UCLA
American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title
A Son of the Fur Trade: The Memoirs of Johnny Grant. By John Francis Grant. Edited by Gerhard J. Ens.

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81w3w2cn

Journal
American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 35(1)

ISSN
0161-6463

Author
Matsui, Kenichi

Publication Date
2011

DOI
10.17953

Copyright Information
This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, availalbe at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

extermination. It is not to deny their special needs to argue, nevertheless, that the predicament they face presently with the latest onslaught of biocolonialism is an integral part of what Michel Foucault described as "biopolitics," a formative moment of Euro-modernity.

Although Whitt stays clear of these complications in her analysis, she recognizes them in the solutions to which she points in her concluding pages, which suggest that hers is what might be described as a post-Enlightenment indigenism, open in its defense of indigenism and indigenous traditions to the deployment of "robust legal pluralism . . . to secure justice and ensure survival for all peoples" (213). Despite the qualifications I have suggested, her study provides a valuable reminder that awareness of the colonization of indigenous peoples is indispensable not just to the cultural critique of the scientific regime of knowledge but also to any serious struggle for a just and sustainable society.

Arif Dirlik
Knight Professor of Social Science, University of Oregon

A Son of the Fur Trade: The Memoirs of Johnny Grant. By John Francis Grant. Edited by Gerhard J. Ens. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008. 468 pages. $34.95 cloth.

John (or Johnny) Francis Grant is a person of mixed Scottish-Métis ancestry, who lived in both American and Canadian frontiers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. For the first time, the complete manuscript of his voluminous memoirs is included in this book. The memoirs shed interesting light on many different events, including his direct involvement in some of the important historic events in the North American West. For this reason, the memoirs are highly valuable historic sources for those interested in frontier lives during this period of time. The manuscript was originally dictated by Grant to his wife, Clotilde Bruneau, sometime between 1905 and 1907, and then further edited by his daughter and others. Some portion of the manuscript related to its American content was published in 1996 by Washington State University Press, whereas much of it remained unpublished in the University of Alberta archives.

Most of the memoirs are devoted to the period between Grant's childhood and his years in his thirties as a thriving trader and rancher in the American West. The descriptions of this period are most detailed and vivid. Grant was born in 1833 at Fort Edmonton to his Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) trader father and Métis mother, Marie Anne Breland, who was the adopted daughter of John Rowand, chief factor of Fort Edmonton and one of the most

influential HBC traders in western Canada during the mid-nineteenth century. Grant's mother died before he was two years old, and he and his siblings were raised by their paternal grandmother and aunt at what is today Trois-Rivières, Quebec. When Grant was fourteen years old, he joined his father's trade at Fort Hall, although in two years he would leave his father's strict supervision at the HBC post and engage in his own trading and ranching businesses. During the 1840s and the 1850s, he traveled to many different places in the North American West, including Salt Lake City, where he met with Brigham Young and observed the Mormon settlement. In Victoria, British Columbia, he met with James Douglas and enjoyed schmoozing with ladies in Douglas's mansion. Grant also spent a considerable amount of time with the Northern Shoshone, or Snake people. In the mid-1850s, he married a number of Native women, most notably Quarra, sister of Chief Tendoy. His notes on food preparation and other cultural activities of the Northern Shoshone (including horse stealing among neighboring tribal people) may be interesting ethnographic information for historians and anthropologists.

In 1862, Grant, Quarra, and their children settled at Deer Lodge, Montana, and engaged in ranching, freighting, and guiding businesses. His initial success, which was partly aided by the gold discovery of 1863 in what is now Virginia City, led to opening a store, saloon, dancing hall, gristmill, and blacksmith shop. A number of French Métis, miners, and other settlers followed him and established a small ranching settlement. At one point, Grant possessed a freight train of twenty-eight wagons and employed thirty-two men. Living near a booming gold-mining town also meant that Grant faced a number of business risks including his weakness for gambling and the threat from highwaymen. According to his recollection, his life was threatened more than once.

The risky life in Deer Lodge and his financial collapse mainly accounted for his moving the family to the Red River settlement in present-day Winnipeg, Manitoba, where his maternal relatives lived. Within a year of his move, Grant was partly involved in the major political turmoil of Canadian history—the uprising of Louis Riel and his French Métis–dominated contingent against the claims of the newly formed Canadian Confederation over the territory of Rupert's Land, which encompassed the vast western region of present-day Canada. Grant expressed his sympathy for the Métis cause by saying that "in my opinion [Rupert's Land] belonged to the natives as well as to the Hudson's Bay Company," but he was dubious about Riel's caliber to lead "the country," meaning the fur-trade country in Rupert's Land (211–12). He confronted Riel several times regarding Métis rights, and these confrontations, according to Grant's claim, led Riel and his men to attempt to assassinate him. That plan failed partly because of intervention from the clergy, though Riel jailed Grant for a few days without giving him a proper reason or trial.

