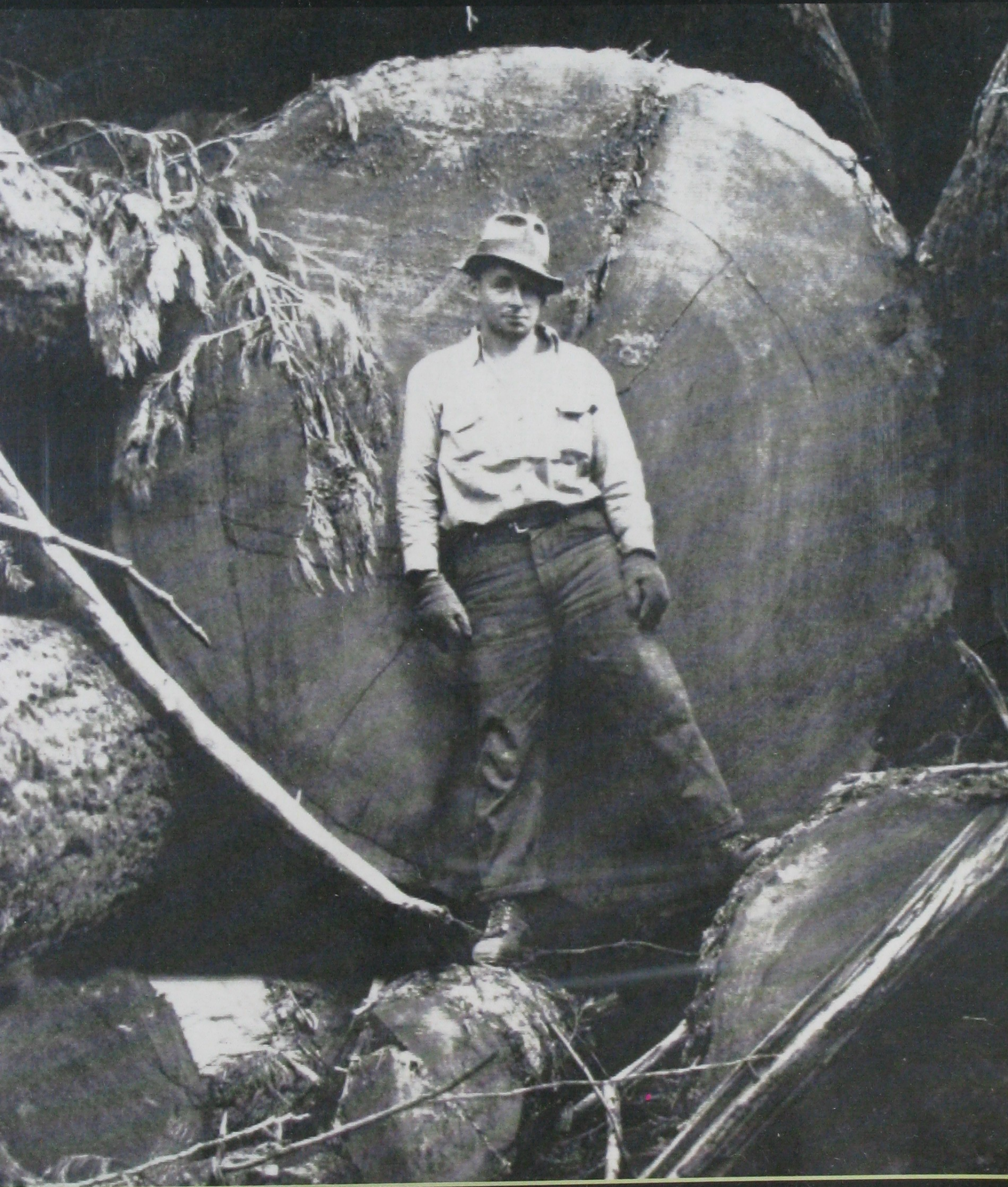


'Call Me Hank'



A Stó:lō Man's Reflections on
Logging, Living, and Growing Old

BY HENRY PENNIER

Edited by Keith Thor Carlson and Kristina Fagan

'CALL ME HANK':
A STÓ:LŌ MAN'S REFLECTIONS ON
LOGGING, LIVING, AND GROWING OLD

Henry Pennier

Edited by Keith Thor Carlson and Kristina Fagan

'My name is Henry George Pennier and if you want to be a friend of mine please you will call me Hank.' So begins *Call Me Hank*, the autobiography of Hank Pennier (1904–1991): logger, storyteller, and self-described 'half breed.' In this work, Pennier offers thoughtful reflections on growing up as a non-status Aboriginal person on or near a Stó:lō reserve, searching for work of all kinds during hard times as a young man, and working as a logger through the depression of the 1930s up to his retirement. Known only to a small local audience when it was first published in 1972, this expanded edition of Pennier's autobiography provides poignant political commentary on issues of race, labour, and life through the eyes of a retired West Coast Native logger.

Call Me Hank is an engaging and often humorous read that makes an important contribution to a host of contemporary discourses in Canada, including discussions about the nature and value of Aboriginal identity. To Hank's original manuscript, Keith Carlson and Kristina Fagan have added a scholarly introduction situating Hank's writing within historical, literary, and cultural contexts, exploring his ideas and writing style, and offering further information about his life. A map of place names mentioned by Hank, a diagram of a steam logging operation, a glossary of logging terms, and sixteen photographs provide practical and historical complements to Pennier's original lively personal narrative.

Pennier's book preceded the proliferation of Aboriginal writing that began with the publication of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* in 1973 and provides a markedly different view of Aboriginal life from other writings of the period. It also documents important aspects of Aboriginal participation in the wage-labour economy that have been overlooked by historians, and offers a unique reflection on masculinity, government policy, and industrialization.

KEITH THOR CARLSON is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan.

