

## **“It’s Our Country”: First Nations’ Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67**

Myra Rutherford et Jim Miller

Volume 17, numéro 2, 2006

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/016594ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/016594ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Rutherford, M. & Miller, J. (2006). “It’s Our Country”: First Nations’ Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 17(2), 148–173. <https://doi.org/10.7202/016594ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Cet article relate l'histoire entourant la participation des Autochtones au spectacle national et soutient que le pavillon Indiens du Canada à Expo 67 était unique quant à sa façon de tracer le portrait des relations entre les Autochtones et les nouveaux arrivants. Les historiens ont perçu l'influence du pavillon comme une occasion de sensibiliser les Canadiens non autochtones à la piètre situation des Autochtones et à leur réticence croissante à souffrir en silence. La controverse sur le contenu du pavillon Indiens du Canada et l'argumentation générale à son sujet ont suivi de près la publication du rapport Hawthorn en deux volumes sur les conditions sociales et économiques auxquelles les Premières nations devaient faire face. Au même moment, le gouvernement fédéral entreprenait une série de discussions avec les chefs des Premières nations afin d'élaborer une nouvelle politique les concernant. Parallèlement, rien ne permet d'affirmer que le pavillon Indiens du Canada – quel que soit le succès de scandale dont il a pu profiter – a eu une incidence durable sur les façonneurs d'opinion ou sur les décideurs. Par contre, l'expérience de construire, de gérer et de défendre le pavillon importait tout d'abord aux Premières nations elles-mêmes. Que ce soit une relation de cause à effet ou une coïncidence, la confiance et la fierté récemment découvertes qui étaient à la base de la création du pavillon indien concordaient tout à fait avec le comportement positif des dirigeants politiques autochtones de la fin des années 1960.

## **“It’s Our Country”: First Nations’ Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67**

**MYRA RUTHERDALE AND JIM MILLER**

### ***Abstract***

*This paper traces the history of Aboriginal people’s participation in national spectacle and argues that the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67 was unique in its assertion of the portrayal of Native/Newcomer relations. Historians have interpreted the impact of the Indian Pavilion as an event that awakened non-Native Canadians to both the plight of Aboriginal peoples and their increasing unwillingness to suffer in silence. The controversy over the contents and general argument of the Indian Pavilion followed soon after the release of the two-volume Hawthorn Report on the social and economic conditions First Nations faced, and operated just as the federal government was initiating a series of talks with First Nations leaders to forge a new policy towards First Nations. At the same time, there is little evidence that the Indian Pavilion, whatever succès de scandale it enjoyed, had a lasting impact on public opinion or policymakers. Where the experience of mounting, operating, and defending the Indian Pavilion did matter, however, was with First Nations themselves. Whether causation or coincidence, the newfound confidence and pride that underlay the creation of the Indian Pavilion was completely consistent with the positive demeanour of Aboriginal political leaders from the late 1960s on.*

### ***Résumé***

*Cet article relate l’histoire entourant la participation des Autochtones au spectacle national et soutient que le pavillon Indiens du Canada à Expo 67 était unique quant à sa façon de tracer le portrait des relations entre les Autochtones et les nouveaux arrivants. Les historiens ont perçu l’influence du pavillon comme une occasion de sensibiliser les Canadiens non autochtones à la piètre situation des Autochtones et à leur réticence croissante à souffrir en silence. La controverse sur le contenu du pavillon Indiens du Canada et l’argumentation générale à son sujet ont suivi de près la publication du rapport Hawthorn en deux volumes sur les conditions sociales et économiques auxquelles les Premières nations devaient faire face. Au même moment, le gouvernement fédéral entreprenait une série de discussions avec les chefs des Premières nations afin d’élaborer une nouvelle politique les concernant. Parallèlement,*

*rien de permet d'affirmer que le pavillon Indiens du Canada – quel que soit le succès de scandale dont il a pu profiter – a eu une incidence durable sur les façonneurs d'opinion ou sur les décideurs. Par contre, l'expérience de construire, de gérer et de défendre le pavillon importait tout d'abord aux Premières nations elles-mêmes. Que ce soit une relation de cause à effet ou une coïncidence, la confiance et la fierté récemment découvertes qui étaient à la base de la création du pavillon indien concordaient tout à fait avec le comportement positif des dirigeants politiques autochtones de la fin des années 1960.*

*May your furnishings tell  
The simplicity of our wants and needs.  
May your accoutrements spell  
The multiplicity of our tongues both Old and New.*

From Duke Redbird's poem, "Indian Pavilion."<sup>1</sup>

Recent attention by historians to public celebrations, exhibitions, world fairs, and royal spectacles has revealed much about nation building, colonialism, and Canadian identity. These major events allowed those in control to shape images of the nation and to determine the criteria of acceptable Canadian representations. As Catherine Hall so perceptively states about colonization, there were constant efforts to draw lines “as to who was inside and who was outside the nation or colony, who were subjects and who were citizens, what forms of cultural or political belonging were possible at any given time.”<sup>2</sup> At Expo 1967, Canadians had a tremendous opportunity to express to the world how they imagined themselves as a nation.<sup>3</sup> Part of this “imagined community”

---

The authors are grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their support of our work. We would like to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Rebecca Brain, Paget Code, Jason Reid, and Karen Traverse. We would like to thank Donald B. Smith and the three anonymous readers for reading and commenting on this paper. As well thanks to Joan Sangster for her editorial efforts. Finally, we thank Lawrence Toews, who integrated the images into the text.

- 1 Duke Redbird, “Indian Pavilion,” *The Indian News*, 10, no. 2 (August 1967): 8. This poem was read by Redbird at the meeting between the Indian Affairs Branch and the First Nations representatives when the scale model pavilion was unveiled.
- 2 Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20.
- 3 We are fortunate to have a variety of Masters’ theses upon which to build our analysis. See Richard Gordon Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size: Contested Liberal Commonsense and the Negotiation of ‘Indian Participation’ in the Canadian Centennial Celebrations and Expo ‘67” (M.A. thesis, Queen’s University, 1996); Randal Arthur Rogers, “Man and His World: An Indian, A Secretary and A Queer Child. Expo 67 and the Nation in Canada” (M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 1999); Sonja Macdonald, “Expo 67 Canada’s National Heterotopia: A Study of the Transformative Role of International Exhibitions in Modern Society” (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 2003); Isabelle Massicotte, “The Architecture of Expo 67: National

included Canada's First Nations.<sup>4</sup> The question about where they belonged, in or outside the nation, was one that Expo organizers and Canadians themselves were forced to come to terms with. The purpose of this paper is to discuss First Nations' participation in the Expo project, and to assess whether or not that participation meant an equal partnership with non-Native Canada or whether it was simply another attempt to portray Canadian Aboriginality without really understanding First Nations' histories or their contemporary concerns. The form and content of First Nations' involvement in the creation of the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67, and their general participation in the festivities, we want to suggest, was unique and unprecedented.

Well before the summer of 1967 anticipation of First Nations' participation in both the Centennial celebrations and Expo was met with both a certain level of enthusiasm and some cynicism. James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Chief from Alert Bay in British Columbia made it clear that he was keen to work along with the "white people" to celebrate Canada's one hundredth anniversary of Confederation:

Now this year, my friends, is a big year and next year we are going to celebrate the birthday of Canada all across our land. When they discovered this land there were only Indians living in this beautiful rich country of ours. Now we are going to celebrate with the white people because we can see all the help that came with them from Europe to show us many things. This is what we are going to be thankful for. I think it's a wonderful thing that we are working together and that we join our hands with the non-Indians in Canada to work together for the good.<sup>5</sup>

Sewid looked forward to the year of celebration and tended to be quite optimistic about working together with the Newcomers to Canada. Simon Baker, a fellow British Columbian and leader of the Squamish band, agreed. He was keen to participate and claimed that since "it's our country," First Nations should participate. He found himself involved in planning the Indian Pavilion and in the end felt that "the Indian involvement in Expo went the right way."<sup>6</sup>

Not all Canadian First Nations were quite so enthusiastic. At Vancouver's centennial celebrations the Coast Salish actor and well-known community

---

Identities and the Signs of Time" (M.Arch. thesis, Carleton University, 2003). Because the research on which these theses were based is admirably thorough, and because our focus is not an institutional one dealing with Indian Affairs or Expo itself, we have not duplicated the research in Indian Affairs and Centennial/Expo materials that the authors of these studies completed.

