of all those involved – whether spectator or participant.

The most popular event of the Indian Days was the Grand Parade, originally held on Monday morning beginning at ten in the morning. Traditionally, parades started at the Indian tipi camp at Cascade. Once the Indian participants had arranged themselves for display in their beaded outfits on horseback, the parade departed and moved slowly into the streets of the Banff townsite. Handbills and posters encouraged tourists to come and line the streets and enjoy the sight of “10,000 Stony [*sic*] Indians, from the Banff Race Track to the C.P.R. Hotel ..,” and this they eagerly did.<sup>13</sup> In the summer of 1925, newspapers reported that

Painted with brilliant red and yellow from the old Indian ochre beds at Marble Canyon, the costumed Indians drew large crowds of tourists from here and Lake Louise to view them in the glimmer of their ancient glory. Many had never seen Indians before...<sup>14</sup>

Eventually the procession moved down the main avenue, heading for the central courtyard at the main entrance to the Banff Springs Hotel.<sup>15</sup> As the parade crossed the bridge leading to the Hotel, the judging of the Native costumes took place. Following the judging, the parade moved up to the Hotel where the crowds of guests were assembled on the porches and galleries.<sup>16</sup>

As the Indians rode by, tourists photographed them: "movie cameras whirred and still cameras clicked by the hundred, particularly when tiny Indian infants mounted on ponies rode up..."<sup>17</sup> In the courtyard of the hotel, the parade disbanded for various ceremonies. This break in the procession allowed for the bestowing of Indian Days honours and provided an opportunity for speeches to be made by various Indians, Banffites, and visiting dignitaries. According to contemporary accounts, the mood at this event was light and jocular; Indians harassed visitors "whenever the opportunity offered[,] roping a pretty girl from amongst the spectators..." while onlookers cheered, and horses and riders mingled. At this point, the parade prizes and gifts were handed out, usually by an important visitor. In 1925, for example, the wife of the ex-governor of Missouri presented the prizes for costumes and passed out gifts to the "papooses." The CPR Hotel also made presentations to the Indians in the form of gifts of candy, cigarettes, cigars, and oranges before the parade returned back through the town and dissembled at the Cascade camp.<sup>18</sup>

Indians were paid at departure according to their costumes. Those dressed in feathers or beadwork costumes were given more money than those "of lesser colour;" however, every participant was "paid some thing, perhaps from a dollar down besides special prizes for best costumes..."<sup>19</sup> Costuming was given a great deal of attention by the Indians, who spent the months before the Days carefully preparing their dress in anticipation of the contests and parades.

In the early years parade participants wore exclusively "traditional Indian" attire: headdresses and buckskin. By the 1920s and 1930s costuming changed and the show presented tourists with a mixture of Indian and Wild West flavors. Indian cowboys and cowgirls became a common sight and dress began to range from "absolute Indian" to "purely Canadian."<sup>20</sup> It appears that it was the younger generation of Indians that mixed the traditional Indian outfits so admired by spectators with more modern material. By 1935 there were numbers of "young maids and bucks wearing white man apparel entirely..."<sup>21</sup> In spite of such modern trends, the appeal of the Days appears to have remained its Indianness and its hearkening to the days of, what one newspaper referred to as the "Indians' Bygone Past."<sup>22</sup> The tourist attraction was promoted internationally as the "Folk-lore of Hundreds of years Ago"<sup>23</sup>

The Indians in the parade were not paid for costume alone. Presents were also made to special "Indian Lieutenants," "chute

men," and outriders. These positions were held by Indian men who accompanied the parade, assisted and monitored the sports events, and acted as liaisons between the Banff Indian Days organizing committee members and the Stoney participants. Men from the Stoney reserve such as Jonnie Lefthand, Tom Kakquitts, and Jonnie Bears paw were of central importance in the orchestration of Indian Days events, which ranged from parades to sports and pow-wows.

Following the morning parades were the sports events, held on Banff's main avenue. Horse races of various kinds and marksmanship contests tended to be the featured events. Newspaper reports of the 1930s claimed that originally White men and Indians competed side by side in these sports events. As the festivities became more established, however, this inter-racial competition was discontinued in favor of an all-Indian Indian Days.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis in the sports, therefore, was on the ethnicity and traditions of the participating Natives. The sports events were not consistent from year to year and, over time, appeared to become increasingly rodeo-oriented. Initially the novelty and "straight out" horse races dominated. Later, exhibition bare and saddle bucking and roping contests became standard.<sup>25</sup> Democrat, or carriage, races were also introduced.

