

Politics and Pragmatism in Early North American Folklore Scholarship

Carole H. Carpenter

Volume 13, Number 1, 1991

Frontières: interactions canado-américaines
Bridges and Boundaries: Canadian/U.S. Interactions

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081695ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081695ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

H. Carpenter, C. (1991). Politics and Pragmatism in Early North American Folklore Scholarship. *Ethnologies*, 13(1), 11–21.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081695ar>

Article abstract

This paper relates differences between the development of Folklore Studies, especially in national institutions, in Canada and the U.S. A. to disparate sociopolitical and pragmatic concerns in either nation. The different approaches and activities of Franz Boas and Marius Barbeau are used as examples, with specific reference made to their involvement with the Northwest Coast native people and their potlatch tradition.

POLITICS AND PRAGMATISM IN EARLY NORTH AMERICAN FOLKLORE SCHOLARSHIP

Carole H. CARPENTER

York University

North York, Ontario

Recent work on the politics of culture has focussed attention on the motivations for and ramifications of scholarly and popular attention devoted to folklore in various parts of North America.¹ Anyone who looks carefully at the development of folklore scholarship on this continent soon becomes aware of a paradox involving the early interest and subsequent developments in folklife work in Canada as compared to those in the U.S.A. At the root of this paradox lies pragmatism in various forms that prompted much of the early work, yet provided the foundation for the differential cultural status now afforded folklore in the two nations.

The American Folklife Center currently enjoys a position of prominence in the discipline within the United States as well as an importance abroad for exemplifying what public folklore can and should be and for providing leadership in the field. This situation is much to the credit of the talented staff of the Center and its imaginative and indefatigable Director, Alan Jabbour. And, it is all the more remarkable because the Center has achieved its prominence in just over a decade. Folklife Studies is entrenched in the bureaucracy, supported by legislation and, it seems, accepted as an appropriate—indeed significant—cultural manifestation at the national level. Well we know that such has not long been the situation, for the Archive of American Folk Song teetered on the brink of existence through many administrations, and the subject—let alone the discipline—overall received at best scant official or governmental recognition.²

-
1. David Whisnant's excellent study, *All That is Beautiful and Fine Chapel Hill and London*, University of North Carolina, 1983, provides a model for such work, of which there is relatively little in Canada. Apart from my own book, *Many Voices: Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture Museum*, Ottawa, National Museum, 1979, which involves an analysis of the socio-political sources and effects of interest in folklore throughout the nation, there are primarily descriptive accounts except for some important works concerning the Native Peoples of which Douglas Cole's, *Captured Heritage*, Vancouver, Douglas, 1986 is the most pertinent here.
 2. As discussed at length in Debora Kodish's fine study, *Good Friends and Bad Enemies: Robert Winslow Gordon and the Study of American Folksong*, Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois, 1986.

Meanwhile, north of the border, folklore early became established within the major national ethnographic/ethnological institution—the Victoria Memorial Museum—through Marius Barbeau, his personality, interests and work. Barbeau and Diamond Jenness were hired in 1911 by Edward Sapir, then director of the Anthropological Division at the new national museum, the successor to the Geological Survey of Canada. Barbeau gradually carved and was, simultaneously, isolated into his own niche—the Folklore Division—within the Museum's Ethnography Division.³ After Barbeau's death in 1969, the Folklore Division lost much of its *raison d'être*, but assumed an apparently new identity under the leadership of Carmen Roy. Her Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies still exists, but it has undergone many changes since its establishment in 1975. Bolstered by the federal government's policy (1971) of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework as the most appropriate form for Canadian culture, the CCFCS enjoyed a heyday of research, publication and government support during the seventies. But the halcyon days are over. Now, the CCFCS—ostensibly a national centre not all that unlike the American Folklife Center—is seriously reduced in staff (having only three permanent researchers in 1987 and subsequently shifting the designation of these and other Centre personnel to curatorial positions to plan for the new museum building and mount exhibitions in it). Despite a noteworthy research and publication record, the Centre now undertakes virtually no research and scarcely publishes at all⁴, and seems to be concentrating its claim to significance on exhibitions organized by its staff for the grand new museum building opened in June 1989. What once was is no longer flourishing in one country, while what once was dreamed of is, and more, in the other. Why?

