

THE UPPER TANANA DENE: PEOPLE OF THIS LAND.

By WILLIAM E. SIMEONE. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-64642-333-0. 320 p., maps, b&w illus., appendices, bib., index. Softbound US\$34.95. Also available as an e-book.

William (Bill) Simeone has made a lifelong career of collaborating, living, teaching, and learning with the Upper Tanana and Tanacross Dene people. His latest book, *The Upper Tanana Dene: People of This Land* results from this work. Simeone has been cooperating closely with the Alaska Native people and communities in this region since 1971. His notable works on the region include *Rifles, Blankets, and Beads* (1995), a seminal publication based on his doctoral dissertation, focused on the cultural importance of the regional potlatch ceremony, and *Upper Tanana Ethnographic Overview and Assessment, Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve* (2007), a key regional ethnographic synthesis co-authored with Terry L. Haynes.

In this latest work, Simeone begins by listing the numerous Elders and persons who contributed knowledge to his understanding. Then, in the introduction, he clearly states his objective for his book: “to be a primary source document for anyone trying to understand Dene heritage in the region, the significance of places, resources, and the cultural values that sustained a way of life” (p. 3). Simeone also notes that he wants to detail the massive cultural change the region underwent during the twentieth century. The traditional territories of the Upper Tanana and Tanacross Dene extended from the Delta River in the west, including the regional watersheds they interacted with, to Scotty Creek in the east, the Alaska Range in the south, and the communities of Joseph and Ketchumstuk in the north.

In an effort to make the book accessible to people outside the academic sphere, the author avoids complex terminology and instead makes use of active description. Simeone relies on primary transcripts to illustrate key cultural details and experiences. Of particular note is the author’s meticulous documentation of the relationships and ancestry of each of his interlocutors before presenting their narratives, reflecting the authoritative weight that relatedness carries in Upper Tanana culture.

The book is divided into 11 chapters and four appendices. Chapter 1 details traditional relationships among humans, animals, and the land from the perspective of acquiring, storing, preparing, and consuming food. Simeone illustrates these relationships and ties them to traditional stories, including the local Raven and Traveller creation myths.

The next three chapters focus on specific aspects of subsistence. In Chapter 2, the author examines changes in subsistence relationships prior to World War II (WWII). It is a wealth of resources, providing first-hand accounts of seasonal subsistence activities. Chapter 3 concentrates on caribou and moose hunts, providing historical information about the herds and use of fences and snares. Simeone makes extensive and consistent use of traditional place names. This is exemplary; surprisingly, this reviewer still

encounters stiff resistance by some anthropologists when referencing and eliciting traditional place names. Chapter 4 highlights fishing, emphasizing the role it played in providing dog food.

Chapter 5 shifts the direction of the work to clan origins. Simeone expresses a confusion common to non-Native researchers regarding this region’s clan interrelatedness and moiety organization. Like almost every other anthropologist who has tackled these complex systems, he is challenged when seeming contradictions arise as his interlocutors present information regarding which moiety their clan is associated with, and thus, how other culturally structured practices are intended to be carried out by specific members. However, Simeone does provide clear descriptions of age-graded rituals and interweaves how the concepts of *injih/ijjih* (i.e., how sacred good or bad luck influences somethings undertaking) pervade all things.

Expanding upon the concept of *injih*, Chapter 6 explores how wealthy men attained leadership if they expressed good hunting luck, showed excellent leadership abilities, conducted exemplary potlatches, and had intimately internalized the knowledge of all extended relations throughout the region. Trading relationships were lifelong and far more important than they became under the market economy; in particular, trade partnerships between unrelated leaders could be used to assuage tensions related to revenge killing requirements through negotiating an apology potlatch.

Chapter 7 summarizes the potlatch ceremony. Forming the core of regional Dene identity, it was one cultural element the Dene refused to abandon during the subsequent political, religious, and linguistic transformations of the twentieth century. However, time has transformed the ceremony, as some elements have been adapted to novel situations and new elements have been adopted. For some Elders already experiencing conservative feelings about the potlatch, these adaptations and changes are stressful. An interesting and novel development is that women command far more important roles in the ceremony than in historical times. The chapter concludes with a retelling of a dramatic funeral potlatch for Chief David, in Tetlin, recorded by Archdeacon Frederick Drane in 1919.