4 The term "imagined community" is borrowed from Benedict Anderson. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

5 James P. Spradley ed., *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Indian* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 265.

6 Verna J. Kirkness ed., *Khot-La-Cha: The Autobiography of Chief Simon Baker* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1994), 116-17.

"IT'S OUR COUNTRY":  
FIRST NATIONS' PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

member, Chief Dan George, read his poem, "Lament for Confederation," to an audience of 35,000 at Empire Stadium. Here he signified his disappointment with Canada's past one hundred years, and wondered what could be celebrated by Canada's First Nations in 1967:

Oh Canada, how can I celebrate with you this Centenary, this hundred years?  
Shall I thank you for the reserves that are left to me of my beautiful forests?  
For the canned fish of my rivers? For the loss of my pride and authority, even  
among my own people? For the lack of my will to fight back? No! I must for-  
get what's past and gone.<sup>7</sup>

He recommended that the best course of action was to look forward to the next one hundred years, which he hoped would produce opportunities for his people to take up positions in Canadian law and government.

Others felt that too often First Nations had been misunderstood. Ethel Brant Monture, a performer, writer, and lecturer from Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario, described for her Centennial Commission presentation the history of her people. She expressed her frustration over the way non-Natives had failed to appreciate the complexities of First Nations' history and culture. She was tired of having Native Canadians portrayed as cardboard characters: "Through the years we have been surveyed by an endless parade of observers. We have been simpered over as the 'dear dead race' by sentimentalists who see us as a romantic hangover. Or again we break out from the printed page as wooden cigar adornments, seldom as human beings intent on holding to a country and an identity. The writer, always of another race, uses the yardstick of his own values and understanding."<sup>8</sup> In Monture's view, constructions of First Nations by outsiders too often suggested a static and passive image which did little to create understanding between Natives and Newcomers.<sup>9</sup> Simpering

---

7 <[http://www.canadahistory.com/sections/documents/1967\\_dan\\_george.htm](http://www.canadahistory.com/sections/documents/1967_dan_george.htm)>. Dan George, "Lament For Confederation," 1967. The "we have nothing to celebrate" idea was commonly expressed by First Nations leaders during 1967. For example, *The Ottawa Citizen* reported Ralph Bruyere of Fort Frances, Ontario, saying that "the Indian hadn't anything to celebrate in the last 100 years but he could look forward to the future." Dave Davidson, "Indians criticize white man's aims," *Ottawa Citizen* (12 January 1967), 32. See also *The Ottawa Citizen* editorial page in which the main cartoon shows two First Nations men sitting at a fire asking "What are WE celebrating this year?" while two White men are dancing in a circle with Expo flags in hand. *Ottawa Citizen* (9 March 1967), 6.

8 Victoria University Library (Toronto), Kathleen Coburn Fonds, Box 009, File 6, Ethel Brant Monture, "The Six Nations of the Grand River."

9 For a fine discussion on Ethel Brant Monture, see Celia Morgan, "Performing for 'Imperial Eyes': Bernice Loft and Ethel Brant Monture, Ontario 1930s-60s," in Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale eds., *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 67-90.

over, surveying, or sentimentalizing Native Canadians did not reveal their quest for equality within Canada. Nor did staging Indian-ness.

This theme of “the spectacle of race” or “performing Indians” has recently been the focus for studies on subjects which range from the Royal tour of 1860 and the Chicago World Fair of 1893 through to tourism at Niagara Falls and Quebec’s tercentenary celebrations.<sup>10</sup> The Prince of Wales’ North American tour of 1860, according to Ian Radforth, changed the nature of monarchical spectacle in Canada: “Because of the vivid (if racist) representations of Indians in 1860, and thanks to the public performances of Native people before the Prince of Wales, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people together fashioned a tradition: majesty in Canada would have an Aboriginal aspect.”<sup>11</sup> Event promoters realized that staging major colonial or national spectacles and attracting tourists to popular destinations required the attendance and participation of First Nations. The nature, extent, and meaning of that participation have prompted historians’ interest. Whether First Nations passively portrayed themselves as a “romantic hangover,” to use Monture’s words, or whether they were able to forward their own agendas and demonstrate that they were “intent on holding to a country and an identity,” while under the gaze of outsiders, is the key question.

- 
- 10 H.V. Nelles, “Historical Pageantry and the ‘Fusion of the Races’ at the Tercentenary of Quebec, 1908,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 29 (November, 1996): 391-415; H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 1999), 55-83. See also Cecilia Morgan, “‘A Wigwam to Westminster’: Performing Mohawk Identity in Imperial Britain, 1890s-1900s,” *Gender and History* 25, no. 2 (August 2003): 319-41. Media representations of Aboriginal Canadians reflected some of these themes of spectacle in print. See, for example, Joan Sangster, “The Beaver as Ideology: Constructing Images of Inuit and Native Life in Post World War II Canada,” *Anthropologica*, forthcoming 2007. The tragic implications of the conflation between race, spectacle, and sport are made clear in Don Morrow and Kevin Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57-58. There is an extensive international literature on the connection between race and spectacle. The most useful perspectives for us are those related to colonization, race, and spectacle, including Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Peter Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions From the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Antoinette Burton, “Making a Spectacle of Empire: Indian Travellers in Fin-de- Siècle London,” *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996): 96-117; Andrew Apter, “On Imperial Spectacle: The Dialectics of Seeing in Colonial Nigeria,” *Comparative Studies In Society and History* 44 (2002): 564-96; Jan Kociumbus, “Performances: Indigenisation and Postcolonial Culture,” in Hsu Ming Teo and Richard White eds., *Cultural History In Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003), 127-41. See also Janet Davis, “Spectacles of South Asia at the American Circus, 1890-1940,” *Visual Anthropology* 6 (1993): 121-38.
- 11 Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 241.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

The gaze of outsiders, argues Karen Dubinsky, was complicated by a White, European, and North American civilized/savage paradox: “they deplored the ‘savages’ in their midst and at the same time made them central characters in their museums, exhibitions, circuses, fairs, and literature.”<sup>12</sup> In her effort to make sense of First Nations’ contributions to these kinds of performances, Paige Raibmon’s often cited study on the Kwakwaka’wakw’s participation in the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 asks why “did Aboriginal people agree to play parts in spectacles that today seem demeaning and objectifying?”<sup>13</sup> Raibmon makes the case that First Nations’ performances such as the ones in Chicago were fraught with ambiguity. The Kwakwaka’wakw risked being accused of being either too “Indian” or too “civilized”: “This sort of double jeopardy, faced by Aboriginal peoples across the continent, resulted from non-Aboriginal society’s success at casting all discussions about Aboriginal peoples along the parallel dichotomies of traditional versus modern, and authentic versus inauthentic.”<sup>14</sup> Caught in this bind the Kwakwaka’wakw performed on the world stage in an effort both to “enact their rejection of assimilationist programs,” and also to demonstrate their desire to take part in the modern labour economy.<sup>15</sup> During both the Chicago fair and the earlier Royal tour, First Nations managed to convey a message beyond what was expected by the organizers. While the Prince of Wales may have been edified by the dances performed in the 1860 Royal tour, he also, through his colonial secretary, was presented with First Nations’ petitions that discussed local grievances. And, while the federal government sent to Chicago a living exhibit showing successfully assimilated First Nations school children in a simulated classroom setting, the Kwakwaka’wakw attracted much more attention with their cannibal dance, and much more annoyance from the federal government too — evidence that things were not always as they appeared.

Remarkably, the federal government’s Indian Affairs Department policy changed very little from the time of the Chicago World’s fair in 1893, until the prelude to Expo 1967. Government officials still expressed the hope even after all those years that staging Indian-ness meant an opportunity to demonstrate the success of their assimilation programs. This paper will argue, however, that, despite the government’s best intentions and wishful thinking, the Indian Pavilion came to symbolize a transitional phase in the history of First Nations’ representation in colonial and national spectacle. Instead of portraying First

---

12 Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment*, 60.

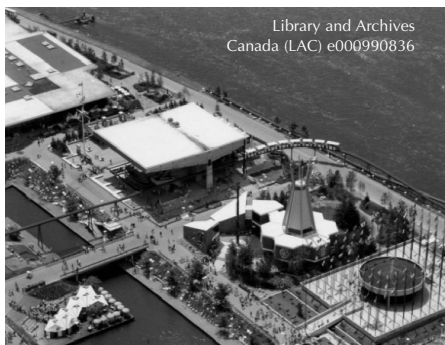
13 Paige Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka’wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World’s Fair,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81 (June 2000): 161.