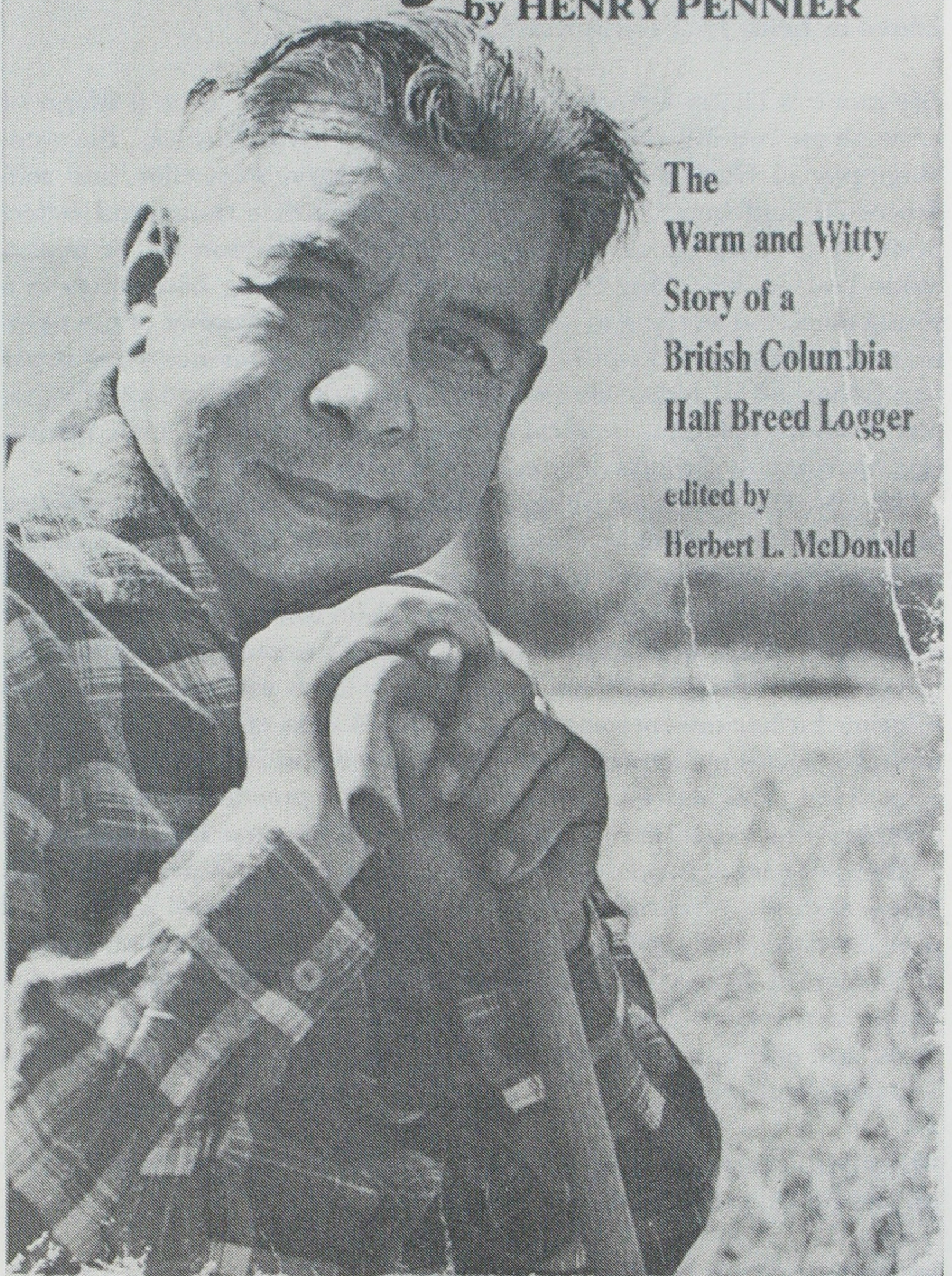
KRISTINA FAGAN is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Saskatchewan.

Chiefly Indian

by HENRY PENNIER

The
Warm and Witty
Story of a
British Columbia
Half Breed Logger

edited by
Herbert L. McDonald



HENRY PENNIER

‘Call Me Hank’:
A Stó:lō Man’s Reflections
on Logging, Living, and
Growing Old

Second Edition

EDITED BY KEITH THOR CARLSON
AND KRISTINA FAGAN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Toronto Buffalo London

© University of Toronto Press Incorporated 2006
Toronto Buffalo London
Printed in Canada

Reprinted 2009

ISBN: 978-0-8020-9426-1 (paper)

ISBN: 978-0-8020-9161-1 (cloth)



Printed on acid-free paper

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Pennier, Henry, 1904–1991

Call me Hank : a Stó:lo man's reflections on logging, living and growing old / Hank Pennier ; with a new introduction, explanatory notes, glossary, and appendices by Keith Thor Carlson and Kristina Fagan. – 2nd ed.

First published under title: *Chiefly Indian*.

ISBN: 978-0-8020-9161-1 (bound)

ISBN: 978-0-8020-9426-1 (pbk.)

1. Pennier, Henry, 1904–1991. 2. Métis – British Columbia – Biography. 3. Stalo Indians – Biography. 4. Loggers – British Columbia – Biography. I. Pennier, Henry, 1904–1991. *Chiefly Indian*. II. Carlson, Keith Thor. III. Fagan, Kristina Rose, 1973–. IV. Title.

E78.B9P4 2006

971.1004'9794350092

c2006-903830-9

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support for its publishing activities of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP).

To Hank's son Henry 'Jumbo' Pennier Jr (January 1930 – March 2006), who contributed greatly to the preparation of this second edition of his father's book, but who, sadly, passed away shortly before it was released.

Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| FOREWORD TO 2006 EDITION | ix |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | xi |
| INTRODUCTION TO 2006 EDITION | xiii |
| FOREWORD TO 1972 EDITION | xli |
| MAP OF LOWER FRASER RIVER | xliv |

| | |
|--|----|
| Prologue to 1972 Edition | 3 |
| Part 1: I Remember My Kid Days | 5 |
| Part 2: I Remember My 1920s Days | 22 |
| Part 3: I Remember My 1930s Days | 41 |
| Part 4: I Remember My 1940s and 1950s Days | 58 |
| Part 5: I Remember the Now Days | 75 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| GLOSSARY OF LOGGING TERMS | 91 |
| APPENDIX 1: HANK'S GRANDFATHER, GEORGE JOHN PERRIER | 99 |
| APPENDIX 2: A CONVERSATION WITH HANK IN HIS KITCHEN, 16 OCTOBER 1972 | 103 |
| NOTES | 109 |
| WORKS CITED | 121 |
| ILLUSTRATION CREDITS | 125 |

Illustrations follow page 50

Introduction to 2006 Edition

Henry Pennier was not the sort of person who attracted a lot of attention during the first sixty-five years of his life – especially from ‘white people.’ So, family members recall him being a little surprised when, in 1969, Wyn Roberts, a young linguist from Simon Fraser University, travelled ninety kilometres east of Vancouver on Highway 7 to interview Pennier about the Halq’eméylem language and related Stó:lō Aboriginal traditions. As a ‘half-breed’ who had spent his years negotiating an identity in the ‘no man’s land’ of Canadian racial politics, Pennier found a certain irony in being identified by an academic as a valued expert on Aboriginal traditions. In the foreword to the original 1972 edition of this volume, Roberts explains that he had very particular goals in making this trip: he wanted to test some linguistic theories that he was developing. He also hoped that he could collect some ‘old Indian stories of ... legendary, god-like figures’ (xli). But Henry Pennier had ideas of his own.