Other events included foot races and bow and arrow competitions. The marksmanship contests typically involved twenty or thirty Indian marksmen, armed with bows and arrows and simultaneously shooting at a single sheep or goat target. The event was simple but had enormous appeal. Again, the attraction of the events appears to have lain in the "traditional" nature of the events. Bows and arrows were a central part of that "traditional Indian" image that lent the Days their great appeal.

All in all, Indian men and women seem to have competed equally in all the Indian Days sports. Separate events featured separate sexes; the Squaw's foot race was reserved for women, while the archery competition seems to have been for the men. The awarding of prizes to winners in each event was of little significance except to serve as an incentive and encouragement to the participants. The emphasis at the Indian Days was on the number of Natives taking part, and less on the quality of the sports. The emphasis was on "good, clean fun" and the unexpected was welcomed.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to money prizes and the gifts of cigarettes and candy presented during the Grande Parade, the Indians were provided with meat and rations for the duration of the festivities. Starting in the

1920s, the Indians participating in the Days were given buffalo meat from Alberta's Elk Island Park herd. Norman Luxton, organizer of the Indian Days, arranged each year for the mid-winter purchase of a number of buffalo carcasses from this federally managed herd, until the following July, and had the frozen meat stored by the P. Burns Company, a Calgary meat packing firm. The Burns Co. looked after the meat rations free of all charge through its connection with Luxton.<sup>27</sup>

The presentation and butchering of these buffalo carcasses was another tourist attraction. The Indian men carved up the meat and portions were handed out to participating Indian families. Surprisingly, despite the butchering spectacle put on in the fields near the Indian village for the benefit of the Banff visitors, the buffalo meat was not always consumed by the Indians. Instead, the Indians were quietly provided with substitute beef following the public "rationing" of the buffalo meat. According to an Indian Days memo:

Ten Buffalo are given by Parks department, these are killed during the winter and sent to P. Burns and Co. They are a great help to Indian Days, Burns I mean. They will give us good cow meat for whatever buffalo meat is sent them. Don't feed the Buffalo meat if possible it makes the Indians very ill some times. Respect Burns['] efforts and help...<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, to have the image of the buffalo associated with the Indians was more important at this time than the actual consumption of the meat. In addition, for more than a generation these Stoney people had not hunted or eaten buffalo, nor was it a central part of their diet since these Assiniboine generally hunted in the mountains. The cow meat was delivered to Banff in two installments: half, one day before the start of the Days and the balance, on the third day. On a daily basis, Banff merchants donated other groceries, including flour, baking powder, tea, sugar, potatoes, ("when they don't cost too much"), up to 300 loaves of bread, and smoking and chewing tobacco.<sup>29</sup>

The role of the Indians in the Banff Indian Days was of central importance. Without the cooperation and the energetic efforts of the Indians, the Days would never have become as popular as they did. The Indians attending the Indian Days festivities came to the resort town in July from the nearby Stoney Indian reserve at Morley. Some

families came up from the Sarcee Indian reserve adjoining Calgary but the majority of participants were Morley people who, as will be discussed later, were connected to Luxton.

In order to understand the state of the Stoney people in western Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century, it is important to consider briefly the location of their reserve, as well as the nature of reserve life during this time.

There has been academic debate surrounding the history and culture of the Stoney people inhabiting the foothills of southern Alberta. Anthropologists conducting fieldwork at Morley in the early 1900s were frustrated to find that much of Stoney "traditional" culture had "become completely effaced ..." and that these people were not living according to the customs of their Plains counterparts.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the nature of their "original" lifestyle, by the 1890s – when the first Indian Days took place informally – the Stoney people subsisted as hunters of large game and trappers in the easterly ranges of the Rocky mountains. Some families resided permanently at the mission site on the reserve, though many were nomadic, ranging through the nearby foothills and mountains until the turn of the century.