14 *Ibid.*, 190.

15 *Ibid.*, 173.

Nations in agreement with the policies of the federal government, the interior of the pavilion actually told a story that was meant to provoke the viewers to think about the impact of colonization on First Nations. Never before had Canadian or international visitors been asked to do that. These realistic images were sometimes construed as “bitter,” but at least the “happily ever after” fantasy had been replaced, perhaps only temporarily, by a new discourse which was more fitting for the age.

### Planning For Canada’s “Big Bash” and the Indian Pavilion



In many ways, the very presence of an Indian Pavilion at the 1967 international fair in Montreal, known formally as *Man and His World/ Terre des Hommes*, and more familiarly to Canadians as Expo 67, was unusual. First Nations were one of only two social groups in the Canadian population that had separate representation in their own pavilion — the other was Christians — and thematically the Indian

Pavilion did not fit easily into the upbeat, technology-worshipping mood of most of the fair’s other exhibition spaces. While most other pavilions celebrated technology and modernism as they supported the official fair theme of greater international amity, the Indian Pavilion was an ambivalent blend of traditional culture and modern adaptation to a world dominated by other cultural groups. Finally, the existence of an Expo 67 pavilion showcasing Indians was strange because the planning for it had been fraught with disagreement and conflict between its governmental sponsors and political representatives of the population that the exhibition space was supposed to feature.

Given the political and social context in which planning for Expo 67 took place, it is not surprising that there were tensions between the parties planning the Indian Pavilion. The 1960s in Canada were part of a period of prolonged introspection about Indian policy that had been going on since the immediate postwar years. The coming of peace in 1945 had quickly been followed by the creation of a Joint Parliamentary Committee that sat from 1946-1948 to consider a long overdue revision of the *Indian Act*, the comprehensive legislation that regulated — some would have said dominated — the lives of First Nations. The conclusion of the ambitious policy review of the late 1940s was unimpressive: the major revision of the *Indian Act* in 1951, as historian John Tobias observed, amounted essentially to stripping away the most coercive means of pursuing policy for Indians without changing its underlying assimilative pur-



“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

pose.<sup>16</sup> Through the 1950s and into the sixties the Government of Canada implemented piecemeal changes: championing integrated rather than segregated schooling through the fifties, introducing a widespread system of welfare on reserves in the sixties, and implicitly acknowledging its policy bankruptcy by authorizing an extensive canvass of Indians’ social and economic conditions — the Hawthorn Commission — that reported in 1966-67. In other words, as Canada moved to include First Nations in its presentations to the world at Expo 67, the federal government was casting about for a new policy formulation to regulate relations. This initiative led in the later 1960s to a series of consultations between government and First Nations leadership, and in 1969 to the infamous White Paper, an abortive policy proposal that stimulated extensive First Nations political activity.

There were developments on the First Nations side of the relationship in this period that also complicated the planning for an Indian Pavilion. Since 1961, two of Canada’s three Aboriginal groups, Indians and Métis, had been combined in a national political body known as the National Indian Council (NIC). The Centennial Commission, the government-appointed body that oversaw the planning for centenary celebrations in 1967, parried a number of overtures from the NIC that would have allowed the Aboriginal organization to arrange centennial celebrations the way it wanted.<sup>17</sup> In the process of fending off the NIC, however, government officials realized that some provision had to be made for First Nations representation at Expo 67, the world’s fair that would be central to the centennial celebration. It was in part because of pressure from the NIC that the federal government decided to have Indians represented in a “private” pavilion, rather than included in the government’s own building at Expo.<sup>18</sup> The point of intersection of Indian Affairs and Indian representatives, a flashpoint in fact, was the nine-member Indian Advisory Committee (IAC) that the government set up to help shape plans for the pavilion. (The IAC operated in addition to the Indian Affairs Branch’s Expo Task Force, a small group of its own officials.) In typical Indian Affairs fashion, the government picked the members of the committee without consultation and arranged for a person of whom it approved to serve as chair. According to one of the participants in the process, George Manuel, the Indian members of the advisory committee effectively commandeered its deliberations, revising its first agenda and helping to engineer the replacement of the Indian Affairs’ chair with one the First Nations participants favoured.<sup>19</sup>

---

16 John L. Tobias, “Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada’s Indian Policy,” J.R. Miller, ed., *Sweet Promises: A Reader in Indian-White Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 139-40.

17 Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” Chapter Two.

18 Sonja Macdonald, “Expo 67 Canada’s National Heterotopia,” 141.

19 George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills, ON: Collier Macmillan, 1974), 171-2.

Although the Indian members were able to make such changes, their part-time role limited their effectiveness over the long haul. So far as the national organization was concerned, the NIC's ability to advance First Nations' interests in the design process was undermined by internal problems. Differences among leaders, particularly a bitter feud between NIC President William Wuttunee and Kahn-Tineta Horn, whom the NIC named "Indian Princess" in 1963 and stripped of her title the following year, severely weakened the NIC in 1964. The differences were both ideological and personal in nature: Horn, an assertive Mohawk sovereigntist, and Wuttunee, a lawyer inclined to be accommodating to government, could not have been more different in their approach. In addition, the two clearly did not like each other. These divisions, combined with uneasiness in relations between First Nations — status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty — and Métis leaders to cause disagreements that would culminate in 1968 in the subdivision of the NIC by mutual agreement into the National Indian Brotherhood and the Canadian Métis Society. The Métis members of the NIC leadership were not prominent in the NIC-Indian Affairs dealings that preceded a decision on what form First Nations' representation at Expo would take. What these difficulties meant was that First Nations' representations to the process of developing the Indian Pavilion were not as strong as they might have been.

This situation provided the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) with significant room to manoeuvre in relation to Expo planning in the critical years from 1965 to 1967. Indian Affairs knew what it wanted: a venue in which to present a positive image of its policies and their results. An approach that emphasized public relations had been a part of Indian Affairs strategy since the late nineteenth century, a ploy that had stood it in good stead politically even if it did little to improve conditions for First Nations. It moved sensibly when it held a series of four regional meetings to elicit First Nations' views on what should go into the pavilion and when it invited a group of regionally representative First Nations artists to propose artwork for the pavilion. The Indigenous artists were selected by the Cultural Affairs Section of Indian Affairs, whose head, novelist Yves Thériault, took the view that the personnel of his office were well qualified to decide who the best artists were.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the decision to use Indian artifacts from the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), though it appears insensitive to twenty-first-century observers, guaranteed an efficient approach.

However, on the important issues of the pavilion's design and selection of the carver for a totem pole to stand outside it, Indian Affairs officials acted in a high-handed manner. The branch's choice for a pavilion design was presented at length, accompanied by a complete model of the structure, to a meeting of

---

20 Kicksee, "Scaled Down to Size," 172.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

the advisory committee at which the selected artists’ work was also unveiled. According to George Manuel, the artists’ work was represented simply by “pictures ... pinned to the walls around the room,” and accompanied by “the artist’s own statement of his story line in cold, formal typewriter face on plain white paper.” After each artist spoke to his proposed work, Indian Affairs officials spent “over an hour” showing the committee “coloured slides of a model pavilion building,” ending the performance with the unveiling of the scale model that occupied a large table near the centre of the room. Recognizing manipulation when they experienced it, the First Nations representatives were mainly silent when their views were invited, with one of them finally saying, “Well, since you have already spent a quarter of a million dollars to get this far you may as well go ahead. None of our works are worth a fraction of that.”<sup>21</sup>

The approach Indian Affairs took to commissioning a totem pole was almost as clumsy. First, IAB officials, apparently without consultation with British Columbia First Nations, though they did solicit the opinion of a leading anthropologist, decided on Bill Reid, the Haida jewellery maker and carver who by this time had established himself as a premier artist. Next, the IAB attempted to get endorsement of its choice from George Manuel, a British Columbia member of the advisory committee and an employee of the branch. Manuel refused and argued that known carvers should be invited to bid for the work. As it turned out, Reid spurned the commission in a caustic letter that pointed out that the generic pole that IAB was requesting was not possible because pole styles varied according to the community from which the carver came. “If you hire a Haida carver you get a Haida pole. If you hire a Kwakwiltl carver you get a Kwakwiltl pole. There are no Tschimsian carvers. If you want a bastard pole, draw your own conclusions.”<sup>22</sup> In the event, after a bidding process that involved British Columbia carvers, the Kwagiulth father-and-son team of Henry and Tony Hunt was selected to carve a generic totem pole for less than half the amount that Reid had demanded.<sup>23</sup>