Roberts asked Pennier (who quickly made it plain that he preferred to be called Hank) to think of Halq’eméylem words and ‘Indian stories,’ and told him that he would come back in a week to record them on audiotape. When he returned the following Sunday, he found that Hank had written out his story – not a ‘legend’ but a humorous anecdote he had heard in his youth, and he had written it

in English. Over the next few months, Hank continued to write, producing a series of anecdotal reminiscences. He eventually published this collection of autobiographical writings, with editorial assistance from his friend Roberts and local Vancouver author/publisher Herb McDonald, under the title *Chiefly Indian: The Warm and Witty Story of a British Columbia Half Breed Logger*. That work is reproduced here under the new title 'Call Me Hank': *A Stó:lō Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old*. Other than the new title, Hank's writing appears here almost exactly as it did in the 1972 edition. His original manuscript has been lost, and there are no records of the changes MacDonald made to the text when he 'assembled and smoothed lightly the stories into a chronological whole' (xliv), so the 1972 edition is the only available version. We have standardized the spelling, with the exception of any spelling that reflects a distinctive pronunciation (i.e., 'shure,' 'likkered,' 'berthing'). We have also added apostrophes where they were occasionally missing and corrected a few errors that were obviously typographical. The small errors and idiosyncrasies in the 1972 edition may have been introduced by Hank, Roberts, or the printer, and we felt that Hank would have wanted his book to appear in the most polished form possible. Similar concerns motivated our title change. We do not know who conceived the original title, and while we like the play on the word 'Chiefly' in as much as it refers to Hank's having been 'principally' or 'primarily' Aboriginal, the second meaning, in our opinion, was not in keeping with the unassuming way Hank Pennier thought of himself and presented himself. In addition to these changes and the composition of this introductory essay, we have added explanatory endnotes, a glossary of logging terms, and a number of photos and illustrations to help readers become more fully engaged in Hank's world. And finally, we have appended a brief biographical sketch of Hank's grandfather George Perrier, and a transcript of a 1972

interview in which Hank proudly discusses his recently printed book while providing his listeners with somewhat different renditions of a few of the stories contained in that volume.

Like the young Professor Roberts, many non-Aboriginal people think that they know, even before they have listened, what Aboriginal people will say. They assume that there is an 'Aboriginal perspective.' Hank Pennier's autobiography, however, reminds us that there is no single or simple Aboriginal voice. Wading fearlessly into issues of race, culture, identity, masculinity, politics, labour, technology, and aging, Hank writes from his own unique perspective and experience. Being part of the Stó:lō community while working in the white-dominated logging industry, Hank had the chance to look at the world from many angles. When, in 1959, four decades of cumulative workplace injuries forced him to exit the logging industry prematurely, time that had formerly been occupied with labour became filled with bitter-sweet reminiscences, humorous reflections, and contemplation. What Hank Pennier chose to say in his autobiography does not fit neatly into any school of thought and will surprise, trouble, and delight people of all political persuasions.

Hank's initial decision not to write what Roberts had asked of him tells us a great deal about this strong-willed man. Of course, more than thirty years after the fact, and fifteen years since his death on 8 October 1991, we cannot know for certain why Hank initially decided not to relate for Roberts the kind of Aboriginal legends for which the aspiring young academic was hoping. It is not that he was incapable of fulfilling the request. Hank was fluent in Halq'eméylem; indeed, he had devised his own practical orthography so he could write it with English letters and not lose the Aboriginal pronunciation. Furthermore, contemporary Stó:lō elders remember Hank Pennier as having been a cultural expert. Perhaps, when Roberts first approached him, Hank felt a reluctance to pass certain sacred

stories to a broader audience through someone he had only just met: once out of his control, they might be misunderstood or misused. Perhaps despite his considerable reputation, initially he felt unqualified to communicate such stories and to speak as an authority with a scholar on certain aspects of tradition. Humility and caution are highly valued traits among the Stó:lō. Showing such humility, early in part 1 Hank observes that if he had been 'smarter' he would have 'listened a lot harder and learned a lot more' from his stepfather's father, Billy Swallowsea, who regularly shared traditional stories with him as he was growing up (7). Ultimately Hank did decide to include some traditional stories in the published version of his writings, but he never depicts himself as a cultural expert.

There is no doubt that Hank was well-versed in Stó:lō traditions, but in his writings he refused to be identified only as a voice of tradition. Just as Hank had asserted his right to be called by the name he chose, he took control of which stories he would tell and how they would be presented to the world. In doing so, he challenged popular stereotypes of 'Indians' and 'half-breeds' as well as federal categorizations of Aboriginal people. And he shaped a very complex self-portrait. Over the course of his recollections, Hank identifies himself in a variety of ways – as a 'half breed' (5), an 'Indian' (52), and 'just good old Hank' (86) – and his judgments of these labels also vary. For Hank Pennier, as for all of us, identity operated differently in different situations and in different relationships.

At the beginning of his story, Hank identifies himself as 'what the white man calls a half breed, and why not since I have been one all my life' (5). But being a half-breed did not mean that one of Hank's parents was Indian and the other white, nor was it a reference to living within what in the Canadian prairies would have been called a Metis community. In British Columbia, 'half-breed' was a pejorative title attached to anyone of Native ancestry who did not have Indian status but who looked like and lived like an

Aboriginal person. It was a negative designation that reflected the racial and gender prejudices of mainstream Canadian society.

Hank admits that he knew very little about the man who had introduced the Pennier name into the Stó:lō community – not even his first name. He writes that he remembers having been told that his paternal grandfather came to the Fraser Valley from Quebec and there met and married Hank's grandmother and sired his father. Hank also knew that his grandfather had been murdered while on a trip back east when his son (Hank's father) was only a young child. Archival research reveals that Hank's grandfather's name was actually George John Perrier, a sailor with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) who went on to play a brief, if rather controversial, role in British Columbia's early colonial history during the 1858 Fraser River gold rush (see appendix 1).

Subsequent to his colourful government service, George Perrier built and ran the Colonial Hotel at Yale. Then, after the enthusiasm for mining waned, he homesteaded on the fertile lands near the junction of the Harrison and Chehalis Rivers in the central Fraser Valley (see map). It is there, presumably, that he met and married Suzanne Chiltlat, of the adjacent Stó:lō settlement of Chehalis.¹ Their son George Jr was born at Chehalis in 1869. After George senior's death (ca. 1875), Suzanne and her son returned to her Stó:lō community on the Harrison River. There being no equivalent for the English 'r' sound in the Stó:lō people's Halq'eméylem language, the young George Perrier II came to be known officially as George Pennier.² In 1889 'Pennier' married Alice Davis (whose father, William Davis, was an American citizen who had been born, and later returned and died, in Wales). Alice Davis's mother, Daelali Rosalie Siamelouet, was from a high-status Stó:lō family on the Lakahaman reserve near Mission City. Together George and Alice had eight children. Henry 'Hank' George Pennier, the youngest, was born in February 1904,

three months after the untimely death of his father, George. The widow Alice and her four surviving children then relocated to the Indian reserve known as Union Bar, near Hope, where she had been born thirty-five years earlier. There she became acquainted with Chief August Billy, a widower with eight children of his own, and in 1910 the two were married in the local Catholic church. August Billy also came from a prominent Stó:lō family. His father, Billy Swallsea (who spent a great deal of time teaching his young step-grandson Hank Pennier about Stó:lō culture and traditions), carried the hereditary name of the original ancestor of the lower Fraser Canyon Ts'ó:kw'em tribe.³ The name Swallsea was also associated with the origin of the sacred Sxwó:yxwey mask.⁴ When Hank turned twenty he married Margaret Leon from Chehalis, and together they had six children.⁵