In describing these events, Grant did not mean to provide a detailed witness account of Riel's political actions; rather, he wanted it to be acknowledged that he had made a significant contribution to a major political event in Canadian history. Grant risked his life by going to Pembina, North Dakota, and obtained official documents that Donald A. Smith, commissioner of the Dominion government, had left for safekeeping. Because Riel wanted to destroy the documents, Grant and his two companions had to run some risk against Riel's well-armed men. After Riel's government failed, Smith was elected to a seat in the House of Commons in 1871, partly because Grant bribed voters by accommodating them in his store and offsetting their debts. His contribution, however, was not sufficiently rewarded by Smith when Grant sought his help to deal with a huge financial loss from land speculation during the late 1880s. The relationship with Smith deteriorated, and Grant eventually decided to move to Edmonton, where he lived until his death in 1907.

Other than the account of his involvement in political affairs, the Grant memoirs relating to his Manitoba years provide a rich account of Métis culture and economy, including women's embroidery, Métis hunting and farming, and the New Year's festivities among the French Métis. For example, according to Grant's description, the New Year's fete began at three or four o'clock in the morning of January 1 with people leaving for church and stopping at every house they passed by calling out their wish for a happy new year. After Mass, people visited their friends in a celebration that lasted for a week or more. Housewives prepared and offered refreshments, such as buffalo meat and plum cake, to all visitors, including Native people. Rum was offered to the men and wine to the women. Grant noted that the English and Scottish Métis did not celebrate New Year's Day as the French Métis did.

The memoirs are accompanied with detailed footnotes, appendices on genealogical information about the Grant family, Clotilde Bruneau's short essay about her relationship with her husband, and the editor's introduction. Footnotes provide useful information about place-names and individuals. The appendices may be of interest to those who are related to the Grant family or those family historians who conduct research on Métis ancestors. The editor's introduction provides detailed information about Métis history, especially as it is related to scrip policies, in which each Métis individual received a certificate for acquiring land or money from the 1870s to the 1920s. The book also contains several useful maps that will help less informed readers to visualize Grant's activities.

Noting the significance of the Johnny Grant memoirs in Métis history, Ens claims that the "life of Johnny Grant is representative of the lives of Métis traders and merchants in the last half of the nineteenth century who grew up in the fur trade" (xxxvi). In the mid-nineteenth century, Grant's businesses

thrived largely because, at the time, a "dualistic" economy of aboriginal peoples and capitalists coexisted in which the Métis traders found an entrepreneurial niche. However, after the 1880s, when the buffalo disappeared, capitalism dominated the economy of the North American West by marginalizing the Native peoples and Métis. Grant claims that when "this dualistic economy disappeared in the 1880s and 1890s, a Métis identity was no longer instrumentally advantageous" (xxxix).

Ens has persistently argued this capitalism-winner analogy since the 1990s, and it seems that he has placed Grant's life within his own idea of the fate of the Métis. Interestingly, in the introduction, he repeats the above-quoted statement from his earlier publication about Métis ethnicity and personal identity. In neither essay does Ens clarify why capitalism worked only against Métis survival. In my opinion, Grant's life does not represent the end of dualistic economy, but it does shed light on the mobility, socioeconomic diversity, and cultural fluidity of Métis communities, in which Grant played a unique role.

Kenichi Matsui
University of Tsukuba

Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence. Edited by Gerald Vizenor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2008. 396 pages. $29.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

Gerald Vizenor introduced the concept of *survivance* into Native literary criticism in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994, reprinted in 1999 as *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*) and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1998). Vizenor defines *Native survivance* as "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name" (1). Vizenor explains that "survivance is not just survival but also resistance" (Vizenor and A. Robert Lee, *Postindian Conversations*, 1999, 93).

During the last several years, survivance has been increasingly employed in scholarship in the fields of Native literatures and rhetoric. Malea Powell's work on survivance is particularly influential in Native rhetorical studies, inspiring the title of Ernest Stromberg's edited collection, *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic* (2006). As noted by Linda Lizut Helstern in this volume, Vizenor's concept of survivance traveled outside of academic discourse during W. Richard West's remarks for the 2004 dedication of the National Museum of the American Indian, marking it as a concept that has resonance inside and outside of Native studies (163). In addition