Chapter 8 shifts focus again to the market economy and eventual contact with Euro-Americans. Simeone traces regional effects of the global fur trade to 1780, then up through early trading with the Tlingit, then directly with Hudson Bay Company posts, and later, independent local American traders. In particular, he spends time describing trading merchant John Hajdukovich, traditional relationships with muskrats, and Native perspectives on that era. Chapter 9 details the episcopal missionization and the incorporation of missionary spirituality, lifestyle, and economic and health ideas into daily life and culture in the region. The book provides a history of the government-sponsored missionary schools and details various plans the bishops had for enculturating Natives and protecting them from negative aspects of white culture. Enforcing

community household gardening efforts was symbolically important to this process.

In Chapter 10, Simeone shares Dene perspectives on their historic interactions with Euro-Americans. For example, Dene describe the heavy toll extracted on the local game population by miners and the Chisana gold rush. They also cite uncontrolled wildfires, attributed to white miners, as a big concern and as being different from their own traditional, controlled practice of landscape burning. Simeone also provides an excellent summary of Dene views on the changes brought by the creation of the Tetlin Reservation, the effects of WWII, the opening of the Alaska Canadian Highway, and the creation of airbases at Tanacross and Northway, and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Simeone concludes, in Chapter 11, that the Upper Tanana Dene actively incorporated aspects of Euro-American culture into their own when these were perceived as enhancements. Western culture did not overwhelm the Dene. Rather, each person maintained personal agency and retained core elements of traditional culture. Simeone argues that the ongoing struggle for land and subsistence rights, proximity to white residents, and historical disease epidemics were the largest inhibitors to Dene maintaining cultural integrity.

Four appendices follow. Appendix A contains transcripts of Paul Kirsteater's letters about Healy Lake culture, written to anthropologist Robert McKennan. Appendix B focuses on traditional territories and the importance of place and place names to local history and identity, and details succinct histories of Healy Lake, Ketchumstuk, Dihthaad, Mansfield, Tetlin, Last Tetlin, Northway, and the Upper Chisana/Upper Nabesna people. Appendix C contains receipts of trade goods and creditors' and debtors' lists from Kessler and Hajdukovich. Appendix D contains census records for associated villages.

The book is filled with photographs and illustrations of excellent quality. This reviewer did not notice any printing errors. I noted one point of interest in Figure 6.9 (p. 107), where the identities of Deshen Gaay and Katl'aad Tá's son seem reversed from those in Thomas (2005). Simeone's identification seems to follow that of Lt. Henry T. Allen, who published the original photograph. However, Allen's specific phrasing appears vague (see *An Expedition to the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk Rivers in 1885* by H. T. Allen, 1985). In my view, Simeone's identification is likely correct. The photo depicts Deshen Gaay, Katl'aad Tá, and Katl'aad Tá's son. The man identified as Deshen Gaay (Little Medicine Man) is notably smaller/slighter and unrelated to the other two, while the father and son seem to share more recognizable facial features.

Overall, I enjoy this book. However, Simeone does not discuss any Tanacross or Upper Tanana people's experiences with the mid-century boarding schools. Readers can consult *Legacy of Our Elders*, by Tanana Chiefs Conference, for an account of some of these experiences. Still, *The Upper Tanana Dene* is well written

and appropriate for anyone, academic or lay person. This work will remain a seminal research piece on the subjects included and is worth the price.

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MEMORY AND LANDSCAPE: INDIGNEOUS RESPONSES TO A CHANGING NORTH. Edited by KENNETH L. PRATT and SCOTT A. HEYES. Athabasca, Alberta: Athabasca University of Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781771993159. xviii + 394 p., maps, colour and b&w illus., appendix, notes, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$59.99. Also available as an ebook and pdf.

For many Indigenous peoples, knowledge and memory are embedded in place. These places hold the stories of triumph, tragedy, and lessons learned over countless generations of living close to the land. Whereas, for many other Indigenous peoples, connections with the land have become increasingly severed, for Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, this relationship remains intact and true. These connections continue despite persistent forces of environmental, economic, and cultural change that have acted collectively to unsettle this enduring relationship. Yet it is also true that the current pace and extent of change in the Arctic are challenging Indigenous peoples in new and unforeseen ways. From the current climate crisis to the effects of globalization, Indigenous peoples of the Arctic are being tested in unprecedented ways. While the changes may be novel, and the impacts profound, *Memory and*