In Hank's words, he and Margaret and all their children were 'half breeds. Not white men and not Indian yet we look Indian and every body but Indians takes us for Indian. It's been a complicated world ... And the government hasn't helped any' (6). Here he points out the problems of public perception and government categorization that made it a 'complicated world' for him and his family. His identity as a half-breed was largely imposed upon him by non-Native society. Though Hank Pennier had more Aboriginal than European blood flowing through his veins, and despite the fact that he had been raised by Stó:lō people in a Stó:lō environment where rights, status, and names were traditionally transmitted bilaterally (that is, through both the mother's and the father's line), he was non-Native as far as the Canadian government was concerned. This categorization was based in the sexism of Canadian Indian policy as it applied to Aboriginal identity. Hank's grandmother Suzanne lost her Indian status when she married the Québécois George Perrier. Their son George, therefore, never had Indian status, and so neither did Hank (although he was technically entitled to it after being

adopted by Chief Billy). Hank's wife Margaret also lost her status upon marrying Hank, and so all of Hank's descendants were ineligible for status until the government amended the Indian Act with Bill C-31 in 1985. As a result, although he sometimes 'felt all Indian' (21), Hank was not legally permitted to live on an Indian reserve and had 'no [Indian] agency to look after [him]' (86).

This position had its advantages and disadvantages. Hank Pennier was technically a Canadian citizen, with all the rights and privileges that this implied. He could legally vote in federal and provincial elections, own property, and purchase and consume liquor while his status Indian friends and relatives could not. And yet the colour of his skin prevented him from enjoying many of the privileges that Canadian citizenship supposedly conferred. Being a half-breed in the first half of the twentieth century meant confronting disadvantage without institutional or community support. 'Outside of my work,' he writes, 'I could not join the white society, socially' (87). With bitter humour he explains that he was not welcome at white people's parties, but if he was caught at a party where status Indians were drinking, he risked being arrested because people assumed he, too, was a status Indian – and under Canadian law various prohibitions restricted Native people's (and occasionally newcomers') ability to legally purchase, sell, or consume alcohol. On one occasion Hank was fined \$300 for having giving a ride to Native friends who had been drinking, and on another he was arrested and charged an additional \$300 for 'supplying' – that is to say, the police arrived at his house and found that he had given a bottle of beer to a visiting Aboriginal friend. Allegedly to recoup the money the legal system had cost him, Hank tried his hand at bootlegging for a while, but was caught and had to pay yet another \$300 fine. Indeed, such was the hypocrisy of Canadian law and the zealousness of Canadian police that Hank claims he was even charged with what he terms 'kniving,' simply for having an Aboriginal person in his car as

well as a sealed bottle of whisky. The crime? As Hank saw it, 'the intention of giving [an Indian] a drink sooner or later' (87).

Despite having been labelled a half-breed by white society, Hank appears to have been considered Stó:lō by his Aboriginal friends and family. His stepfather and step-grandfather were particularly traditional men (a point that Hank is careful to note more than once), and it was through them and his mother that Hank acquired much of his cultural knowledge. More than a decade after the publication of *Chiefly Indian*, as Hank neared the end of his life, he was widely acknowledged as a respected member of the Coqualeetza Elders group – a community of Stó:lō elders who, to this day, meet weekly at the site of the old Coqualeetza Residential School and Indian Tuberculosis Hospital in Chilliwack, BC, to share their cultural traditions and promote the Halq'eméylem language.⁶ Moreover, Hank carried the hereditary names of Cinda and Swegh-tin. To the end, Hank valued being Aboriginal and preserving Aboriginal culture, but he never thought highly of being 'Indian' as defined by the Indian Act.

Hank was also aware that, despite the Indian Act label, he was subject to the same stereotypes as his friends with status. Throughout his writing, he plays with and against the expectations of his largely non-Aboriginal audience. At one point, for example, after telling the story of a flood that cut off the electricity to his home, Hank acknowledges that his audience might have been surprised to learn that an Aboriginal family like his would find it difficult to get by without electrical appliances: 'I suppose you think that is funny since I am Indian sort of' (52). Here, as in other places, Hank anticipates that his audience's impressions of him would likely be shaped by stereotypes. Thus, perhaps in an attempt to educate his audience, he often comments on issues of racism and stereotyping that he faced at work (50) and in the world at large: 'I like good shootup detective movies and western movies the best but in the westerns

with all those Indians which always get the worst of things and always get shot up, I can't put any faith. It's all pretty phoney because Indians were a lot smarter than that and still are for that matter' (75-6).

The stereotype that seems to bother Hank most was the way that Indians had been typecast as 'lazy,' and he clearly wants to prove to his audience that he does not fit that mould. Deflecting stereotypes associated with 'lazy Indians' became particularly important for Hank after work-related injuries compelled him to leave the workforce prematurely in 1959 and placed him in the position of depending on welfare:

I see all this talk on TV the past couple of years about all the Indians on welfare and I think by golly, that's me they are talking about too. Think Hank I say to myself. Maybe you earned the right better than some others I say, and if it wasn't for all those accidents you had could be you would still be working and pulling your weight ... It was thoughts like this that drove me near crazy the first five or six years after I [stopped working]. (76)

It was not that he did not want to be Native, or to be associated with Native society; he just did not want to be associated with what non-Native society so often – and pejoratively – associated with 'Indianness': 'Way back in the woods among the trees doing a man's work, I wasn't a half breed, I was just good old Hank' (86).

Pondering the issues of racism and governmental injustices that he had experienced, as well as the suffering he anticipated for his young grandchildren and foster children, Hank Pennier wonders in his autobiography what pragmatic solutions there might be. He was writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just as Pierre Trudeau's government was proposing to eliminate Indian status, and when British Columbia Aboriginal people had no meaningful role in the management of the resources of their territory.

From his vantage point, he could not have foreseen such important judicial decisions as the *Sparrow*, *Guerin*, and *Delgamuukw* cases, which gave legal status and protection to a variety of Aboriginal rights, or the related political developments that led to the establishment of the BC treaty process – developments that significantly strengthened the hand of indigenous people vis à vis mainstream Canadian society. Given the social context of the times, it is not surprising that Hank determines that the best solution is to eliminate issues of official status altogether. In the conclusion to this volume he asserts, with some frustration, ‘Why shouldn’t there be just people now? No Indians. No Eskimos. No whites. Just people. Maybe some day it will be like that but I know I won’t be around then. Too bad because there won’t be any half breeds either and that will be a damn good thing’ (86).