This paper argues that the disparity is directly traceable to differential approaches that emerged in folklore work on either side of the border. These approaches are exemplified in the works and persona of, on the one/American hand, Franz Boas, and the other/Canadian hand, Marius Barbeau. The different paradigms operating become clearly evident in the existence of, and response to, one particular socio-historical situation—the Potlatch legislation and prosecutions of the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries.

-
3. There eventually were six Divisions in the Museum. The Folklore Division evolved into the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies when the Museum was restructured as the National Museum of Man in the late sixties. It is now included within the new Canadian Museum of Civilization.
 4. Current research tends to be done primarily by consultants on contract to support special exhibitions or by the Centre's staff to supplement its material collections for specific exhibitions. Similarly, the recent publications of the Centre have been populist in nature, for instance, reissues of some works by Marius Barbeau on the native people and a "coffee-table" volume on *Bird Houses of Western Canada* based on the excellent work done by Robert Klymasz in the late sixties and seventies. Concentrated field studies and the scholarly publications (such as, but not limited to, the Mercury Series) have been abandoned.

From earliest contact, the white man experienced difficulties with the Northwest Coast Indians' central ceremonial, the Potlatch. At best, this custom was poorly understood; at worst, it was actively misinterpreted so that it became the primary target for those whites seeking to "civilize" the Indians. Missionaries tended to equate the potlatch with the very essence of heathenism. According to William Duncan (founder of the utopian Christian community of Metlakatla), the festival was "the most formidable obstacle in the way of the Indians becoming Christian, or even civilized".⁵ While fur traders on the average tended to be more tolerant, even they failed to appreciate the full significance of this ceremonial. Settlers were typically most unwilling to learn about native customs and, in the absence of clear and accepted explanations of this, or any other, native traditions were prone to fabricate their own pragmatic explanations that always justified whatever actions were necessary to support settlement. The potlatch was certainly a problem for non-native settlement and development by the middle of the nineteenth century, for the natives clearly gave preference to their own custom over "civilized" pursuits such as that Protestant panacea—work. The custom typified "foolish, wasteful and demoralizing"⁶ native festivals that embodied values antipathetic to the Victorian age. The evangelical religion, cultural imperialism and *laissez-faire* economics typical of the period demanded that the Indians be led by whatever means possible to "civilization". So evolved the ultimate goal of Canadian government Indian policy—the complete transformation and assimilation of the Indian.⁷

The local demands for prohibitions on potlatching continuously increased until, in 1884, the federal government established a commission to the Indians of the Northwest Coast to investigate their land claims as well as the status, importance and continuation of the potlatch. It was this commission that proposed the following amendment to the 1880 Indian Act:

'every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the 'Potlatch' or the 'Tamanawas' is guilty of a misdemeanour and shall be liable to imprisonment.'⁸

5. Letter to David Laird, Canadian Minister of the Interior, May 1875, as cited in Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1977, p. 206.
6. So described by W. H. Lomas in a communication to B.C. Indian Commissioner Powell, 27 February 1884, as cited in Fisher, p. 206-207.
7. As Duncan Campbell Scott, federal Deputy Superintendent for Indian Affairs boldly declared, "The happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the policy of our government", as cited in E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott & the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1986, p. 34.
8. Canada, Statutes, "An Act Further to Amend 'The Indian Act, 1880'" 47 Vict. c. 27, Statutes of Canada, 1884.

