

CANADA'S FIRST PEOPLE

Let's pretend we are looking at Canada's first people, as they lived before the coming of the white man; and so, there are no English or French names on lakes or rivers. There are no Indian names either, since there was no written language, although there were many languages spoken.

Some tribes made picture stories or histories on skins, but these did not last very long, and would be very hard for us to interpret correctly.

Ways of living varied greatly, according to the climate and the conditions where they lived, but each tribe found ways to provide food, clothing and shelter, making very clever use of the materials nature provided. They often faced great danger every day, and so have great admiration for courage and strength in others.

Some suffered great hardships and hunger at

times, but what they had was always shared. They had great respect for the animals, fish and birds that provided food, and so never killed wastefully.

The people lived in villages although the homes are shown singly for lack of space. They travelled in groups too, for protection and co-operation in hunting and fishing, and were fond of community celebrations and festivals.

Children were very carefree in some ways, with no schools or books, but they worked hard helping their parents at a very early age. They learned endurance and patience, because life was often very hard. They also had happy times with games, story telling and contests.

The Eskimo, whose lives were probably the most difficult of all, have a great sense of humour and like to tell stories and sing.



A WESTERN ESKIMO



A CARIBOU ESKIMO



A COPPER ESKIMO WOMAN



MICMAC



HURON



ONONDAGA



WOODLAND CREE

The people here grew corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers, so did not depend so much on hunting and fishing. Their homes were of a more permanent type, and the people were better organized than the wandering tribes.

Instead of developing great artistic skills as the west coast people did, these people were more advanced in organization and formed a league to keep peace among the tribes.

MANY TRIBAL NAMES ARE THOSE GIVEN BY WHITE MEN. IT IS SORRY THAT WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT SOME TRIBES, AND THAT SOME NO LONGER EXIST. SOME ARE NOW IN OTHER LOCATIONS THAN THOSE SHOWN HERE.

Bagatway, or la crosse, was a very rough game, played by hundreds of men in the same game. Each man used two sticks, and the game sometimes lasted all day.

Children's games often developed skills in hunting, fishing and fighting.

Mothers found various ways to keep their babies warm and safe from harm, while they worked at their many tasks. Cradles of wood, bark or skins were made soft and warm by packing them with mosses, lichen, shredded bark or the fluffy fibres from bull-rushes. Older sisters often helped in looking after the younger children.

Eskimo games that we would call "pick up sticks" and "cat's cradle"



KOOTENAY CHIEF



BLOOD



BLACKFOOT CHIEF



CHIPLEWYAN



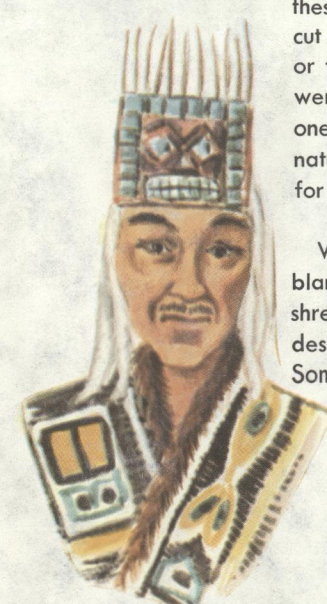
A NORTHERN WOODS HUNTER



HAIDA

Where fish were plentiful all year round and the climate mild, the people had more time to develop greater artistic skills in carving, weaving and in building more elaborate homes than anywhere in Canada. Just imagine how difficult this would be without metal axes, hammers or nails. They made tools from hard stone, and were able to get some copper from northern tribes.

Nootka Indians harpooned whales. This required great skill and courage, because the whale could easily upset or split the small wooden boats.