Such sentiments appear to contradict the opposition Aboriginal leaders across Canada mounted against Trudeau’s 1969 proposal to integrate Aboriginal people into the Canadian body politic as citizens like any other ethnic group. Indeed, a decade after the publication of *Chiefly Indian*, and still a decade before the creation of the BC Treaty Commission, Hank counselled his non-status relatives not to take advantage of the 1985 amendments to the Indian Act (known as Bill C-31) that entitled them to regain Indian status – advice they largely rejected. But to categorize Hank Pennier as a supporter of Trudeau’s vision, or as an opponent of indigenous rights, would be to miss the nuance of his personal philosophy and the depth of his commitment to preserving Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Hank both despised and came to value his identification as a half-breed. It was a designation, Hank asserted, that presented a challenge greater than that faced by either status Indians or non-Native Canadian citizens. Caught in the middle, Hank took the cards fate had dealt him and turned

what was ostensibly a 'nothing hand' into a 'full house.' As a half-breed, he determined that he needed to create opportunities out of deficits. His only avenue for accomplishing this was through hard work, determination, and a driving ambition to show that he was more, and better, than people would at first give him credit for. If society regarded a half-breed as inferior to both a full-status Indian and a non-Native white, Hank demonstrated that the term could also refer to someone who was more than the sum of either of his ethnic identities: 'What I think the real trouble today is nobody has any ambition anymore to be a better work man than the next guy or to turn out a first class piece of work. I guess those days are over and its just too damn bad I think. I also think they should a been born half breeds then they would know how to work hard to make their way and stay ahead and be better than another guy' (54).

As this passage shows, it was through the dignity of labour that Hank found a way to be respected in this 'complicated world.' Through hard physical labour in the logging industry, Hank achieved status within mainstream society's definition of masculinity, a society that devalued Aboriginal people and made no space for people of mixed ancestry. Hard work enabled him to feel as good as, or better than, other men. It was after a hard day's work, he says, that 'a man can feel like he's standing ten feet tall' (61). While the 1930s is generally considered to have been a sad and disempowering time for Canadians, and especially for indigenous people, for Hank Pennier the Great Depression was a remarkable decade. It was during the thirties that his personal philosophy stressing the value of hard work and ambition was solidified and validated, for it was then, in the midst of international economic chaos, that the social and racial orders were temporarily inverted. The 1929 stock market crash created an extremely tight and competitive job market. Coastal logging companies, Hank Pennier's

principal employers, were compelled to streamline. Hard workers, therefore, were valued, and by this standard Hank had clearly demonstrated his worth.

Within months of the 1929 Black Monday crash, when many men were suddenly struggling with unemployment, Hank Pennier found himself solicited to hire his own crew of similarly minded and skilled individuals, regardless of the men's race. As he proudly notes, throughout the Depression he was never without work, and indeed his income and status rose significantly. Hank traded in the currency of masculine hard work to balance the weight of racial prejudice. His experiences, however, should not necessarily be regarded as typical. Many Aboriginal people found themselves disadvantaged throughout the 1930s, and efforts to start or sustain band-based Native logging companies faced special challenges. Racism became even more pronounced in many labour fields.⁷ Nonetheless, as a result of the general economic downturn, employment advantages that had previously flowed exclusively to other people because of their skin colour and education were occasionally neutralized, and Hank was quick to seize the chance. On one occasion, he even found himself supervising two otherwise unemployable white university professors as they performed the mundane task of checking railcar wheels for cracks (49). Logging, as it was practised prior to the Second World War, was no place for soft intellectuals. It was, in Hank's words, 'man's work and risky. This last reason is the best one I think because it means an Indian can feel as good as the next guy and from what we see of a lot of whites these days, maybe even better than the next guy. So with me as a half breed which is neither one or the other, that reason is I guess the best of all' (58).

Logging was also work that Hank regarded as consistent with his Stó:lō traditions. As is common among indigenous people, the Stó:lō consider humans to be a part of nature, not above it, as was long a tenet of Western Christian philosophy.⁸ In this world view, people are entitled to use and

benefit from plants and animals, but such use is informed by a desire to create and sustain balance and harmony. Indeed, power and status come from succeeding in balanced situations. Victory that is predetermined by a technology that creates an unfair advantage for humans over plants or animals (or even other human adversaries) is often regarded by the Stó:lō as hollow and vapid. For that reason, some Stó:lō men engaged in activities that outsiders regarded as excessively difficult, dangerous, and even foolhardy. Rather than using spears, deadfall traps, or rifles to hunt grizzly bears, for example, certain Stó:lō men chose as their weapon only a 24 cm sharpened bone. Such hunters approached the bears directly and waited for the attack. They knew that at close quarters, as bears lunge forward, the great beasts inevitably open their mouths. It was at this point, with the bear descending upon him, that the Stó:lō hunter thrust the sharpened bone into the bear's mouth, causing the point to pierce the roof of the mouth and puncture the brain, killing the animal almost instantly. There were easier and safer ways to dispose of a grizzly, but none that brought such acclaim or status, for in killing the bear when the odds were at least as favourable for the grizzly as the hunter, a man demonstrated much more about his character than an easy victory with a rifle or a deadfall ever could. What is more, he acquired potent spirit power from his defeated adversary.⁹

While Hank discusses grizzly hunting only twice in his prose, both anecdotes are significant. In one, Hank describes hunting bear with a rifle, but the thrill of the kill was profound: 'I sure felt all Indian that day,' he tells us (21). The bear kill provided him with a sense of racial balance that too often was lacking in his life as constructed by outsiders. The second bear anecdote, discussed later in this introduction, also depicts bear hunting as a source of personal fulfillment and balance (see xxvii–xxviii). Similarly, his discussion of his efforts to achieve victory through balanced and harmonious competition with giant Douglas firs

are clearly informed by the same epistemological assumptions. Steam logging and handsaws made Hank feel 'big' in a world of giant trees. They empowered him, but not to the point of overpowering nature. He respected the towering firs because he knew that they had a fair chance against him: 'In my time it took two men at each end of a ten foot crosscut saw bucking away for most of a day before old Mr. Fir would give up the ghost. We always knew who was going to win but at least we gave him the chance of putting up a fight for it. And some times in spite he would flip his butt as he died and take a man with him' (60). Men took trees, and sometimes trees took men. There was balance in Hank's world and occupation.

Born in the early years of the twentieth century, Hank witnessed and reluctantly participated in the rapid industrialization of the West Coast logging industry. The new technology that entered the industry after the Second World War ushered in changes that Hank saw as disrupting the sensitive balance between loggers and trees: 'I bet that the men who sit in those nice warm glassed-in cabs and move all those pedals and levers and throttles need engineers papers from some university to run them ... Where's the chance for a guy to get in there into the jungle with just his muscle and his brains and slug it out with a tough opponent?' (59). Hank explains that in his day 'things were different.' 'You take a virgin Douglas Fir tree that has spent maybe two hundred, three hundred years to grow straight and maybe two hundred feet high and that is about eight feet through at the butt. In my thinking which I know is old fashioned I think there is some thing dirty about a man now who is able to cut it crashing down in less than half a hour all by himself using a six foot gasoline chain saw. What chance does the poor tree have?' (59-60).