Increasingly, however, maintaining residence off the reserve became difficult for the Stoney hunters and their families. In 1903 the Canadian government extended the boundaries of Rocky Mountains National Park and in 1909 created the Rocky Mountains Forestry Reserve, which limited Stoney access to these regions and reduced Stoney hunting grounds.<sup>31</sup> Such travelling and hunting restrictions made it impossible for the Stoney to live off the land exclusively.

By the 1910s changes in established hunting and trapping subsistence patterns were felt more acutely by the Stoney as heavy industry moved onto reserve lands.<sup>32</sup> In 1914 the Seebe Dam, with associated Calgary Power Co. facilities, was constructed on reserve land. In the late 1920s the Ghost Dam was completed, flooding part of the reserve, and by 1929 mineral exploration began on the reserve as a result of interest generated by the finds in Turner Valley.<sup>33</sup> Note that during this time families began attending the Banff Indian Days and other similar festivals in large numbers. Social gatherings off the reserve began to take on increasing importance right up to the 1940s.

During the Great Depression the income, rations, and social opportunities derived from activities such as the Calgary Stampede

and Banff Indian Days were especially important to both the spiritual and financial health of the Stoney community. Many working off the reserve lost their jobs, and throughout the 1930s the Stoney people struggled to make the best of their situation on the reserve.<sup>34</sup> Like many other rural Albertans, they survived the economic hardship by carefully managing their resources, hunting, and working their vegetable gardens. The reserve had acquired a hospital and an industrial school by this time; however, relative to the other Indian reserves of southern Alberta, Morley was less affluent.<sup>35</sup> The small size of the reserve, lack of proper pasture land, and scarcity of winter feed for cattle resulted in heavy cattle losses in the 1930s, causing the Stoney people to become increasingly dependent on government assistance.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the Stoney people began to look for sources of income off the reserve.

The Stoney people viewed life on a small isolated reserve as limiting.<sup>37</sup> The Stoney people were accustomed to making social visits to the other Indian groups in the province, to working off of the reserve, and to travelling to their trap lines. The Banff Indian Days were an extension of an already existing type of socio-economic activity.

Between 1900 and 1940 not only the Stoney people, but also those accompanying them to the Indian Days from other reserves, were particularly enthusiastic about the event and looked forward to its annual recurrence. In a letter to Luxton, Enos Hunter declared: "I am writing to tell you about the sport the Indian day this next June, the people there are wishing next week there wish June month come quick, there all like to come..."<sup>38</sup> Norman Luxton was particularly influential and important in encouraging and compensating the Indians for their participation in the events.

The relationship between Luxton and the Stoney people was important in the establishment and success of the Indian Days. Luxton had a special connection to the Stoney people of the Morley reserve, a connection he had established in the very early 1900s. Luxton had married into the McDougall family, a pioneer Methodist family active and influential in Alberta and Morley since the 1860s. His wife Georgina's family ran a trading post on the Morley reserve and, following his marriage, Norman Luxton expanded his own business enterprises to include a trading post at Morley, "across the creek from the Morley Church."<sup>39</sup> Luxton purchased the Morley Trading Co., which had been in operation since 1886, from his brother-in-law Fred Graham.<sup>40</sup> The Luxtons lived in Banff, but

maintained close ties with their McDougall relatives in the Morley area, visiting them often.<sup>41</sup> Through his wife and his Morley Trading Company, Luxton established a close relationship with the Stoney Indians.

Luxton's relationship with the Stoney Indians was friendly, but also characterized by a degree of paternalism. Luxton and the Stoney were mutually dependent, though Luxton frequently made direct demands on the Indians. Sometimes the relationship was strained when either Luxton or the Indians felt that the other party was gaining the upper hand. In a letter directed to the Stoney Enos Hunter, for example, Luxton asserted his authority:

Dear Enos, You never keep your word so if you do not pay the bank I will. The goat scalp you sent me some time ago has the lower lip all eaten by mice. The scalp is no good that way. I did not see it or I would never have sent you \$10. Now you get busy, stop telling stories and stop fooling me. Keep your promises when you make them. From now on you do this or I will not be your friend any more.<sup>42</sup>

Luxton provided the Indians with food when they requested it. He also assisted them with letters to the government when problems with the Indian agent arose and informed them on other political issues.<sup>43</sup> The Indians depended on Luxton for both financial and moral support, and Luxton depended on the Indians to make his Banff Indian Days a success.