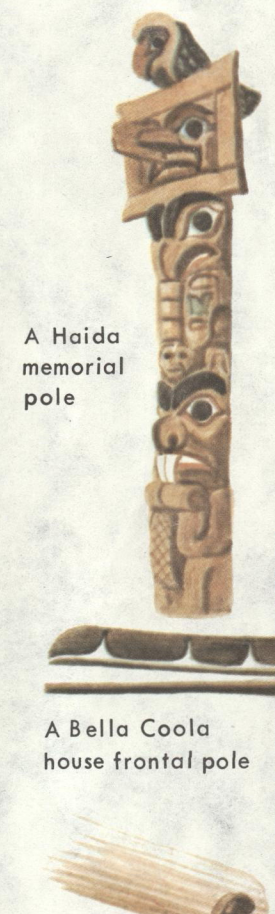
TSIMSHIAN ("Chilkat" blanket)



KWAKIUTL



NOOTKA



A Haida memorial pole



Kwakiutl house post to support ceiling beam



DUGOUT CANOES

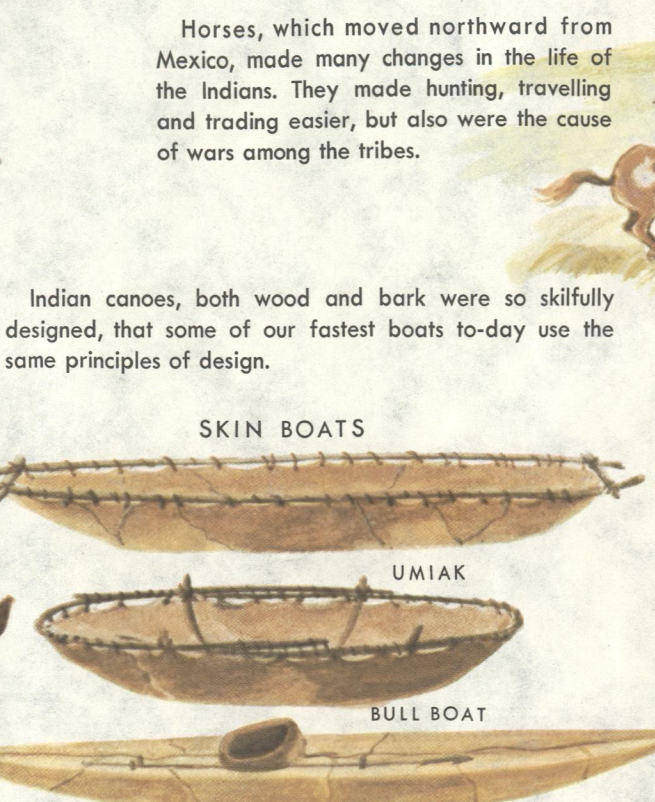
NORTHERN STYLES

KWAKIUTL WAR CANOE WITH SHIELD-LIKE BOW

NOOTKA

HAIDA

The very large cedar trees on the west coast were used for dugout canoes of various sizes and shapes, some large enough for fifty or more people. The Haida sometimes carved and painted designs on both paddles and canoes.



SKIN BOATS

UMIAK

BULL BOAT

KAYAK

Eastern Eskimo used seal skins for light swift kayaks or hunting canoes, and also for the umiak or "woman's boat" which was used for transporting goods. The prairie people used the "bull boat" mostly for taking meat and other goods across streams. It was clumsy and hard to steer, made from heavy moose or buffalo hide.

Northwestern bark chair cradle

West coast cradles



Many tribes made very light swift birch bark canoes. In areas where the birch trees were not large enough, other barks such as spruce, pine and elm were used. Sections were sewn together with spruce roots, made water-tight with spruce gum, and strengthened with white cedar and ash.



BIRCH BARK CANOES

DOGRIB

ALGONKIN

CHIPLEWYAN

INTERIOR SALISH RIVER CANOE

Interior Salish River Canoe

Skin cradles

A basket cradle

Prairie People dried buffalo meat, pounded it and mixed it with wild berries and fat to make pemican, which would keep for a long long time, in skin pouches or bags.

The men harvested the wild rice in a canoe and the women dried it, pounded it to take off the husks and stored it in birch bark baskets.

Some birch bark canoes were very large, over thirty feet in length and over six feet wide at the centre.

They also made birch bark pails for maple syrup, and pots for cooking.



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