Hank Pennier was not alone, of course, in regarding the trees of the forest as capable and worthy opponents. Many of his 'old-timer' non-Native friends undoubtedly anthropomorphised trees and occasionally equipment in much

the same way. What set Hank apart was his indigenous belief that all things – even manufactured inanimate objects – are genuinely sentient. In the Stó:lō world view, life force (*shxweli*) inhabits all things, including trees and rocks, and residual spirit power from humans and their spirit helpers inform and help animate objects such as dip nets, arrows, and spears. With the arrival of European newcomers this belief was extended to include introduced objects as well. That is to say, new things were incorporated into the Stó:lō world view at least as much as, if not more than, the Stó:lō world view was altered by new things. A commonly shared story within contemporary Stó:lō communities tells of a spirit dancer from Sumas whose spirit helper came from a steam locomotive. Perhaps it is within this vein that Hank's wonderful account of Chief Johnny, who fell asleep with his feet too close to a woodstove and awoke to find the soles of his boots scorched, is best appreciated: 'He bawled out the stove for five minutes and after that the old stove never did keep him quite so warm again' (53). That anecdote, told to Hank when he was just a child, reinforced his world view about the spirit energy in all things. 'I always remember that story when Temptation makes me want to swear at some piece of equipment that don't do what its supposed to do. Poor innocent stove' (53).

Throughout his autobiography, Hank Pennier seeks to challenge limitations in our perceptions, whether of trees, of Aboriginal people, or of himself. Indeed, this challenge was at the centre of the very first story he chose to write for Wyn Roberts. That first story described a 'great Indian bear hunter' who, at the age of ninety-eight, wanted to hunt a grizzly one last time. The hunter's two grandsons carried him on a stretcher back into the hills but, as soon as a bear appeared, the terrified boys dropped the stretcher and ran away. They arrived home crying about their grandfather's certain death. And, Hank concludes, 'the mother says to the boys stop crying you two, your grandpa got home a half

hour ago. Boy he sure must have been a tough old guy' (44).

At the time that he wrote this story, Hank was sixty-five years old and, as a result of injuries sustained while logging, scarcely able to walk. His immobility clearly bothered him; he mused about needing to depend on welfare and worker's compensation: 'How do I feel about that? Me who was always independent and worked hard as I could for what I earned? And was never without work for 39 years. Not very good but what else can I do about it now?' (76). It was clearly not random selection that led Hank to write the story of an old man who longs for the work that once gave his life a sense of value. The story of the old bear hunter who turns out to be faster than his grandsons clearly appealed enormously to Hank. But more than that, the story tells of an old man whose abilities go far beyond what the young expect of him. Thus, the story of the great bear hunter may have been a message to the young linguist, Wyn Roberts, and to other future readers, that Hank Pennier was capable of more than they might at first assume. Like the classic West Coast Aboriginal 'Trickster' figure, Hank liked to use humour to show that things were not always as they seemed, especially when it came to Native–newcomer relations – a theme M. Holden subsequently documented as typical of Coast Salish oral narratives.¹⁰ Though Hank's story of the great bear hunter now appears in the middle of the book, this first story established the themes of individual choice and unexpected ability in the face of limited expectations that run throughout the many stories and recollections that Hank went on to write.

The 'great bear hunter' anecdote reminds us of how carefully Hank selected the stories that he would pen. It is common, in reading Aboriginal autobiographies, for critics to accept the work as a transparent recording of the teller's 'truth.' We can see a degree of this critical response in the young Wyn Roberts's emphasis on the 'honesty and lack of

pretension' (xliii) in Hank's writing: 'Any way you look at it,' Roberts concludes, 'this book *is* Henry Pennier' (xliv). The appeal of such an approach to interpreting Aboriginal autobiography is obvious. The voice in Hank's writing – direct, casual, conversational – gives the impression that we can see directly into his life. But this is an illusion: this book *is not* Henry Pennier but, rather, it is something that he created, shaping and selecting events, emphasizing or repeating some things and leaving out others, carefully creating a portrait of himself for a principally non-Aboriginal audience. Hank Pennier was not only a logger, he was also a writer.

As a writer, Hank's primary form was the anecdote. A brief, often humorous, story, the anecdote is considered a traditionally oral genre. Hank likely refined and ultimately perfected the form while sitting with his fellow workers in camp after a day of logging. It is in such situations that one memory brings up another and the stories flow. The transcript of an interview with Hank Pennier that appears at the end of this edition reveals Hank as a master teller of anecdotes – setting the stage, building the tension, and then carefully timing the unexpected punchline. Within the book, Hank's narrative may appear to move from one such anecdote to another in a kind of free association. However, his selection of stories is not as random as it might first seem. He carefully chose and shaped them to create a particular impression. In the appended interview, for instance, he explains that he changed the setting of his story about giving the priest salt for his tea. While he tells his interviewers that the incident happened at his mother's house in Union Bar, in the book it takes place at residential school. Perhaps he felt that, within the context of the book, the story would fit well into a series of humorous stories about priests and church. He unapologetically explains that this creative revising of the past is a necessary part of writing: 'You know it's little different in my book, you know, you gotta change.'¹¹ Indeed, the style of this oral

story is also significantly different from the version that appears in his book. Talking to his Stó:lō friends and relatives during the group interview, he salted the story with swear words as well as with references to local people and places that are lost on the outside reader. He clearly recognized that such a casual and familiar style might not be appropriate within his book. He never does explicitly explain why he changed the story, but in Stó:lō society aspects of personal reminiscences are occasionally altered for different audiences to disengage social tension or to enhance humour.¹² To those at the group interview, this was a story about Father Chirouse, a specific man in a specific place. For the primarily white audience of Hank's book, this was a story about a non-specific priest, and perhaps the details of place are less important than the theme of Hank's playfully challenging relationship to authority figures. Hank also freely admits that some stories have been left out altogether because they would not create the desired effect. In the final chapter he reflects openly about this exclusion, contemplating his own motivations for what he included and what he omitted in the preceding chapters: 'I think of being a altar boy, and my grandfather's stories, and the days in the woods with the big trees, and some of the girls that I used to know but I never told you about those did I? because I am a gentleman' (77). 'So I guess that's my story up to now or as much as I can remember of it and if I wanted to tell you the truth, as much as I want my wife to know about me. A man has to have some secrets' (88-9).