Luxton was also responsible for negotiating payment with the Indians for the Indian Days. Those participating in the Days were sometimes paid in rations prior to the Days to encourage them to make the trip to Banff to attend. Luxton would arrange with the Morley Trading Co. to dispense rations to those in need, including basic items, such as flour, sugar, tea, and potatoes, along with milk, soap, and tobacco, and even had meat sent to them via the train.<sup>44</sup> In Banff, the Indians would greet tourists at the train station, and Luxton compensated the Natives for their attendance at the rate of five dollars each for "head men" and three dollars for others, depending on the success of the venture. Tourists would tip the Indians and pay to photograph them. There appears to have been no guarantee of payment for the Indians, however, they were dedicated to Luxton: "I did just as you wanted me to do the other time us head

men did not make even 25cts but we just brought the people up for you..."<sup>45</sup> Records of payments to the Indians.

The Stoney leaders involved in "negotiating" the payment and events with Luxton did not blindly accept his terms. Peter Wesley, of the Kootenay Plains band, distinctly made demands on Luxton in his correspondence:

so I am glad to say to ask you, to let me know, to get \$15.00 myself from those thousand people [tourists at the train station] and one animal, tea, sugar, flour, and tobacco, for my poor stonies, try and get ready for all these things, we will be glad to come...<sup>46</sup>

Though Luxton kept a varying amount of Indian money in a trust account in a bank in Banff, the Indians had some degree of control over the financial aspect of their participation in the Indian Days as they exacted cash from Luxton and actively negotiated the price of their attending the Days.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, the famous Calgary Stampede paid its Indian participants not in cash, but in vouchers, redeemable only at Stampede facilities.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, the Indians had some degree of control over the nature of the sports events and the horses used in them. Luxton consulted with the Indians over what type of events they preferred and the Indians responded critically. Not all Indians were eager to accept Luxton's terms without question and there appear to have been many mixed opinions among the Stoney on Luxton's offers and suggested programs. As one Stoney pointed out, "remember Mr. Luxton, some are hard to please."<sup>49</sup> Luxton proposed the programs and the Indians discussed matters among themselves before responding:

Dear Mr. Luxton, I am just answering you letter about the race program as I have been showing it the others and they seem to think that every is alright. but the 2 mile race they think that it should be a bit more money for I have got marks on this program. which we thought might be altered a little more. and I was satisfied with the others.<sup>50</sup>

The Stoney also made clear that they preferred to use their own horses in the various sports events: "we want to have race the horses that we ride by our own colts that the kind we want."<sup>51</sup>

That the Indians enjoyed the Days could easily be related to the fact that the Stoney people held their own athletic competitions on the reserves and gathered for feasts and sports on a number of occasions during the course of a single year. As early as 1915, for example, the Stoney people hosted a gathering on their reserve in January to inaugurate the new year. The Stoney people invited members of the Sarcee, Blackfoot and Cree nations to attend. Much like the Indian Days at Banff, this celebration involved extensive feasting, socializing, parading in Indian costume. As at the Banff Indian Days, tipi villages were erected at these sports days, and events included the usual marksmanship contests, rodeo sports, and novelty events.

The presence of the Indians in Banff for the purpose of entertaining the tourists was certainly successful, but not without controversy, particularly in the early years of the 1900s. The Indians of Alberta participated in numerous agricultural exhibitions and fairs, particularly in the south of the province, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though the Indians were a very popular attraction at most of these fairs, their increasing attendance at such events caused the Department of Indian Affairs to investigate the situation and voice its concern. The Department of Indian Affairs found Indian dancing especially contrary to its official "civilizing" policy.<sup>52</sup> It was felt that the urban fair environments condoned a "revival of barbarism" and paganism and had an unsettling effect on the Indians.<sup>53</sup> The Banff Indian Days were no exception. Banff was reported to be more of a problem than the other exhibitions, since drunkenness was more prominent at the Days.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the role of the Indians as tourist attractions also had its supporters. Aside from their own statements of enjoyment, the Indians were supported by a number of influential Whites as well as by the enthusiasm of the visitors who enjoyed the Indian show. Tourists did not necessarily see the displays at the Banff Indian Days as exploitation or domination of the Indians. Some visitors may have viewed the Indians sentimentally as a dying and vanquished race. Others, however, came out to revel in the liveliness of the Indian show. Between 1903 and 1922, for example, tourist attendance increased from 10,696 visitors to 71,540.<sup>55</sup> The overall tone of the Banff Days emphasized the vibrancy of "traditional" Indian culture. The tourists enjoyed the Indians and their "Indianness." The parades and sports were certainly not a lament for a disappearing people.