It would be inaccurate and unfair to suggest that the federal government’s approach to Expo 67 was completely insensitive to Aboriginal people. In fact, Aboriginal iconography figured prominently in both the fair’s and the federal government’s contributions to the exposition. The official mascot of the fair was Ookpik, an Arctic owl reminiscent of many figures in Inuit prints, while the meeting place in the Canadian government pavilion was called Katimivik, an Inuit word for gathering place. In *La Toundra*, a restaurant in the Canadian pavil-

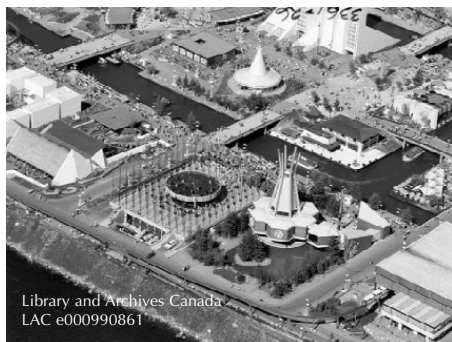
---

21 Manuel and Posluns, *Fourth World*, 172-4. According to Manuel’s recollection, he also spoke, saying that he ought to denounce “this whole piece of conniving,” but would not because the artists had approved it. See also Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 167, 169.

22 Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” Appendix B, Bill Reid to Eric Mansfield, 12 April 1966.

23 Manuel and Posluns, *Fourth World*, 177; Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 169-72.

ion site, Inuit art was a prominent part of the decoration.<sup>24</sup> The various pavilions sometimes featured Aboriginal peoples. In the “Growth of Canada” section of the federal government’s pavilion, a variety of Aboriginal groups appeared, although they were located in relation to the arrival of Europeans, rather than depicted as existing both before and after colonization began. And the People Tree in Katimavik did not feature Aboriginal people at all.<sup>25</sup> During the height of the fair organizers held two events that highlighted First Nations. One was a flotilla of Mi’kmaq canoes that paddled from Nova Scotia to Montreal to commemorate a treaty between the Mi’kmaq and Mohawk of Kahnawake. The paddlers arrived three days behind schedule — “‘Indians never get lost,’ [said] one of the perspiring paddlers, ‘Confused for a few days — maybe. But never lost,’ he smiled” — to a warm welcome.<sup>26</sup> On 4 August, Expo held an elaborate “Indians of Canada Day,” designed to be “the most ambitious special day yet planned for Expo,” featuring Governor General Roland Michener, which was unfortunately marred by driving rain that kept crowds away.<sup>27</sup>



The placement of pavilions spoke eloquently of how mainstream Canada, or at least its political representatives, viewed the role of First Nations in Canadian society. Indeed, the placement of pavilions in what is often called the Canada complex or compound was most interesting. The federal government site, the largest, was closest to Ontario’s,

with the Western Canada and Eastern Canada pavilions being somewhat removed. Quebec was still further off and approached by a causeway over water: a moat came to mind. Most striking of all these locations, however, was that of the Indians of Canada: it was “located at the end of the arc of the Canadian compound, separated from the Canadian Government Pavilion by the Atlantic Provinces, and beside the United Nations and the Christian Pavilions.”<sup>28</sup> Whether intentionally or not, the site symbolized the place of First Nations in 1960s Canada: of but not in the country.

24 Gary Miedema, “For Canada’s Sake: The re-envisioning of Canada and the re-structuring of public religion in the 1960s” (Ph.D. diss., Queen’s University, 2000), 242-3.

25 Macdonald, “Expo 67,” 130, 136.

26 *Montreal Star* (20 July 1967).

27 *Ibid.* (5 August 1967).

28 Macdonald, “Expo 67,” 142. There is also a useful, if somewhat overwrought, discussion of the site and location of pavilions in Rogers, “Man and His World: An Indian, a Secretary and a Queer Child,” 118-24.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

The same ambivalence about First Nations also occurred in the storyline and illustrative material in the Indian Pavilion itself. The Cultural Affairs Section of the Indian Affairs Branch convened the artists it had selected at a symposium on Aboriginal art in the summer of 1965. The artists submitted sketches of potential artworks for the pavilion, with selections being made by an assessment committee controlled by the branch.<sup>29</sup> As it turned out, however, the flawed process produced an excellent group of First Nations artists and some memorable, and controversial, works of art. The artists included Nuu chah nulth George Clutesi, Plains Cree Noel Wuttunee, Blood Gerald Tailfeathers, Dakota Ross Woods, Dene Alex Janvier, Six Nations Tom Hill, Anicinabe Norval Morrisseau, Odawa Francis Kagige, and Jean-Marie Gros-Louis of Quebec.<sup>30</sup> Tom Hill remembers the initial meeting of this group as one of the main highlights for him during the preparations for Expo, since it was the first time that First Nations artists from across Canada came together and shared their concerns.<sup>31</sup> George Clutesi took the lead as the “wise older man” in the group. Clutesi, Woods, Hill, Wuttunee, Janvier, and Tailfeathers created the large exterior works that decorated the outside walls of the pavilion. Some of their creations delivered a strong First Nations’ message, sometimes subtly, sometimes more aggressively. Morrisseau’s *Earth Mother and Her Children* was dedicated to his “Grandfather Potan Onanakonagas and to our Ancestors.” Alex Janvier, who signed his contribution with both his name and his treaty number, called his *The Unpredictable East* and must have been pleased to see it placed prominently close to the entrance to the pavilion. However, sometime after the raising of the Hunts’ totem pole in February 1967, Janvier was persuaded to rename it *Beaver Crossing Indian Colours*, and it was relocated near the back of the building.<sup>32</sup> The pavilion itself might have been principally Indian Affairs’ creation, but the artwork on it articulated more authentically First Nations’ points of view.

The same uncertainty of message was found in the displays and text inside the Indian Pavilion. Indian Affairs had the British-born Robert Majoribanks, who served as public relations officer for its Expo Task Force, prepare the outline of the pavilion exhibit’s text. Majoribanks and his wife conducted four regional consultations with First Nations people to develop the storyline, ensuring that the exhibition outline at least in part reflected Canadian Indians’

---

29 Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 172-3.

30 Sherry Brydon, “The Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67,” *American Indian Art Magazine* 22, no. 3 (1997): 56; *Montreal Star* (28 April 1967), Special Expo Magazine, 66; Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *Annual Report 1966-67*. <[http://www.collectionscanada.ca/indianaffairs/index\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/indianaffairs/index_e.html)>, (viewed ). George Clutesi was paid \$6,000 for his mural. See “Indian painter, writer records ancient fables,” *Ottawa Citizen* (30 June 1967), 32.

31 Tom Hill interview, 2 May 2006.

32 Brydon, “Indians of Canada Pavilion,” 58.

perceptions and messages. After the regional consultations, Majoribanks composed a storyline “intended to represent the Indians’ answers to the question: ‘What do you want to tell the people of Canada and the World when they come to Expo in 1967?’ The storyline conveys the substance of the Indians’ ideas, and not the form in which they will be expressed.”<sup>33</sup> In addition, in 1965 and 1966 organizers of the pavilion traveled across Canada to hold consultations about the development of the storyline with First Nations in their own communities. The final text was reviewed and approved by the Indian Advisory Council. The hybrid process used to develop the message inside the Indian Pavilion perhaps explains why the central theme — “the struggle of the Indian to accept a modern technological society with its mass culture while preserving his identity, his personal integrity, and the moral and spiritual values of his fathers”<sup>34</sup> — was strikingly qualified in many places.

