

SCIENCE SCAN

ETHNOGRAPHY



PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY/HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Several members of the Kwakwaka'wakw delegation at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas wrote a groundbreaking book about the indigenous people in 1897.

A 'Box' full of surprises about an anthropologist, his complex legacy and a Native Canadian tribe

Packed with illustrations and descriptions of the habits, rituals and songs of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest, Franz Boas's 1897 book "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians" was a groundbreaking work in a new field. Boas, a pioneering anthropologist, had produced an ethnography that would become influential in the discipline he helped create.

So how does it hold up 122 years after its publication?

"The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt and the Making of Anthropology," at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in New York, helps piece together a complicated legacy.

The exhibition, organized by Bard and the U'mista Cultural Centre in British Columbia, uses Boas's own metaphor of his book as a kind of box in which the history and culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw people — a group of Native Canadians who live along the Pacific Northwest near and on Vancouver Island — could be stored.

Although the book was one of the first to attempt a complete portrait of an indigenous people's rituals and knowledge, much of Boas's fieldwork took place among the Kwakwaka'wakw who were living on display at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. (They were paid to live in a re-created village on the fairgrounds where they essen-

The Story Box

Bard Graduate Center Gallery
bit.ly/storyboxbard

tially became a living exhibit. For the performers, it was a deal worth making — at their "village" at the fair, they could perform songs and dances that had been banned by Canadian government officials who disapproved of their traditions.)

And Boas also co-wrote the book with George Hunt, a Native Canadian who was a linguist and ethnologist. Hunt's contributions, however, were not fully acknowledged.

The exhibition was created with the help of Hunt's great-granddaughter, artist Corrinne Hunt, and supplements Boas's work while highlighting the culture it portrayed. It features ceremonial Kwakwaka'wakw objects, photos, drawings and manuscripts. Also included are unpublished revisions by Hunt, who wanted to correct the book but whose additions were never published.

A larger effort to preserve Boas and Hunt's work and combine archival material with their texts is also underway at Bard.

"The Story Box" runs until July 7. If you cannot visit, take a look at the exhibit's website at bit.ly/storyboxbard. It has artifact photos and in-depth details about the book's history.

— Erin Blakemore



HARVARD UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES/FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM PAPERS

George Hunt, a Native Canadian who was also a linguist and ethnologist. Hunt co-wrote the 1897 book with Boas, but his contribution was not fully acknowledged until recent times.