Attendance at the Days by national and international figures is also an indication of the popularity of the Days. In 1919 H.R.H. Edward

Prince of Wales was an honorary guest at the Days; in 1939 Helen Keller was a featured personality; and over the years others, including the Duke of Connaught, William Hornaday, director of the New York Zoo, respected authors Peter Kyne and Charles G.D. Roberts, and various governors and other celebrities attended.<sup>56</sup> With such distinguished company annually frequenting the Banff Indian Days, the Days became an important social event for the town.

Obviously opinion surrounding the Banff Indian Days was divided. White society was not, en masse, attempting to divest the Indian community of its right to a degree of independence. Nor was the Indian community unified in its views of the nature and implications. This disunity among the Stoney people is revealed in their letters to Luxton. On the other hand, no records survive of internal debates among the Morley Indians regarding exhibition participation. The Indian community was not necessarily of a single mind when it came to attending exhibitions like the Indian Days at Banff.<sup>57</sup> Disputes did arise within the Indian community over issues including payment, the nature of the sports events, and the dates of the Days. In response to these inevitable debates, the Indians seem to have voted "with their feet." Those that were in favor came to the Days while those who were opposed did not. Through their attendance at the Days, the Stoney families that sided with Luxton made their support known.

Numerous factors were influential in determining whether a family might attend the Indian Days or not. The "pass system" was one such factor. According to this system, instituted by the Department of Indian Affairs under Hayter Reed in 1885, Indians were to obtain official permission from their Indian agent to leave the reserve.<sup>58</sup> Another factor affecting Indian participation was the nature of the participants' relationship with organizer Norman Luxton in any particular year. If a family was out of favor with Luxton they might not attend. As mentioned, the relationship between Luxton and the Stoneys was one of mutual dependency. Luxton made certain demands on the Stoneys, and they, in turn, made similar demands on Luxton. If they were dissatisfied with him, they were not shy to voice their opinion:

Dear Mr. Luxton,.. I know that you have been trying to help the stonies and I thought I was try to help you. You know that for a long time I have never been Friend to you so if you dont wont to depend on me I will look at you

different I got along very nicely in Banff Indian Days some years ago until you and your friends and not want me to have anything to do in working for you at the sports days. so this is all now.

Jake<sup>59</sup>

Though aware of Luxton's powers as Days organizer, the Indians did not see the point in subsuming their own interests to those of Luxton merely for the sake of winning his favor.

Contrary to the idea that "in their participation at exhibitions and fairs the Indians found a way to draw White society at least part way into their culture" which helped to keep Indian culture "alive and meaningful," the Indians instead were astute marketers of themselves.<sup>60</sup> The side of their culture that they presented at fairs was not necessarily identical to their historical culture, nor was it necessarily related to, or a reflection of, their contemporary life on the reserves. To assume either would be to assume that Indian culture of the early twentieth century was static, and that feather headdresses and buckskin outfits were all that Indians could cling to in order to maintain their dignity. This point is also supported by the fact that the Stoney, who presented themselves as equestrian buffalo hunters at the days, were in reality nomadic hunters and trappers of the montane regions.

The Banff Indian Days, as well as other exhibitions, were less arenas of authentic cultural display for the Indians than a place where the Indians could assert and celebrate, simply and publicly, their membership in a particular group that stood apart from White society. The Indian Days provided a forum for the differentiation of Indian from White culture at a time when these distinctions were beginning to disappear. Between the 1910s and 1930s there were fewer and fewer "traditional" elements available to the Indians with which to convey separateness from White society, and so many of the stereotypical elements, including feather headdresses and allusions to buffalo, were utilized. As the Indians entertained White society, they also strengthened their own group bonds. In turn, their arrangements with promoters of fairs such as Luxton were business arrangements. Luxton acted as a facilitator in the maintenance of the distinction between Indian and White domains. He encouraged and rewarded the Indians in their display of a culture which White society, at large, understood and recognized as "Indian."