While this legislation proved difficult, if not impossible, to uphold in prosecutions, nonetheless it sent a message to the native people that their traditions were under severe threat. Further, it indicated that those working with the Indians and for the government believed that native culture could, and in fact should, be legislated away. As Robin Fisher has cogently argued, the overall pattern of dominance (of which the potlatch legislation is just a part, however significant) imposed by the Europeans on the Northwest Coast reveals the non-native sense of inferiority and insecurity there as compared to the feelings of the natives who were exceptionally well-adapted to the region.⁹

The native people responded variously: some retreated from their traditions and became Christianized—by the end of the century virtually all B.C. natives were titularly Christian; others struggled to change the law, as when a deputation of chiefs petitioned the Department of Indian Affairs in 1919; and still others, most notably many Kwakiutl, reacted by elaborating and almost flaunting the customs in the face of Indian agents, missionaries and other officials. There were occasional arrests, some unsatisfactory prosecutions and many arguments against the law itself, which by the 1920s had become an object of ridicule. One legislator, for instance, suggested that the popular dances of the time were more offensive than anything performed by the native people.¹⁰ Meanwhile, collection of native artifacts proceeded apace, as documented by Douglas Cole in *Captured Heritage*. Needless to say, this so-called “salvage operation” contributed significantly to a decline in ceremonial activity and in the significance of that which did take place. Boas documented the transformation in 1930 as follows:

This afternoon there was a name-giving in an old house—i.e., in old Indian fashion...Julie [Averkieva, his collaborator on this fieldtrip] was happy to be at a feast in an old house, but it was nothing compared with former times. There were only thirty people there. The old bedrooms and storerooms which made the house livable were gone.¹¹

Yesterday there was quite a mess. The chief, who is hated by everyone, gave a great feast...A speech was given while the meat was distributed. He said, ‘This bowl in the shape of a bear for you, and you, and so on; for each group a bowl.’ The bowls, however, are no longer here. They are in the museums in New York and Berlin. Only the speech is still the same....It is strange how these people cling to the form though the content is almost gone. But this still makes them happy.¹²

In the winter of 1921, an extraordinary potlatch was held by Dan Cranmer of the Southern Kwakiutl. It is described at length in Ronald P. and Evelyn C. Rohner, *The Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia*, Chicago, Holt Rinehart &

9. See especially Chapter 8, “The Consolidation of Settlement: The 1870’s and 1880’s” in Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*.

10. See Titley, p. 175.

11. Letter Nov. 27, 1930 to Ernst Boas from Fort Rupert.

12. Letter Dec. 14, 1930 to his children (addressed to Ernst) from Fort Rupert.

Winston, 1970, p. 170-172. A special occasion, it was also targeted by the zealous Indian agent in the area, William May Halliday, as an example. Halliday was determined to make an arrest, so he solicited and gained Indian collaborators to inform on the participants and their activities. As a result, twenty-nine Indians were charged for dancing, singing, making a speech and like ignominious activities. The participants were, however, offered suspended sentences if they agreed to give up potlatching and surrender their ceremonial regalia which some of them did, leading to a major collection of significant artifacts. Some were purchased outright by George Heye, who had heard of the situation and proceeded to capitalize upon it, while the majority went (as was originally intended for all) to Dr. Sapir at the Victoria Museum in Ottawa. The saga of their retention and ultimate repatriation some fifty years later I have discussed elsewhere.¹³ What concerns us here is the outcome of the convictions and the involvement of various scholars in the affair.

Despite the convictions that did occur, the potlatch was not eradicated, for it persisted underground and in various guises (such as in Haida wedding festivities), but the confidence of the Indians in the remnants of their traditions was seriously undermined, and the centrality of the potlatch in Northwest Coast culture was gone forever. It is unquestionably true that this potlatch conviction was a severe attack upon a seriously deteriorated and endangered cultural system.