In fact, one of Hank's biggest 'secrets' in his book seems to be his relationships with his wife Margaret and their children. They are scarcely mentioned. His wedding is summed up briefly: 'When I was 20, I signed the lifelong contract for better or for worse. Which meant I really had to work for the rest of my life' (30). The lack of details and his wry tone when he mentions his wife, however, certainly do not mean that Hank's family was not important

to him. For one, his identity as father and husband may not have fit into the image of masculinity and independence that he created for his readers. Another possibility is that not writing about his family members was, in fact, a sign of respect for them. While telling his own story, Hank pointedly excludes the personal stories of others, allowing them to maintain their privacy. This sense of privacy is seen in many Aboriginal autobiographies. For instance, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, while revealing deeply personal incidents from her life, such as her struggles with prostitution and drug addiction, scarcely mentions her children. Similarly, while Cherokee writer Thomas King spoke revealingly about himself during his Massey lecture series, he did not mention his wife or children, and he could not bring himself to tell the story of his friends John and Amy Cardinal and their family problems. Though he does write about these friends in the book based on the lectures, he seems disturbed by his decision, explaining, 'The story about John and Amy Cardinal is not a story I want to tell. It is, quite probably, a story that I should not tell. It is certainly not a story that I would want anyone to hear.' The only reason King can bring himself to write about them is, he says, because this story is exclusively written rather than spoken out loud in a lecture theatre and it is therefore a 'private story'; oral stories, on the other hand, he says, are 'public stories.'¹³ Indeed, Aboriginal oral traditions are often accompanied by beliefs that saying the wrong things can have serious consequences. Stó:lō traditions, for instance, warn that mistelling a story in the presence of a pregnant woman may cause her baby to be born with missing or extra limbs. Perhaps Hank Penner, raised in this tradition of oral and public stories, was particularly careful in whom he spoke about and how he spoke about them.

Hank's humorous spirit may also have been learned in his Stó:lō community. Salish people have a strong tradition of witty, satirical, and ironic stories that challenge author-

ity, whether that be the authority of 'the whiteman,' or of traditional Salish culture.¹⁴ Many of Hank's stories were in this line. He clearly enjoyed relating anecdotes that displayed cleverness and strength in the face of low public expectations – especially if they included humorous twists reminiscent of the classic Native Trickster stories. Side by side in his repertoire are accounts of a Stó:lō boy whose entire family was massacred by Lekwiltok raiders from the coast near Campbell River but who nonetheless grew up to be a powerful Indian doctor, and the story of 'Ollie the logger' who registered in a hotel as Dr Ollie and ended up being called upon to deliver a baby – which he did with ease. Whether they were his own or those of other similarly disadvantaged people, Hank Pennier revelled in unanticipated accomplishments. He was just enough of a rogue to enjoy challenging and occasionally taking advantage of the system and assumptions that had disadvantaged him. Yet, in keeping with Aboriginal storytelling traditions, he rarely explains the 'moral' of these humorous stories, allowing readers to interpret them on their own. Vi Hilbert, a Puget Sound Salish historian, remembers her own childhood experience of listening to humorous stories from her elders: 'While the stories were told to me in great detail, allowing for my delicate ears, the moral was never, ever explained to me.'¹⁵ Hank's stories are a way for him to teach the attitudes and values that allowed him to achieve a sense of success and self-worth. But just as importantly, his sense of humour seems to help him to deal with troubles and injustices. For instance, after working in the logging industry all his life, Hank finished his career filling potholes – a job that clearly humiliated him. Yet he quips. 'Funny thing was if you remember, my first job in 1920 was wheeling sawdust at a mill, where I used a big scoop shovel, and I ended 39 years later on the end of another kind of shovel' (73). Lakota scholar Vine Deloria writes that such a sense of humour has allowed Aboriginal people to survive colonization: 'When a people can laugh at themselves and

laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anyone drive them to extremes, then it would seem to me that the people can survive.’¹⁶ Hank Pennier was undoubtedly a survivor – and a celebrator – of life, even in the worst of times.

For Hank, the worst of times seems to have been the period of his life after his injuries forced him to retire at the age of fifty-five. Deprived of the work that had been such an important part of his identity, the limitations of age and disability grated: ‘I am not an old man yet by a damn sight, although with only the little bit I can get around I sure as hell act like one’ (75). The final chapter of the book, which describes this period of Hank’s life, reflects on a world that, for him, had become physically smaller, a world focused on his home, his television, and his bingo games. Yet while his frustration is evident, Hank finds relief in his thoughts, memories, and dreams: ‘Best time for me these days is when I am sleeping. That’s when I can lead a double life’ (84). Waking hours were pensive and often more difficult. ‘I just go on from day to day living from day to day and I watch the seasons pass across my window ... and I think about being an alter boy, and my grand father’s stories, and the days in the woods in the big trees, and some of the girls I used to know’ (77). He even composes dramatic narratives about the animals he sees outside his window. And, of course, this was the period of his life when Hank began to write, an activity that he says ‘makes the days pass easier’ (89), thus once again turning limitations into opportunity. Perhaps it was this creative work that allowed Hank to move towards acceptance of his body’s restrictions: ‘I found that it takes a man one hell of a long time to accept the fates but that no matter how hard you fight it there comes a time when you just learn to accept it all and stop fighting’ (77), though he suddenly interrupts his philosophizing to joke: ‘Hey Hank that’s enough about that. You sound like an old man which I am certainly not’ (77).

Overall, Hank's depiction of old age is unexpectedly optimistic. Readers may also be surprised to read his relatively positive and sympathetic portrayal of Catholic Church officials and of St Mary's Residential School. As a 'half-breed,' Hank was technically not entitled to attend a federally funded Indian school, but, he recalls, in his case, 'the priests were kind and made an exception' (9). It might be tempting to ascribe Hank's perspective to the era in which he was writing. The systemic physical and sexual abuse that we now know characterized so many residential school students' experiences had not been fully and publicly exposed. Yet even without this added sinister context, such influential and widely publicized studies as H.B. Hawthorn's 1967 *Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada* had already condemned residential schools for creating an environment where students 'come to value themselves less and to strive to do less as they get no benefit; they are confused as to what they should be and do; they do not live in a setting where schools prove themselves either happy or useful; [and] they withdraw when they can, psychologically or bodily.'¹⁷ But if such was a part of Hank's experiences, he chose not to communicate it in print. In this regard, what he remembered and decided to share is similar to some of the more recent public expressions related by some former students of the Catholic and Methodist residential schools operating in Stó:lō territory.¹⁸ And so here again, as in so many others instances, Hank invites us to view the world through a lens that is different from the one we anticipate. For him, apparently, residential school provided a relatively fun and safe environment, and it was only 'after [he] got out [that] things were never quite so nice again' (13).