The pavilion balanced the theme of Indians “joining the mainstream” with assertions of First Nations’ pride, grievance, and entitlement. One glossy account of the fair published soon after the event, said that the Indian Pavilion first impressed visitors with the large totem pole that stood outside, and then barraged them with criticism. “The 65-foot totem pole is not the only thing that makes the visitor feel small. If he is a ‘paleface’, the tour of the pavilion is akin to running the gauntlet. The documents, drawings, works of art and photographs of contemporary conditions are accompanied by unkind comments about what the white man has done to the original Canadians.”<sup>35</sup> It was noteworthy that the generally positive summary of the pavilion that appeared in the April 1967 *Indian News* did not quote any of the text from the interior of the building.<sup>36</sup>

The pavilion’s reception area featured statements such as “When the White Man Came We Welcomed Him With Love” and it was made clear that the “great explorers of Canada traveled in Indian canoes, wore Indian snow-shoes, ate Indian food, lived in Indian houses. They could not have lived or moved without Indian friends.” The section that dealt with the long period of alliance and warfare that dominated the eighteenth century was the occasion to tell visitors: “Wars and peace treaties deprived us of our land. The White Man fought each other for our land and we were embroiled in the White Man’s wars. The

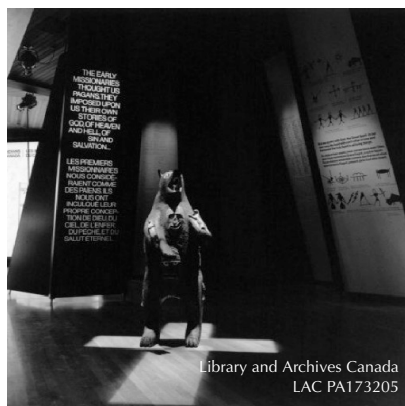
33 Manuel and Posluns, *Fourth World*, 176; *Indians of Canada Pavilion – Expo 67* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1968), “Introduction” by Robert Marjoribanks, 19 April 1966. We are grateful to Donald B. Smith, who generously provided a photocopy of the outline.

34 Quoted in Brydon, “Indians of Canada Pavilion,” 59.

35 *Expo 67* (Toronto: T. Nelson, 1968), 118. The best accounts of the interior of the pavilion, both of which move systematically from one section to the next, are Macdonald, “Expo 67,” 144-6 and Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 3-6 and 187-96. Also useful is the short film *Indian Memento; Indians of Canada Pavilion – Expo 67* (National Film Board of Canada, 1967).

36 *The Indian News* (April 1967), 1, 4-5.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67



wars ended in treaties and our lands passed into the White Man’s Hands. Many Indians feel our fathers were betrayed.” The section on missionaries and the churches was both a written and pictorial indictment. “The early missionaries thought us pagans. They imposed upon us their own stories of God, or Heaven and Hell, of sin and salvation. But we spoke with God — the Great Spirit — in our own way. We lived with each other in love and honored the holy spirit in all living things.”

In this section, a Delaware spirit bear was transfixed in a beam of light projected as a cross. The message was subtle, but clear. Finally, the section on education was hard-hitting: “Dick and Jane in the storybook are strangers to an Indian boy. An Indian child begins school by learning a foreign tongue. The sun and the moon mark passing time in the Indian home. At school, minutes are important and we jump to the bell. Many precious childhood hours are spent in a bus going to a distant school and coming home again.”

The Indian Affairs Branch got its message across in the various sections of the pavilion, too. In an area near the end of the pathway through the pavilion visitors were assured that First Nations in Canada were winning “the struggle of the Indian to accept a modern technological society.” A display of photographs that showed First Nations people in a variety of modern work situations was accompanied by text that read: “Our people have succeeded in many kinds of work — as hunters and trappers, fishers and farmers, craftsmen, tradesmen, merchants, doctors, lawyers, judges ....” However, this upbeat tracing of the evolution of Indians’ roles in the workplace ended with the decidedly downbeat observation, “and still, too many Indians are poor, sick, cold and hungry.”<sup>37</sup> It was the sort of ambivalence that manifested itself throughout the Indian Pavilion.

The First Nations personnel associated with the site tended to deliver a muted message. The commissioner for the pavilion was Andrew Delisle, a Mohawk and former elected grand chief from Kahnawake, who worked closely with the Cultural Affairs Section and Expo Task Force of the Indian Affairs Branch.<sup>38</sup> He was given to fulsome statements about the degree to which First Nations had been consulted in the creation of the pavilion and its contents, and on one occasion he

37 John Gray, “Pavilion Reflects Bitterness,” *Montreal Star* (5 April 1967); Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 188-94; *Indian Memento*.

38 Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 161. Delisle had also served on the NIC’s Expo 67 Committee along with Kahn-Tineta Horn and others. He had especially bad relations with Horn, who was also from Kahnawake. See *Montreal Star* (19 May 1967).

got himself into trouble with his home community by suggesting publicly that the Mohawk might give a small island that formed part of the reserve to Expo. At Kahnawake, where memories of losing a part of the their reserve to the higher water levels that came with the St. Lawrence Seaway in the late 1950s still rangled, the offer was met with anger, and Delisle had to back down. The selection of a Mohawk peace force from Kahnawake to oversee the site was uncontroversial, the guardians acting more as greeters than as peacekeepers.

Also revealing of the motivations behind the Indian Pavilion were the thirteen young people, all First Nations women, who acted as “hostesses,” in effect guides and interpreters, to help visitors. The planning for the hostesses was mainly the work of Yves Thériault, the head of the Cultural Affairs Section of Indian Affairs. He advocated that they be selected by a nation-wide competition, given detailed training, and outfitted in modern suits or uniforms designed for the occasion. His reasoning was clear: “The reason for this is that we are going to present a damned respectful image of the Canadian Indian, and ... these girls will be the living concept of this Indian ... we should spend a great deal of attention towards making these hostesses the very embodiment of what an Indian can be.”<sup>39</sup> Indian Affairs recruited and evaluated 220 women by means of advertisements placed on reserves and in First Nations newspapers for “treaty Indians,” but, the final selection of fourteen (later reduced by one) was made by the Indian Advisory Council.<sup>40</sup>

Judging by the personal characteristics of the successful applicants — “all pretty and personable women between 18 and 25” according to the *Montreal Star*<sup>41</sup> — “an Indian” could be modern and plugged into the mainstream economy. The eleven selectees, whom Indian Affairs featured in their newspaper *The Indian News*, represented the Mi’kmaq, Montagnais, Ojibwa, Mohawk, Plains Cree, Blackfoot, Interior Salish, Haisla, and Haida, providing representation from coast to coast. Of the ten whose occupations were mentioned five were skilled office workers or technicians, two were clerks or receptionists, two were students in junior college and a nursing program, and one, an accountant, was a professional. *The Indian News* did not feature Doreen Stevenson, “a young and lovely Indian from Winnipeg with a university degree in commercial art,” who “is also a professional go-go girl.”<sup>42</sup> Ms. Stevenson was sometimes — as in the

39 Quoted in Kicksee, “Scaled Down to Size,” 175.

40 One of the women selected, Doreen Stevenson of Manitoba, who was also known by her stage name Barbara Anne, was later removed by Indian Affairs staff.

41 *Montreal Star* (6 April 1967).

42 The *Montreal Star* (4 January 1967) described Doreen Stevenson, the hostess from Manitoba, as “a lithe five-foot-seven, and her 128 pounds are done up in 36-23-37 contours. She began dancing professionally under the name Barbara Anne last May when she turned 21 ... Barbara, 21, will miss the go-go circuit, where she had been paid up to \$300 a week for gyrating to the frantic modern sounds.” Ms. Stevenson is identified by her “stage” name in the illustration of the hostesses.



“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67



illustration — referred to as Barbara, presumably because her stage name was Barbara Anne. Five of the group members were described explicitly as being able to speak, or in one case to understand, their own people’s language, one spoke French, and the others only English. As a group, these young women conformed more closely to Yves Thériault’s desiderata than they did to young First Nations females as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

The thirteen hostesses went through careful training for four months in Montreal. Like the women hosts in other Expo pavilions, they received instruction in “makeup, grooming, posture and walking. There is a language class for girls whose French or English is rusty,” as well as “an intensive course in Indian culture, its past, present and future in Canada.” Once a week an official from the IAB in Ottawa traveled to Montreal to give the Indian hostesses instruction in “how to handle such crises as the heckler or a pest — ‘You’re bound to have one at some time this summer.’”<sup>44</sup> At work they were

43 *The Indian News* (April 1967), 6-7.