One is led to query, then, how the anthropologists and other scholars who ought to have known what was at stake for the native cultures involved could ever have allowed this circumstance to occur; if they were involved in any way; and why. The records clearly indicate their involvement. A letter of protest was signed by the staff of the Anthropological Division at the Victoria Museum and forwarded to the Department of Indian Affairs, but no campaign was ever mounted by scholars in or out of Canada to have the law changed. The move to return the Potlatch Collection (as the confiscated artifacts became known) was eventually personally initiated in the mid-sixties by the then-Director of the National Museum of Man, W.E. Taylor, Jr. It is noteworthy, though, that Taylor is a specialist in Arctic pre-history, with no direct involvement on the Northwest Coast. His concern was that of an administrator, a scholar who became a successful career civil servant.

Returning to the 1920s, the Department of Indian Affairs made arrangements as the decade began for "the preparation by the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of a full and comprehensive report on the subject, for submission to the Minister, based on the voluminous information relative to the matter which is at the disposal of the Government".¹⁴ On the surface,

13. See "Secret, Precious Things," *artmagazine*, 114:53/54 (May-June 1981), p. 64-70.

14. Communication from Duncan Campbell Scott to W. M. Halliday in 1920, as cited in Daisy Sewid-Smith, *Prosecution or Persecution*, n.p., Nu-Yum-Baleess Society, 1979.

it is difficult to comprehend why such a necessarily confidential report was even required given the extent of research that had been done (by the Museum staff itself, let alone other, foreign scholars) and was published on the Northwest coast native traditions.¹⁵ By way of explanation one could assume that, given a government bureaucracy, Indian Affairs personnel did not know what the Anthropological Division did. But Ottawa, always a government town, was a very small society: there was bound to be contact as, indeed, proves to be the case.

Duncan Campbell Scott worked as the chief administrator of Indian Affairs¹⁶ from 1913 until 1932, but his abiding passion and real interest in life was the arts. He ardently pursued policies to eradicate what he termed "senseless drumming and dancing" among a "weird and waning race" destined to disappear,¹⁷ while he simultaneously achieved a considerable reputation in *belles lettres* primarily for his poetry in which the vanishing ways of the French Canadians and Indians figured significantly. He was a leading force in Canada's literary world and, naturally, of Ottawa's artistic community which included Marius Barbeau.

Barbeau painted and wrote, sang and drummed—never exceptionally well, but certainly conspicuously. As one of my informants recounted after Barbeau's death in 1969:

Oh, you should have met him. He was such a character! More often than not when he was sick and you went to visit him, you'd find him sitting up in bed with a toque on, playing an Indian tom-tom. He'd say, 'You must listen to my song!' which was terrible.¹⁸

Through his art and showmanship, Barbeau cultivated friends, influenced people and secured his position in the Museum. It was he who served as the primary author of the report requested by Scott. He Scott could depend upon to provide a suitable document not only because of their social connection, but also because Barbeau, in his own way, needed such influential people as Scott.

-
15. As indicated in Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, New York, Crowell, 1969, Boas wrote thousands of pages on the Northwest Coast peoples. Two of his books, *Primitive Art* and *Kwakiutl Mythology*, relate specifically to the Northwest Coast as do many of his 600-plus articles. In fact, fully one-half of Boas' total publications pertain to the Northwest Coast peoples, one-half of these directly on the Kwakiutl. Much of this work was in print by 1920 along with studies by various Canadians including Barbeau, James Teit and Harlan Smith.
 16. A civil service position. In 1871, administration of matters pertaining to the native peoples passed to the federal government, and in 1880, a separate Department of Indian Affairs was created. B.C. was the only province with its own Commissioner of Indian Affairs appointed by the Provincial Government. See Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, Vol. 1: *The Impact of the White Man*, Provincial Museum of British Columbia, Anthropology in British Columbia Memoir No. 5, 1964.
 17. Scott's many comments of this nature are considered at length in Titley, Chapter 9.
 18. As cited in *Many Voices*, p. 220.