Given the richness, range, and uniqueness of his writing, it is unfortunate that literary scholars and historians alike have largely overlooked Hank Pennier. Hank is not the only Aboriginal writer from BC whom the public has largely forgotten. Alan Twigg documents many others in *Aboriginality: The Literary Origins of British Columbia*. It seems

that Indians writing colourful, humorous, and generally happy anecdotes were not what readers were looking for in the early 1970s. One reviewer at the time expressed 'disappointment' that Hank had presented neither the magical appeal of 'a mythical logger' nor the activist anger of 'an articulate half-Indian writing about the dynamics of race prejudice in the logging industry.' Instead, what the reviewer claims to have found was a 'series of single framed shots, ... the kind of thoughts that come along when the body's busy but the mind rolls on.'¹⁹

Others seem to have shared these views, for the current wealth of Aboriginal writing in Canada is widely considered to have been kick-started by Campbell's 1973 autobiography, *Halfbreed*, which appeared the year after Hank's *Chiefly Indian*. After Campbell, the next-most-cited text in this genre is Beatrice Culleton's 1983 fictionalized autobiography, *In Search of April Raintree*, and similar to both are the works of Lee Maracle, a woman of mixed Stó:lō and Cree ancestry who in 1975 published *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel: Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman*, the fictionalized autobiographical account of a counter-culture protagonist's travels in BC, California, and Ontario. Like Pennier's work, Campbell's, Culleton's, and Maracle's writings reflect on the experience of being of mixed descent. However, unlike Pennier's, these three books largely focus on the gradual development of an activist consciousness in a pan-tribal urban environment. These works were part of the developing political movement among Aboriginal people in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s,²⁰ and most subsequent Aboriginal writing in Canada has followed in their footsteps, with Aboriginal writers being part of a youthful, supportive, artistic, and politicized community. The more elderly Hank Pennier was not part of such a community (in fact, he comments disparagingly on 'these dirty long haired hippies'! [23]).

But if Hank's work sits uncomfortably alongside Aboriginal activists' voices, it also fails to play the same chords as

West Coast Aboriginal autobiographies and life stories such as James Sewid's *Guests Never Leave Hungry*, and Charles Nowell's *Smoke from Their Fires*. Unlike the material selected in these two works, Hank's choice of subject matter was not directed by an anthropologist. Moreover, Hank's writing is more representative of the vast majority of Native people who were neither chiefs nor political activists. His political resistance, personal empowerment, and decision to write his story took place in a way very different from that chosen by these other Aboriginal writers. His autobiography, therefore, presents a perspective rarely seen in indigenous writing in this country. Just as Hank initially challenged Wyn Roberts's expectations, he continues to challenge us as readers.

Though *Chiefly Indian* was largely ignored by scholars (even David Brumble's comprehensive *Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Bibliographies*, which picked up several 'half-breed' biographies in more obscure places, missed this one), it did find an enthusiastic popular niche readership. Hank's descendants remember that distribution through the small independent Vancouver publisher was a problem (whereas Campbell's autobiography was published by McClelland and Stewart and Culleton's by Pemmican Press), and it seems that the volume circulated principally through an informal system of library-like personal loans. As a boy growing up in a small coastal forestry town in the 1970s, one of the authors of this introductory essay remembers his father enthusiastically lending his prized copy of *Chiefly Indian* to a succession of friends. Every few months the book was retrieved so it could be lent to another reader. In the end, that well-loved dog-eared copy found its way into the hands of the chief of the Sliammon First Nation.

Meanwhile, many expatriate West Coasters apparently received copies of *Chiefly Indian* as Christmas presents. We know this because not a few readers took Hank Pennier seriously when he ended his autobiography with the invita-

tion 'P.S. Send me a letter sometime' (89). His son Henry Jr (known locally among the Stó:lō as 'Jumbo'), now an elder himself living in his mother's community on the Chehalis reserve, remembers how happy it made his father whenever a letter postmarked from Europe arrived telling Hank how much a reader had enjoyed his book. Such correspondence continued to trickle in well into the 1980s.

Hank was a widower and nearly eighty-seven when he passed away in 1991. Nineteen years had passed since the publication of *Chiefly Indian*, and the world was a vastly different place from what it had been in 1972, let alone 1904. The term 'half-breed' was no longer publicly acceptable and had been largely replaced in BC by 'non-status Indian.' The designation 'First Nation' and 'First Nations people' had yet to become widespread, but 'Aboriginal' was becoming common parlance, and challenging 'Native' as the identifier of choice among indigenous people. Hank was working on a second book when he died. Close relatives say it continued very much in the humorous tone and character of the first volume. It also reflected on the changes in Aboriginal politics and Native–newcomer relations over the intervening years, but specifics do not seem to be remembered. Unfortunately, the loose-leaf manuscript that Hank kept in a shoebox beside his bed was misplaced when Hank's possessions were distributed after his death, but his son Henry Jr continues to be hopeful that they were just tucked away by one of his nieces and will turn up someday. We share this hope.

In the fifteen years since Hank's death, his Stó:lō community created two of the largest and most comprehensive Aboriginal organizations in Canada: the Stó:lō Nation Society and the Stó:lō Tribal Council. Together, these closely aligned entities are involved in treaty negotiations with the Canadian and British Columbia governments, and in the interim have acquired jurisdiction to administer and deliver child and family services, employment training, education, and fisheries, among others to their nineteen

member bands' citizens. The Halq'eméylem language – Wyn Roberts's initial interest – is today spoken fluently by only two female elders (Elizabeth Herrling and Matilda Gutierrez), but Hank, along with other Stó:lō elders, was instrumental in helping establish an orthography and word list that today serve as the heart of revival programs offered by Coqualeetza, the Stó:lō Nation Society, the Stó:lō Tribal Council, and several individual Stó:lō First Nations. Hank's nephew Clarence 'Kat' Pennier was elected in 2003 to the Stó:lō Nation's top political office – the Yewal Siya:m – with a four-year mandate to lead the Stó:lō people to restoring healthy communities and re-establishing a comprehensive system of self-governance. Kat acknowledges his uncle Hank as having been an important role model.

As these brief examples illustrate, Hank Pennier has left a proud and rich legacy, not only through this book, but through the family and friends he inspired. Hank refused to be held back by circumstances or how others saw him. 'Call me Hank,' he told his readers, asserting the right to define himself and to tell his own story, in his own way, on his own terms. Sitting by the window in his small house, he wrote his life story, and though it was an intensely individual story, it provides a profound set of insights into the lives of Aboriginal people. The final anecdote in his book is a joke about two indigenous men who become lost while hunting. They decide to do something about their situation 'white man style' and fire three shots into the air. Having done this several times to no avail, one tells his friend to fire again. 'I can't,' the other man replies. 'I haven't any more arrows left' (89). With this last story, Hank is not just leaving us with a laugh; he is also leaving us with a question. Will anyone hear him? He has decided to tell his stories 'white man style' – in English, in writing. But without the tools that many writers (especially non-Native writers) have – formal education, academic or literary role models, access to large publishers – could he make his story heard? Or would he, like the two lost men, be sending his message

in vain? We hope that, in reissuing Hank's autobiography, we are helping others to hear his voice.

Keith Thor Carlson
Kristina Fagan

P.S. Although Hank is no longer with us, his son Jumbo wants readers to know that the family would still appreciate receiving a friendly letter from readers – or maybe an email.