For the Indians there were obvious social and monetary benefits involved in attending the Days, but what attracted the hundreds of tourists? If anthropological theory is applied to this historical scenario, the conclusion could be drawn that the Banff Indian Days provided the Indians with a place in the tourist imagination.

The Banff Indian Days parades, pow-wows, and sports formed a set of highly formalized events that can be viewed as public ritual. Public ritual, despite its public nature, is rarely probed for its meaning.<sup>61</sup> The Banff Indian Days provide an opportunity for precisely such an investigation. In typical ritual fashion, the Days program was a highly ordered pattern of action, re-enacted on an annual basis, with both repetitive and formal aspects.

Ritual can be defined as a stylized social activity which, through the use of symbolism, expresses and defines social relations.<sup>62</sup> Ritual also frequently occurs in a context where there is ambiguity about social relations.<sup>63</sup> Anthropologist Victor Turner's pioneering theories on the anthropology of performance similarly point out that ritual has the ability to achieve genuine transformations of social relationships. In his view, society is not a static framework in which the lives of its members play themselves out, but rather is "a world in becoming..."<sup>64</sup> It is through the symbolic behaviour of ritual that society is created.<sup>65</sup> Ritual allows for the members of a society to perform their individual assigned roles, or to assume new ones and have such roles declared and sanctioned publicly.<sup>66</sup>

Considering these characteristics of ritual, the Banff Indian Days can be viewed as ritual in a public setting. Between 1910 and 1940 there was a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the place of Native people in Canadian society. The Canadian federal government generally pursued a policy of assimilation for the Indians while it simultaneously recognized that Indians were not going to join mainstream Euro-Canadian society. Neither were the Indians dying off at the expected rate.<sup>67</sup> The Indians were simply maintaining their separate identity. Through rituals such as the Indian Days, Indians were able to invent a new position for themselves, if only for the duration of the Days.

At the Indian Days the Indians were temporary celebrities and the tourists were temporary admirers. Under these special circumstances it became acceptable for tourists to venerate Native life. The ritual of the Days was used to define a new set of social relationships between White and Indian. Within the context of a parade or sports

event – both possessing clearly defined rules and patterns of behaviour – there still remained a great deal of flexibility for both viewers and participants to express themselves creatively. On an annual basis the Indians could command respect from the White community in a public arena for all to see and acknowledge.

The Days, however, were not a time when all social rules were lifted or broken, as in the case of European carnivals where all laws were seemingly broken. Rather than serving as an opportunity for social catharsis – a time for dissipating popular frustrations – the Days provided a structure in which White and Indian could interact comfortably on a social level and redefine their relationship. The Days had a highly regulated program leaving little opportunity for chaotic activity suitable for social catharsis.<sup>68</sup> The Days were not an annual exception to Indian-White relations but rather served to influence and shape the relationship through an evolving and changing public ritual.<sup>69</sup> Parades and festivals such as the Indian Days helped to order the confusion of such a mixed population into neat categories: tourists were unified into an audience, and Indians were designated the actors.<sup>70</sup> In this way the tourist had a context in which to place the Indian, one which was recognized and respected by all.<sup>71</sup> Banff and its human and geographical features were being ordered, reorganized, and mapped out for interpretation by the incoming tourist.

In conclusion, the Banff Indian Days reveal that the tourist response to Indian culture was essentially positive and that the Indians, themselves, revelled in the events as much as the tourist. More work is required to understand fully the fate of the Indian Days after 1945. The image and role of natives changed significantly after World War Two, and more research is required to reconstruct the Days in the post-war context. Prior to 1945, however, the present research suggests that for the tourist, the Indian Days not only entertained, but also served to create a context for Indian-White relations in a period when this relationship was highly ambiguous. Tourists were drawn to the “traditional” image of the buckskin Indian as defined by the stereotypical image already existing and derived from other Indian shows such as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. For the Indian, the Banff Indian Days were not only a popular social occasion providing a source of income, but also to assert, manipulate, and present their status to a society with which they had relatively little contact on a regular basis. In this way, the Indians were

taking advantage of a situation presented to them, in a time when advantageous situations were few and far between.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985), or essays in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989)