Barbeau began fieldwork on the Northwest Coast in 1914 and became the Museum's most aggressive collector of coastal artifacts through the 1920s and into the thirties. At first under protest from Sapir, but later without restriction when Jenness replaced Sapir (1925), Barbeau freelanced as a collector and made a considerable profit dealing in Northwest Coast artifacts as well as Quebec silver and sculpture.¹⁹ Therefore, he himself had much to gain financially from the demise of the potlatch since, in the short-term, the termination of the ceremonials would bring more good artifacts onto the market. Barbeau's own attitudes on the potlatch matter (including his thoughts about the long-run implications)²⁰ will likely never surface, now that virtually all of his contemporaries and many of those who worked closely with him are deceased. There remains a pressing need for a substantial biography of this prominent Canadian in order that his overall role in shaping Canadian culture and cultural studies be generally better understood. Whatever Barbeau's personal feelings might have been, the pragmatic pursuit of his political goals clearly took precedence.

Never preferred by Edward Sapir, Barbeau was passed over in favour of Harlan Smith for significant assignments and eventually rejected when the lower-profile, less-published Jenness became Sapir's successor. Personality as well as scholarship contributed to this situation, for Barbeau and Sapir were diametric opposites. A gregarious extrovert, Barbeau must at one level have threatened the very reserved Sapir, who preferred a probing intimacy with select friends. Yet it is unlikely that Barbeau's character could have withstood the intense scrutiny inherent in Sapir's style of interpersonal relationships. Ottawa was, in effect, a personal and intellectual exile for Sapir who both his contemporaries and subsequent generations describe as a genius, an extraordinary scholar whose "originality and boldness of mind led him beyond the conventional limits".²¹ Barbeau, meanwhile, was not a massive intellect—clever, charismatic and politically astute, but no genius. Like his teacher Boas, Sapir must have found Barbeau's tendency to grand statements (for example, that the totem pole emerged as a result of the fur trade) and sweeping generalizations (for instance, that there were obvious and profound Asiatic connections to Northwest Coast culture) not only questionable but also antithetical to acceptable scientific enquiry. Sapir's mind-set involved the focussed vision associated with the timely and "scientific" approach to cultural studies widely advocated and practised

19. As discussed in Cole, *Captured Heritage*, p. 268-270.

20. Especially regarding artistic creation amongst the Northwest Coast peoples which, both professionally and avocationally let alone ethically, ought to have concerned him. Such matters do not, for instance, figure significantly in the 520 pages of letters between Barbeau and Sapir housed at the Canadian Ethnology Service in the national museum.

21. "Foreword" to Leslie Spier, A. Irving Hallowell and Stanley S. Newman (eds.), *Language, Culture and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, (rpt.) Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1960, p. vii.

by Boas and his students, whereas Barbeau's way of thinking incorporated a scanning vision more typical of the nineteenth-century cultural scholars (such as R.R. Marett, with whom he studied on his Rhodes scholarship to Oxford) against which the scientific anthropologists had developed in reaction. Yet, in the very important civil service society of a small capital town, Barbeau had the edge, for Sapir's personality as well as his family circumstances mitigated against the social success necessary for him to wield political clout. It was during his Ottawa years that his wife was mentally ill and eventually, in 1924, died. About this time, Sapir also experienced a decline in bureaucratic support for the Museum. Early in the twenties he was, then, neither personally nor politically in the position to contest the government's policy on, or treatment of, the native people, although he was a signatory of the protest from the Museum. Further, he was not committed to Canada (which he gladly left in 1925) or the Northwest Coast people *per se*. He had done some limited work among the Nootka, but had had little other direct involvement.