44 *Montreal Star* (6 April 1967). Indian Affairs described the four-month regimen thus: “This was a three-phase program based on language training, personality development and Indian culture. Branch staff were involved in a number of courses and programs ranging from Letter and Report Writing to Educational Leadership.” Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Report 1966-67* online. In contrast, female hosts at the Ontario Pavilion apparently received only an intensive

dressed in stylish tunic-style dresses with cap-like hats and dark brown gloves.<sup>45</sup>

The origins, organization, contents, and constructed image of the Indian Pavilion that the hostesses were to interpret for visitors blended both the Indian Affairs Branch's desire to present the First Nations as accommodating themselves to the modern, technocratic world that Expo 67 celebrated, and the First Nations' wish to use the pavilion as a platform on which to show the world their view of themselves and the history of their interactions with non-Native Canada. Both parties managed to include leading elements of their conception of the relationship in a single space through a subtle blending of messages in artwork, text, and personnel. That First Nations, who did not have material resources or a strong political base from which to strive for their objectives, did as well as they did was remarkable. Lest there be any doubt that they significantly influenced the pavilion's message, it is only necessary to contemplate whether the IAB, left to its own devices, would have portrayed the role of warfare, treaties, Christian missions, and Euro-Canadian schooling as the pavilion ultimately did. In fairness it should be noted that the short National Film Board presentation that Indian Affairs sponsored included a great deal of critical text from the pavilion.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the sometimes discordant notes in the interior displays at the pavilion, its final message was surprisingly pacific and non-confrontational. The last section that visitors toured before they stepped out into the rest of the fair had an imitation fire and an invitation to sit and contemplate the future of the Indians of Canada. It suggested a hybrid, accommodating future: "Ancient wisdom and modern science — two keys to the Indian's future."

Some of my people see in the dark coals a world where the Indian is a half-remembered thing and the ways of the old men are forgotten. But I see another vision. I see an Indian, tall and strong in the pride of his heritage. He stands with your sons, a man among men. He is different, as you and I are different, and perhaps it will always be so. But, in the Indian way, we have many gifts to share. Our skills and strengths — yours and mine. The ancient wisdom of our fathers — yours and mine. The love of God, the Great Spirit — yours and mine.<sup>47</sup>

---

weekend of training in February, and then had on-the-job training in the days immediately after Expo opened to the public. Email from Laird Saunderson, 7 June 2006, and Eva Innes, 10 June 2006. We are grateful to Donald B. Smith, himself a former Ontario Pavilion host, for putting us in contact with Laird Saunderson and Eva Innes.

45 There is a good depiction of Okanagan hostess Janice Lawrence, both before she left home and in Montreal, in *Indian Memento*.

46 *Indian Memento*.

47 Kicksee, "Scaled Down to Size," 193-4.

"IT'S OUR COUNTRY":  
FIRST NATIONS' PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

The future of the Indians of Canada was obviously to be one shared with non-Indians on a basis of mutual respect.

### Visitors

The summer of 1967 was the summer of travel in Canada. Everyone seemed to be on the road. Several international dignitaries traveled great distances to be at the opening of Expo, or to see it during mid-summer. Children hopped into the back seats of their family car to head off to Montreal with their parents. Young Jesuits from various communities in Ontario canoed to Montreal in an effort to re-enact the travels of early Jesuit missionaries.<sup>48</sup> They were destined for the Christian pavilion. Clara Linklater Tizya, who grew up in the Vuntut Gwitchin community of Old Crow, Yukon, was selected by the National Indian Advisory Board to represent "Indian women" in Canada at the opening ceremonies of the Indian pavilion.<sup>49</sup> One government-supported centennial project allowed for one hundred Inuit children, one for every year of Confederation, to travel in July from Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit) to Ottawa, and from there to Montreal for a tour of Expo.<sup>50</sup> Expo became a pilgrimage, a "coming-of-age party" that Canadians did not want to miss.<sup>51</sup>

First Nations and non-Native Canadian visitors who ate Native food at *La Toundra* (muktuk, arctic char, and buffalo steak were popular), and those who meandered into the Indian Pavilion, responded to their new experiences in a variety of ways. Some felt proud and others were ashamed. Some were angry and others were not at all surprised by what they encountered. Three million people visited the Indian Pavilion during the six months it was open. The range of reaction was recorded in newspapers, but most often these reports offered the opinions of either prominent community members or those of the journalists themselves, rather than 'average' Canadian First Nations or Newcomers. There were, of course, some exceptions. For example, the children from Frobisher Bay generated much interest. They spent much of their day at Expo trying to find drinks to stay cool, and the girls in the group were delighted that the wash-rooms featured "automatic vending machines selling jewellery." The *Ottawa Citizen* reporter concluded, "They have a great yen for jewellery so it took much persuasion to get them away from the machines."<sup>52</sup> Two other Inuit boys,

---

48 "Jesuits become voyageurs," *Ottawa Citizen* (22 April 1967), 19. Another group of men traveled by canoe from Rocky Mountain, Alberta to Montreal, in order to reenact the voyageur experience. See "67 voyageur enacts history," *Ottawa Citizen* (10 August 1967), 27.

49 "Going to Expo Indian Pavilion," *Ottawa Citizen* (30 January 1967), 25. The Clara Tizya fonds are held at the Yukon Archives.

50 "100 Eskimo children Hillcrest HS project," *Ottawa Citizen* (10 March 1967), 47.

51 "What Expo really is: a coming-of-age party," *Maclean's* 80, no. 1 (January 1967): 4.

52 Maureen Johnson, "The Eskimo way of seeing Expo," *Ottawa Citizen* (25 July 1967), 23.

Davidee Angmalik and Pauloosie Keyoota, from Broughton Island, who traveled to Expo with the Boy Scouts of Canada, were delighted to recognize the word Katimavik, and claimed, smilingly, to favour the Man in his Polar Region exhibit over any other. This was where the Inuit were best represented. According to the *Montreal Star*, however, they were in “instant awe,” of the entire fair especially when they saw its size.<sup>53</sup>

First Nations’ opinions of Expo and the Indian Pavilion varied. The popular singer, Buffy Sainte-Marie, offered her analysis of the Indian Pavilion in a post-visit press conference in which she first reflected on her own social location, having just returned to Montreal from her home reserve in Saskatchewan: “Somewhere along the line I began wondering what I was doing as a singer. Sure, I’m making fortunes and perhaps I’m contributing to understanding between our two peoples but basically I’m performing the familiar Indian role of providing entertainment for white men.”<sup>54</sup> As she visited the Indian Pavilion, she was struck by the fact that “too many of our people think we have to beg when all they have to do is demand what is rightfully theirs.” She felt the Indian Pavilion itself was more “serious than most, more like a classroom, but that is what is needed.” In the end, she believed that the pavilion “could provide more of a shock than it does,” and she wished it had been “more forcible.”<sup>55</sup> The director of the National Congress of American Indians, John Belindo, who visited the pavilion in May, declared that he was “impressed with the display.” Nonetheless, he was left with the impression that “Canadian Indians may be 50 to 75 years behind us in our relations with the federal government.”<sup>56</sup> Another American visitor, the well-known Seneca who was host of a long-running Philadelphia-based children’s television show, Chief Traynor Ora Halftown, was enthusiastic about the pavilion: “It is a true reflection of the Indian’s spirit of dignity.” He reiterated Buffy Sainte-Marie’s view that First Nations should not feel beholden to anyone: “They never begged, nor asked for anything not included in the peace treaties. They just wanted the terms of these treaties to be adhered to.”<sup>57</sup>

None of the First Nations observers seemed at all surprised or shocked by what they saw: in fact, some of them wanted the pavilion’s displays to confront the issues more aggressively. For example, George Manuel, one of the early

---

53 Brian McKenna, “‘Instant Awe’ As Eskimo Boys Air-sled Into Expo,” *Montreal Star* (13 June 1967), 52. Several groups of First Nations children appear to have traveled together to Expo, and sometimes combined their trips with a visit to Ottawa. See “Mohawks visit Parliament Hill,” *Ottawa Citizen* (1 September 1967), 17.

54 Helen Rochester, “‘Head Is White, Heart Is Cree’ Singer Seeks Sure Self,” *Montreal Star* (13 June 1967), 8.

55 *Ibid.*, 9.

56 “Pavilion Praised,” *Montreal Star* (19 May 1967), 47.