<sup>2</sup> See Jim Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* (Toronto, 1989), and Keith Regular, "On Public Display" *Alberta History* 34 (1986), 1-10. This literature has taken the point of view that, historically, White interaction with Indians tended to be coercive and oppressive of "traditional" Indian culture and that, at a societal level, Whites lacking interest in Indian culture and society deprived Indian people of their self-determination. An underlying assumption of this literature is that government attitudes reflected attitudes of the general population. The history of the Banff Indian Days shows the contrary.

<sup>3</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), xvi

<sup>4</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York, 1973), 10

<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1986), 75

<sup>6</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture*, xvii. The following discussion of the Banff Indian Days is based largely on original papers generated by the Banff Indian Days Committee and the Stoney Indians of the Morley Reserve, Alberta. Between the early 1900s and 1945, Banff Indian Days organizer Norman K. Luxton and a number of families from the Morley Reserve actively corresponded on numerous subjects, including the Banff Indian Days.

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Campbell, *I Would Do it Again* (Toronto, 1959), 104-107

<sup>8</sup> Jon Whyte, *Indians in the Rockies* (Banff, 1985), 71-80; E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada* (Banff, 1983), 59

<sup>9</sup> Whyte, *Indians in the Rockies*, 72

<sup>10</sup> Glenbow Alberta Institute [GAI], Norman Luxton Papers, Luxton-Weadick correspondence, file 145

<sup>11</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 19 July 1939

<sup>12</sup> Ms. Eleanor Luxton, interview with the author, Banff, AB, 3 July 1990

<sup>13</sup> GAI, Luxton Papers, file 146

<sup>14</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 22 July 1925. Though such reports of huge crowds of both tourists and Indians could easily be labelled as clever public relations work on the part of the sponsoring Canadian Pacific

Railway company, which encouraged reporters to come up from the United States and report on the Days, photo evidence suggests that the Indian Days events did indeed attract huge numbers of people.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Also see photo documentation of the Indian Days as in the Glenbow Photo Archives.

<sup>16</sup> *Medicine Hat News*, 24 July, 1935

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See *Calgary Herald*, 22 July 1925 and the *Calgary Herald*, no date, [clipping] in GAI, Norman Luxton Papers, file 138.

<sup>19</sup> Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, [WMCR] Norman Luxton Papers, file 56

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. See also *Medicine Hat News*, 24 July 1935

<sup>21</sup> *Medicine Hat News*, 24 July 1935

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. See also *Calgary Herald*, 22 July 1925

<sup>23</sup> WMCR, Luxton Papers, file 56

<sup>24</sup> *Albertan*, 23 July 1936

<sup>25</sup> WMCR, Luxton Papers, file 56; GAI, Luxton Papers, file 146

<sup>26</sup> WMCR, Luxton Papers, file 56

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Raoul R. Andersen, "Alberta Stoney (Assiniboin) Origins and Adaptations," *Ethnohistory* 17 (1970), 49-61; George W. Pocater, "Among the Nomadic Stoney," *Alberta Historical Review* 11 12-19. Quotation from WMCR, Luxton papers, file 56.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Lowie, "The Assiniboine," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. IV, Part I (New York, 1910), 5, 33, 56, 58. Andersen, "Alberta Stoney," 49-61; Pocater, "Among the Nomadic Stoney," 12-19

<sup>31</sup> Wayne A. Getty, "Perception as an Agent of Socio-Cultural Change for the Stoney Indians of Alberta," (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1974), 94; see also John Snow, *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney Indians* (Toronto, 1977), 84

<sup>32</sup> Claudia Notzke, "The Development of Canadian Indian Reserves as illustrated by the Example of Peigan and Stoney Reserves." (PhD thesis, University of Calgary, 1982), 32

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 38-39

<sup>34</sup> Getty, "Perception as an Agent," 104

<sup>35</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 19 August 1937

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; *Calgary Herald*, 12 July 1935