Franz Boas was another story. The nature and extent of his role in this affair, while largely unrecognized at the time, was of particular import for subsequent generations of native people, scholars and Americans generally. Boas' extensive involvement with the Northwest Coast dates from 1884. Early in his collecting, he was asked by the native people there several times about his intentions regarding his research and his apparent receptiveness to Indian ways.²² Unlike Barbeau, he could and did maintain and justify an aloofness from the Canadian government's actions because he was working at different times either independently, for the British Association for the Advancement of Science, or for American agencies. Obviously his responses to his informants' questioning were adequate, for he not only was able to proceed with his research but he also acquired a Kwakiutl name meaning "He-who-says-the-right-thing" as the direct result of a speech about his intentions.²³

Boas' cooperation was definitely sought by the Northwest Coast people in their efforts to fight the governmental campaigns to transform their way of life. Prior to 1904, Boas gave talks in Victoria and wrote a number of letters to Canadian newspapers defending the Kwakiutl potlatch. But these activities as a public spokesman for an anthropological perspective on this social issue are described by George W. Stocking as "ephemera" in comparison to his other contributions as an intellectual activist.²⁴ Certainly Boas never prepared any critique of Indian policy comparable to that he presented in various speeches and publications on what was then termed racialism (specifically concerning

22. See Helen Codere (ed.), *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. xvi.

23. Codere, p. xv.

24. In his introduction to Part X, "Anthropology and Society" in *The Shaping of American Anthropology 1883-1911*, New York, Basic Books, 1974, p. 307-309.

the Blacks in America). Nor did he apply the authority of his recognized position as America's leading anthropologist to bolster the native traditions, despite the indisputable fact that his reputation was built upon his work with these self-same traditions. This situation is really neither puzzling nor surprising, especially given the fact that such applied activities were not the norm at the time.

Early in this century, Boas like Barbeau was in no personal position to undertake a committed endeavour to transform a political circumstance even if he had believed in it which, as will become evident, is not obvious that he did. Boas, by this time, had been embroiled in controversies involving a confrontation of his scientific principles or programmes and the bureaucratic policies, personalities and structures at each of the Field Museum in Chicago, the Bureau of American Ethnology and the American Museum in New York. His practical response was to move away from such public institutional involvement and to consolidate his career in academe from 1905 on. He had come to know, as Kroeber described it, "the outcome of contest with superior authority"²⁵, and what really seemed to matter to him intellectually was the progress of science, not its social application, however much that might, at times, be deemed desirable.

On a more personal level, Boas was profoundly affected by the onset of World War I. He found himself with divided loyalties despite twenty-eight years of residence and long citizenship in the United States of America. He publicly opposed American participation in the war and, while he was never persecuted or threatened with dismissal, his relations with Columbia's administration were definitely strained as a result. His colleagues in the American Anthropological Association reacted negatively to his exposé (after the war was over) of intelligence work undertaken in the war years by anthropologists during their fieldwork in Latin America. A rebuke from the academy—no doubt fueled by resentment over his power and prestige—ensued. Boas' response was again a practical one—to withdraw from the broader public arena into only those social actions directly related to his scientific and intellectual concerns; for instance, he subsequently served diligently in the Emergency Society for German and Austrian Science.

But, he was aging and his health was uncertain. He had had a cancerous growth removed from his face in 1914, and the operation left him with some permanent paralysis and disfigurement. He suffered emotional blows as well, when a daughter and son died suddenly, and then, in 1929, his wife was killed in a traffic accident. His immense personal energy had to be conserved and directed to what mattered most in his work.

25. In his article "Franz Boas: The Man" in the memorial publication of the American Anthropological Association, *Franz Boas: 1858-1942*, Menasha, WI, 1943, p. 17.

Throughout all the upheavals, Boas displayed what has been described as an “icy enthusiasm”²⁶—an objectified commitment to his studies, placing the concerns of science above socio-political matters and detached from emotion. He never did applied work until he was in mid-career and then only pertaining to American Blacks, a people whom he did not study intensively. Amongst the Kwakiutl, his approach was that of the scientist who becomes personally involved in order to pursue his work. He was, despite Helen Codere’s suggestions to the contrary in her introduction to Boas’s *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, aloof from the native peoples’ daily activities; he purposefully kept his distance in order to study them, yet he participated as he should to know them better and so improve his observations. This commentary is not to say that Boas was without emotional attachment to the Northwest Coast people, but rather that his intellectual and professional involvement predominated. He is described by various people who knew him in the field as *le patron* or “the professor”, who did not really like Indian food and by choice remained separate from the people.²⁷