57 Bill Fox, “Missionary Chief explains the true Indian,” *Ottawa Citizen* (6 October 1967), 17.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

organizers, argued that the pavilion had been “scaled down to size,” meaning that in his view Indian Affairs had imposed its vision, and ensured that the pavilion was less forceful than it could have been. Contrary to Manuel, Russell Moses of the Six Nations Delaware, who was the pavilion’s public relations officer, thought the Canadian public would be shocked by what they saw. According to the *Montreal Star*’s John Gray, Moses believed the pavilion went beyond the “staged Indian” phase: “In the eyes of Mr. Moses, the pavilion is the first time that Canada’s Indians have had a chance to express their true feelings ... their own feelings, expressed by themselves. ‘We’ve had too much of this television type stuff. We are the guys who are always loosing.’ [*sic*] Mr. Moses acknowledged that the pavilion may raise some hackles in government circles: ‘A great many people are going to have their eyes opened.’”<sup>58</sup> As the public relations officer, Moses accentuated the positive, but he was not sheepish. He felt that something had changed in the telling of the Canadian narrative. The traditional portrayal of First Nations in these kinds of public displays was being challenged for the first time. One former guide recalled that the mood in the Indian Pavilion was quiet, as visitors read the text on the walls and made their way through the presentation at a measured rate.<sup>59</sup>

John Gray reflected well the mainstream media’s reaction to the pavilion. He thought it represented “brutal frankness,” and warned Canadians not to expect “sweetness and pride of national achievement” when they stepped inside this pavilion: “If the Federal Government thought that the Canadian Indian pavilion at Expo would be a grateful tribute to the Great White Fathers, there will be many raised eyebrows in Ottawa. The pavilion is a bitter and resentful denunciation of the Indian’s place in Canada today and the ills he has suffered.”<sup>60</sup> Other journalists appeared surprised by the realistic portrayal of the plight of First Nations. Ben Malkin at *The Ottawa Citizen* thought that the Indian pavilion constituted a “bitter commentary.” He congratulated the department of Indian Affairs for allowing “the Indians to tell their own story in their own way,” and felt that this “bitterness with the past is justified.” He was struck by the panel on education which made clear that “[t]he white man’s school is an alien land for an Indian child ... Dick and Jane in the story book are strangers to an Indian boy.”<sup>61</sup>

The Dick and Jane motif was picked up by Pierre Berton, who claimed in *Maclean’s* to be utterly satisfied with Expo and the questions asked by the Indian pavilion, which he felt “faces us with cold truth (why do we teach Dick and Jane to kids who live in hovels?).”<sup>62</sup> Charles Lynch claimed that the “Indians” had

---

58 John Gray, “Pavilion Reflects Bitterness,” *Montreal Star* (5 April 1967), 5.

59 Velma Robinson (Rankin River, Ontario) interview, 23 May 2006.

60 Gray, “Pavilion Reflects Bitterness,” 5.

61 Ben Malkin, “Our Indians at Expo relate a bitter story,” *Ottawa Citizen* (10 April 1967), 6.

62 Pierre Berton, “By God, we did it! And generally we did it well,” *Maclean’s* (June 1967): 3.

much to be angry about and chided the DIA bureaucrats who he believed had a hand in the display: "I confess to the suspicion that our Indians had some help from angry young men in government in staging their exhibit. Certainly the dirty deal they have had is eloquently set forth."<sup>63</sup> The media commentators elsewhere tended to agree, reflecting a general indictment of the federal government. As one Guelph *Mercury* report noted, "white Canadians" ought to see this as an opportunity to have their consciousness raised:

It serves the federal government — and the rest of us — right .... We are surprised some government busybody has not complained about the exposure of a Canadian failure to the rest of the world. But it is encouraging that the Indians themselves have used this opportunity in this way to dramatize their condition. It is an indication of a new spirit of determination and independence that has for too long been missing. The Indian pavilion at Expo ought to challenge the conscience of every white Canadian who sees it.<sup>64</sup>

The general consensus in the press at least was that the First Nations had finally had an opportunity to tell their side of the story, and it was a version that they had not been allowed to tell so publicly until then. Media reports on the pavilion served to remind Canadians that all was not well. Journalists did not shy away from the issues that were revealed. And they did not tend to reinforce the "performative Indian," yet they seemed to enjoy reminding Canadians, both Native and non-Native that the government was negligent.

Historian Olive Dickason argued that the pavilion represented a chance for Amerindians to "publicly" express "for the first time on a national scale, dissatisfaction with their lot."<sup>65</sup> This idea that the Indian Pavilion was the "first time" became a popular narrative itself that is still repeated.

As a young man fresh from the Ontario College of Art, Tom Hill was impressed with just how much voice First Nations were given at Expo. It did not seem so long ago, he recalled, that he had asked his grandfather why, when he went to the St. Louis World's fair of 1904 with his lacrosse team, he was dressed in feathers and head dress. His grandfather answered by saying, "because, that is what the audience wanted." Hill felt that Expo 67 marked a departure from this constructed image: "I can remember saying that up to Expo we were always the quaint little folk. Here at Expo there was something a lot more. The pavilion caused a great sensation."<sup>66</sup>

Certainly, the pavilion had caused a sensation. At least in the short term there was the sense that First Nations people had been consulted about how

---

63 Charles Lynch, "Easy Rambles around Expo," *Ottawa Citizen* (13 May 1967), 7.

64 Guelph *Mercury* (11 April 1967); in Kicksee, "Scaled Down to Size," 196.

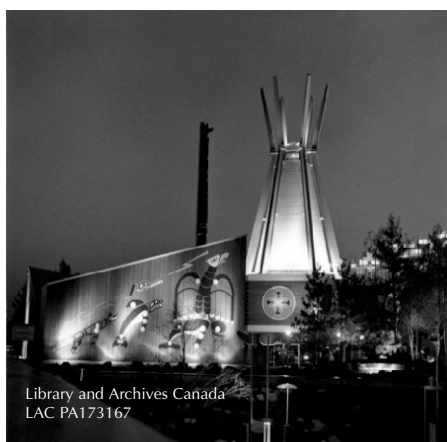
65 Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 383.

66 Tom Hill interview, 2 May 2006.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

they wanted to appear at Expo, a feeling that Aboriginal people were heard. The portrayal of the impact of colonization on Native children, adults, and communities had been expressed in photographs and print. While the pavilion represented a new phase in “staging Indian-ness,” one could also read in the display a desire to move forward, a hopefulness that was expressed by elders such as Chief Dan George and shared by George Clutesi and many of the artists who contributed.

## Conclusion



The life of the Indian Pavilion after the exposition closed in October 1967 was disheartening. Because the cost of moving the building to another location, even one within 80 kilometres of Montreal, would have been \$380,000, none of the First Nations organizations that initially expressed an interest in acquiring it closed the deal, once they learned what it would cost to move it. Indian Affairs offered the building and totem pole to the City of Montreal, which did operate it for a time. It saw use by a number

of Native organizations for some years.<sup>67</sup> Over time, however, its condition deteriorated, and eventually it was demolished in the late 1980s. Sadly, except for the Hunts’ totem pole, none of the original artwork, including the exterior panels, survived. Whether they were taken away by unknown people during the period that the pavilion was used or simply trashed during demolition is unknown. Given that some of the artists who contributed their work were among the best young Indian artists in the country at the time, the outcome was a great loss.

In 1967 a perceptive observer of Expo and its Indian Pavilion would have noted that the First Nations’ representation offered a different message than did the fair as a whole. Overall, Expo 67 celebrated the marvels that technological innovation was producing, while simultaneously it suggested through its chosen themes and official message that humankind was learning how to live productively with a measure of harmony. The overtones of good relations and

<sup>67</sup> *The Indian News* (December 1967), 4; Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Report 1967-1968*; Brydon, “Indians of Canada Pavilion,” 61. See also, “What’s next for Expo site?” *Ottawa Citizen* (31 October 1967), 6.

embracing the modern were absent from the Indian Pavilion. While the message of the First Nations exhibit did contain suggestions that Native and non-Native Canadians had learned to live together, it also conveyed clearly that harmony had come thanks largely to the generosity of the Indigenous peoples and that the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country had suffered enormously from non-Native Canadians' insensitivity, intolerance, and selfishness. Still, as the closing section of the Indian Pavilion also showed clearly, First Nations still looked — or, perhaps, hoped — for better relations and a more just Canada in the future.