<sup>37</sup> The Stoney people requested Norman Luxton's help on numerous

occasions to speak out against the “pass” system, which they felt kept them imprisoned on their reserve. Letters written by Stoneys to Luxton reveal the value these people placed on being able to travel freely between nearby reserves and also spend time in Banff at the Indian Days. See GAI, Luxton Papers, file 138, 139.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, GAI, file 138, Enos Hunter to Luxton, 1923

<sup>39</sup> Cochrane and Area Historical Association, *Big Hill Country: Cochrane and Area* (Cochrane, 1977) 101-102

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

<sup>41</sup> Ms. Eleanor Luxton, interview with the author, Banff, AB, 21 July 1990

<sup>42</sup> GAI, Luxton Papers, file 138, 12 March 1928, Luxton to Enos Hunter

<sup>43</sup> GAI, Luxton Papers, file 138 and 139

<sup>44</sup> GAI, Luxton Papers, file 138, 1928

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Jonas Twoyoungmen, no date

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, letter by Peter Wesley, [1898]

<sup>47</sup> WMCR, Luxton Papers, file 56, a note scribbled in margin of letter in Luxton’s hand.

<sup>48</sup> In 1988 the Calgary Stampede was still paying its Native participants with vouchers (personal observation of the author).

<sup>49</sup> GAI, Luxton papers, file 139, Jake Twoyoungman, 1935

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, file 138, Tom Simeon, 1929

<sup>52</sup> Regular, “On Public Display,” 1

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 2,4, 6; F. Laurie Barron, “The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935,” *Prairie Forum*, 13, 25-42

<sup>54</sup> Regular, “On Public Display,” 7

<sup>55</sup> Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Annual Report of the Department of Interior, 1904, 1922

<sup>56</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 19 July 1939, *Medicine Hat News*, 24 July 1935, *Edmonton Journal*, 16 August 1928

<sup>57</sup> It is acknowledged openly today that reserve society is split into factions of traditionalists and progressives. It is implied that a similar split also existed among the reserve population in the decades discussed in this thesis. Obviously the reserve population was not homogeneous in terms of its ideology.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 191-192, and Barron, “The Indian Pass System,” 25-42

<sup>59</sup> GAI, Luxton Papers, file 139, May 7, 1935

<sup>60</sup> Keith Regular, "Red Backs and White Burdens," (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1985), 181

<sup>61</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, *Symbol and Conquest* (London, 1976), 45-46

<sup>62</sup> Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers* (Cambridge, 1981), 11

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid* 11

<sup>64</sup> Victor Turner, *Dramas Fields and Metaphors* (London, 1974), 24

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>66</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1986), 81

<sup>67</sup> Diamond Jenness predicted the extinction of Canada's Indians in his book, *Indians of Canada*, National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 65, Anthropological Series No. 15, (Ottawa, 1932), 259, 261. At the time of his prediction, however, many bands still had sizeable populations that were not in decline and many of the government policies regarding Indians, such as the pass system, indicate that there was a general confusion as to what to do with this still substantial Indian population.

<sup>68</sup> See Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons for Misrule," chapter four in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), as well as Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (Toronto, 1982), 3. Davis questions the "safety valve" idea regarding public celebrations, which Bailey assumes. According to Bailey, public celebrations were a form of control for public frustration. At public festivals, local anger could be vented when all rules and social roles were temporarily suspended in the chaos of the events. The result was that for the rest of the year community life would be more harmonious. Davis, on the other hand, questions this interpretation and suggests that public festivals had a more complex role, functioning to give youth a position in society, to maintain social order, and to provide a forum for political criticism within a community. (97, 103).

<sup>69</sup> Grimes, *Symbol and Conquest*, 45-46

<sup>70</sup> Mary Ryan, "The American Parade," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1989), 152; Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975) 511-518. Howe discusses the turn of the century concern with culture and reconciling splits in culture that occurred as a result of a new "mass" social order at the turn of the century. The negotiation and definition of social change is an ongoing process in society. The Indian Days and the audience response are yet an

historical example.

<sup>71</sup> For perspectives on the Indian Days' history after the time period of this paper, see Patricia Parker, *The Feather and the Drum: The History of Banff Indian days, 1889-1978* (Calgary, 1990).