Boas’ ideas about native people are rather interesting too, for he considered the Kwakiutl (whom he frequently referred to as his “favorite people”) inferior in many respects to the Plateau people. At no point in his journals pertaining to the Northwest Coast did he make any comment suggesting that he regretted the passing of the native ways (though he consistently sought out non-Europeanized traditional Kwakiutl for his research). From 1922 on he pointedly recognized the changes, but nowhere did he make impassioned statements comparable to that of the Oxford scholar, Thomas McIlwraith, when he visited the coast in 1923.²⁸ Boas’ strongest objections were reserved for the activities of some missionaries on the Northwest Coast, for he considered the dogma of religion to be abhorrent, yet he worked alongside, rather than in opposition to these cultural transformers.

In sum, Boas made his life’s contribution through the scientific approach he advocated, taught and himself assumed which dictated that he maintain personal distance—the orientation certainly amenable to his personality. He unquestionably did not lack knowledge of the potlatch prosecutions, because Dan Cranmer himself became one of his chief collaborators (even travelling

26. From Abram Kardner & Edward Preble, “Franz Boas: Icy Enthusiasm” in *They Studied Man*, Cleveland, World Publishing, 1961, p. 134-159.

27. Personal Interview with Mrs. Margaret Frank, a niece of George Hunt and one of the native women who kept house for Boas during some of his fieldwork amongst the Kwakiutl. From my collection housed in the Ontario Folklore-Folklife Archive at York University.

28. See Cole, p. 278-279. For instance, in one of his letters to a Cambridge colleague, McIlwraith wrote: “The manner in which the ancient civilisation has broken down here is truly deplorable”. As a result, he could not bring himself to collect objects as he was most unwilling to take away what little remained.

to New York to work with him) after the 1921 potlatch and subsequent prosecutions. Boas was fully cognizant of what was happening and what it all meant for the Indians, but non-involvement suited him personally and professionally.

The overall outcome of these pragmatic attitudes and resultant approaches was a submission of Canadian folklore and ethnography in general to a bureaucracy and to the vagaries of political control. In the United States, there developed a professionalization of the discipline that impacted upon the institutionalization of ethnography in the Bureau of American Ethnology and various prominent museums. Scientific advancement took precedence over personal concerns, whereas in Canada, professional and personal interests were clearly bent to government needs or uses. Barbeau—a very political character—continued to subjugate himself and his scholarship in order to preserve his position. He became a power broker in Ottawa and the chief political force in the emergence of ethnographic studies in Canada, as one can only hope will someday be well documented when his papers become accessible for study.

The Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies has continued in this politically pragmatic pattern, so that it is subservient to government policy and demands rather than active in making and pursuing them. Those folklorists associated with the CCFCS have, as a result, retreated and entrenched, becoming increasingly isolated from the forefront of the discipline.²⁹ By comparison, many of those scholars associated with the American Folklife Center are active at the leading edge of folklore-folklife studies and in its socio-cultural applications. They are deeply involved as folklorists and heritage conservationists not merely as government functionaries. Pragmatism has influenced the work in both nations, but in one it has emerged from and produced political obeisance whereas in the other, it was bred from and has resulted in political wisdom.

Folklore has, then, submitted to government will in Canada and become the less. Neither the discipline nor the materials are widely considered of substantial significance in modern Canadian culture. In the U.S.A., however, folklore materials and work have grown to have government as well as increasing popular respect. Our discipline is the better, and Americans the richer in their cultural awareness, for the extra time and the approach taken in achieving recognition for folklore-folklife.

29. For example, though the CCFCS is our national folklore centre, none of staff is active in intangible heritage management either at home or in the international cultural conservation movement promoted by the UNICEF resolution concerning folklore as adopted in 1989 and endorsed by Canada.