Observers looking back from the early twenty-first century find it harder to gauge the long-term impact of the pavilion. For one of the pavilion hostesses, it was transformative: "When I was young I always wanted to see beyond the horizon. We didn't know what university was, and when I found out I wanted to go. Expo was the springboard of my life."<sup>68</sup> The Indian Affairs Branch's official newspaper observed in an understated way that the pavilion "has been rated, nationally and internationally, as one of the most thought-provoking on the Expo site." More than 3,000,000 of Expo's approximately 50,000,000 (many multiple visits) visitors toured the Indian Pavilion, among them Queen Elizabeth; Indian Affairs reported, "It has had newspaper, television, radio and motion picture coverage in Italy, Japan, Australia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia and Russia, to name just a few."<sup>69</sup> Scholarly evaluation of the Indian Pavilion's longer term impact has been divided. Pierre Berton opined that it "was one of the most striking at the Expo site, and also, I think (though no one mentioned it at the time), the one whose influence was the most lasting, for it literally changed the attitudes of many who visited it."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, historian Jack Bumsted wrote an article, "The Birthday Party," in a popular history magazine and never mentioned the Indian Pavilion at all.<sup>71</sup> What are we to make of the Indian Pavilion's significance?

It is tempting, of course, to situate and interpret the pavilion in a dynamic 1960s continuum in which First Nations advanced noticeably on the public stage, and in which the state of First Nations figured intermittently in the minds of the Canadian public. The long history in North America of placing Aboriginality on public display was an uneven road of "staging Indian-ness." We can place this particular exhibit along a broad continuum that moves from the late nineteenth-century government's desire to exhibit the success of assimilation, to Canada's Centennial decade when there was more Aboriginal assertiveness in display and performance spectacle. We can also contextualize the political changes of the 1960s.

68 Addy Tabac (Fort Good Hope), telephone interview, 9 May 2006.

69 *The Indian News* (December 1967), 4; Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Report 1967-1968*.

70 Pierre Berton, *1967: The Last Good Year* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1997), 146.

71 J.M. Bumsted, "The Birthday Party," *The Beaver* 76, no. 2 (1996): 4-15.



“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

The decade began with the last phases of another joint parliamentary committee’s inquiry into the *Indian Act* and the situation of First Nations. The middle of the decade, 1966-1967, was the time when the exhaustive social science survey, *The Hawthorn Report*, was released. *Hawthorn* revealed that the conditions in which First Nations lived and tried to educate and care for their children were often appalling. The revelations of *Hawthorn* reignited an effort in Indian Affairs to look for a new policy, a process in which it had been engaged on and off since the end of the Second World War. Specifically, the Liberal government of L.B. Pearson initiated an extensive consultation with First Nations leaders that stretched over 1968-1969, and ended abortively in the incendiary White Paper of 1969. The federal proposal, in turn, incited First Nations across the country to organize quickly to lobby the federal government against the White Paper, and the government announced within a year that it would suspend implementation of the new policy. The dramatic and successful campaign against the White Paper solidified the reputation of the fledgling National Indian Brotherhood, and helped to launch it into a productive period of activity in the 1970s. With Expo 67 coming amidst these events, it is tempting to see the Indian Pavilion as both an effect and a cause of the process of change. However, there is little evidence that the pavilion was either greatly influenced by preceding events, such as release of *The Hawthorn Report*, or in turn shaped later developments, such as those that culminated in the NIB-led resistance to the White Paper in 1969-1970.

Similarly, there is no evidence of continuity between the First Nations leaders who were active in the planning of the pavilion, especially through the Indian Advisory Council or, more generally, the National Indian Council, and those who spearheaded the militant and effective response to the federal government’s misguided White Paper of 1969. George Manuel was a member of the Indian Advisory Council prior to Expo, and in the 1970s he played a leading role as president of the National Indian Brotherhood. His memoir, *The Fourth World*, perceptively draws out the similarity between the bureaucratic high-handedness that typified Indian Affairs’ handling of the pavilion and the preparation of the 1969 White Paper,<sup>72</sup> but Manuel himself was not much involved in the 1969-1970 protests.<sup>73</sup> Those reactions, which were led mainly by provincial Indian organizations, especially the Indian Association of Alberta, similarly do not illustrate a connection between the pavilion and the later campaign. Harold Cardinal, the Alberta Cree who most fully embodied the resistance, did not refer to the exhibition at Expo 67 in his brilliant polemical work, *The Unjust Society*, that emerged from the backlash against the White

---

72 Manuel and Posluns, *The Fourth World*, 171.

73 Sally M. Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), passim, but see especially Chapter Seven.

Paper.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, William Wuttunee, a Plains Cree defender of the White Paper policy, who had been deeply involved in the National Indian Council, also did not link the Indian Pavilion to later developments.<sup>75</sup> In short, like the movement from the *Hawthorn Report* to Expo, there is little evidence of linkage between the Indian Pavilion and the White Paper and the response that it evoked.

If there is little evidence of continuity among events of the 1960s that affected First Nations and the general public, how does one explain the absence of connections? If the Indian Pavilion is not significant as a link in a chain of connected events as First Nations were moving towards prominence on the national stage, does it reveal some other tendency of Canadian historical development?

The short-lived impact that the pavilion appears to have had is reminiscent of a number of other similar phenomena in twentieth-century relations between First Nations and the non-Native Canadian majority. As Scott Sheffield, John Tobias, and others have explained, at the end of the Second World War it appeared briefly that the Canadian Parliament was poised to move dramatically to overhaul the foundation of state-First Nations relations, the *Indian Act*.<sup>76</sup> Canadians, according to one Member of Parliament, were human rights conscious and aware both of the contributions First Nations combatants had made and of the problems on the reserves from which they came. However, when the smoke — or haze? — of bureaucratic and parliamentary scrutiny had cleared by 1951, what remained was a revised *Indian Act* that reverted to the largely non-coercive methods of the original 1876 *Indian Act*, but retained the central assimilative purpose of earlier legislation.<sup>77</sup> From a later era, one could as easily point to crises such as Oka in 1990 or the monumental *Final Report* of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in November 1996. In spite of enormous press attention while both events were transpiring, and, generally speaking, eliciting widespread sympathy from the members of the public who interested themselves in the events, when both upheavals are viewed from the perspective of a decade or decade and a half, little has changed that can be attributed to the events. The underlying land problem at Oka is unresolved, and relations between the Mohawk of Kanesatake and non-Native Quebecers gen-

---

74 Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969) refers to the *Hawthorn Report* (55-8), but not to the Indian Pavilion.

75 William I.C. Wuttunee, *Ruffled Feathers: Indians in Canadian Society* (Calgary: Bell Books, 1971).

76 Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), chapters four to six; Tobias, "An Outline History," 139; J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 325-6.

77 Tobias, "An Outline History," 139-40.

“IT’S OUR COUNTRY”:  
FIRST NATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 67

erally are still poor. RCAP’s central recommendations on governance were ignored by the Government of Canada in its January 1998 response, *Gathering Strength*.<sup>78</sup>

It might well be that the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67 is simply one more instance where high-profile First Nations issues proved to have little staying power — no “legs,” as journalists might put it. If so, the evanescent nature of these phenomena reveals a deep-seated indifference, or lack of engagement, on the part of Canadians at large with First Nations issues. In other words, the historical significance of the Indian Pavilion is the same as the message its exhibits conveyed: the root of “the Indian problem” is non-Indians.

\* \* \*

**MYRA RUTHERDALE** is an assistant professor of history at York University. She is particularly interested in Native/Newcomer relations in Canadian history. She is the author of *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* and co-editor with Katie Pickles of *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past*.

**MYRA RUTHERDALE** est professeure adjointe d’histoire à l’Université York. Elle s’intéresse particulièrement aux relations entre Autochtones et nouveaux arrivants dans l’histoire du Canada. Elle a écrit *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field*, et a corédigé avec Katie Pickles l’ouvrage *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past*.

**JIM MILLER** is a Professor of History and the Canada Research Chair in Native-Newcomer Relations at the University of Saskatchewan. His teaching and research focus on the history of relations between indigenous and immigrant peoples in Canada; this interest has resulted in the publication of many articles and books.

**JIM MILLER** est professeur d’histoire et titulaire d’une chaire de recherche du Canada en relations entre Autochtones et nouveaux arrivants, à l’Université de Saskatchewan. Son enseignement et ses recherches portent principalement sur l’histoire des relations entre peuples indigènes et immigrants au Canada; il a publié à ce sujet de nombreux livres et articles.

---

<sup>78</sup> Canada, *Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1998).