



MY LIFE IN RECORDING  
CANADIAN-INDIAN  
FOLK-LORE

BY DR. MARIUS C. BARBEAU

Canadian Ethno-Musicologist



FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP., N. Y. C.

FG 3502



FOLKWAYS FG 3502

# MY LIFE IN RECORDING CANADIAN-INDIAN FOLK-LORE

BY DR. MARIUS C. BARBEAU

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FG 3502

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 57-714

©1957 FOLKWAYS RECORDS AND SERVICE CORP.  
701 SEVENTH AVE., N.Y.C., U.S.A.



FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FG 3502

© 1957 Folkways Records and Service Corp., 701 Seventh Ave., NYC USA



MY LIFE  
IN RECORDING  
CANADIAN-INDIAN  
FOLK-LORE

BY DR. MARIUS C. BARBEAU

Canadian Ethno-Musicologist





TRALAHAETH, AN EAGLE CHIEF  
OF THE NASS RIVER, IN 1927  
RECORDING ON THE EDISON.



Published  
during the tenure  
of a  
Guggenheim Fellowship 1956-57

MY LIFE WITH INDIAN SONGS

by  
MARIUS BARBEAU

Indian songs came to me early in life. French-Canadian born near Quebec City as I was, I saw my first Indians at the age of ten. They were Kickapoos from the North West touring the province, in covered wagons and giving entertainments for a living along the way. A rumour went about that parents should be watchful of their children lest they fell captives to the hands of the strange nomads. The circus-like Red Men and Women gave a show with their horses in the college hall, where I sat among rows of other boys of my size. The Kickapoos sang and danced, and we marveled at their tricks and jugglery; they swallowed swords and vomited flames and sawdust. They belonged to the same class as that other wanderer, a white man, stopping with a tamed muzzled bear in the villages and wrestling with the animal while he sang Taraboomdehay! Most children in America must have seen their first savages in the same way. It all belonged to the days of Barnum!

My next experience with Indians left me a much deeper impression. When I was twelve, an evening programme at the college was given by a Huron priest named Prosper Vincent, from Indian Lorette a few miles north of Quebec City. He stepped on to the stage and chanted Weniya ..., stooping forward and shading his brow with a hand, pretending to be on the war path looking for ambushed enemies. This was the dance of Discovery, reminiscent of the colonial past and story books with gruesome tales that we enjoyed reading. After the dance of Discovery came the quick stamping on the trail in pursuit, the attack with the tomahawk, and the capture, the raising of the scalp, with tunes each suited to the picturesque action: Yanikoya, Alokowi hayanine, Wekayawaninonhe, and many others.

In spite of his wearing a cassock, the Huron priest had the born gift to confer deep impressions upon his audience; his personality, brown complexion, eagle eye and aquiline nose bore the stamp of a native race and of Indian Days gone by. His dramatic motions and incisive tunes were bound to leave their mark in my memory. But he belonged to a vanishing race, and most of his compatriots -- a few hundred only, whose ancestors dwelt in Ontario -- were half breeds with pale complexion. And the ways of their ancestors had been mostly given up. Prosper Vincent, the priest -- the only one of his race ever ordained -- was among the very last to remember songs and tales of his red ancestors. And he was already beyond his sixties, and in poor health. The chief of his tribe at Lorette, Maurice Bastien, a manufacturer of moccasins and snowshoes, was a friend of my father, Charles Barbeau, of Ste. Marie, Beauce, forty miles away, and why was he? Because both were horsemen and keen on horse races. The small French-Canadian horses, of a stock descendant of Arabian forebearers from the stables of Louis XIV, were fast speeders and sturdy quadrupeds, which the painters have always been fond of depicting, especially when speeding on the spring ice or the winter snow. Bastien and my father would talk for hours to each other about the feats of their stallions in the ring. But, had I not known that Maurice Bastien was an Indian chief, I would never have suspected his origin. No scalping song with him, only stories of horse racing and, to boot, of werewolves, witches, and the like. These I was to come back and collect from him at a later date.



A FALSE FACE FROM OHSWEKEN, ONTARIO



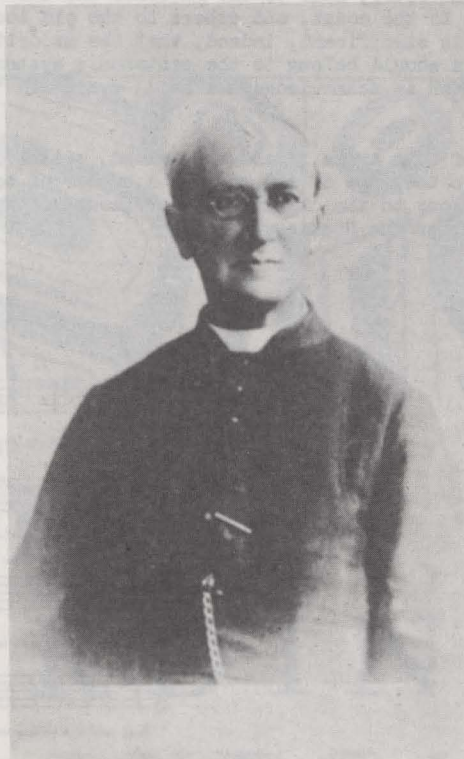
Then my studies took me away from my college and university surroundings. When grown up, I went away to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, there to study-- not the classics and the law as I had heretofore -- but Anthropology, that is, the story of primitive man, including the Red Man of America. How to explain this volte-face at the age of twenty-three? Perhaps was it due to persistent impressions of boyhood days, of Kickapoos, of Huron scalp dance, of hair-raising horse races, werewolves, witches, and other tales? The colonial wars of French Canada, the attacks of the Iroquois and the Indian captivities have left a trace deep down in the soul of present day white men who have never seen an Indian in their life.

Be it as it may, I took my degrees in Anthropology at Oxford in England and at the Sorbonne, Paris, and came back home to become one of the two pioneer anthropologists at the National Museum of Canada. The study of the Canadian Indians as a calling was a novelty in Canada, but not in the United States. Where to begin for us, -- my colleague was Edward Sapir, born in Philadelphia and trained at Columbia University, under Franz Boas -- in such an immense field? Sapir went out on fieldwork among the Nootkas of Vancouver Island; and I, in spite of having presented a thesis at Oxford on the Social Organization of the North Pacific Coast, chose to go and study the Huron Indians or what was left of them near my birthplace.

The first one I met on the Indian reserve of Lorette was chief Maurice Bastien, my father's friend. And I was disappointed. He looked and spoke much like a white man! With him I studied moccasins, moose hair embroidery, leggings, snowshoes, birchbark canoes. But what about the Huron priest Prosper Vincent who had sung Weniya and other war songs? The old man, I learned, stayed in a Home for the aged across the St. Lawrence river, at Lévis. Soon I called upon him, with my notebooks and standard Edison Phonograph and plenty of blank wax cylinders. He quickly grasped whom I was, although he had never heard of me before. He called me "Mon cher petit Marius", as if I had been his nephew, born close to his heart. Interested and generous, he gazed at me with warm dark eyes and seemed to be an eagle who, because of old age, had lost most of his feathers.

Weniya, Yanikoya, Wetsiyane, and other Huron songs soon began to roll forth and he recorded on the museum phonograph for their ultimate preservation. The singer had learned them when a boy on the reserve, particularly from an old uncle named Zacharie Tehoriolen (see his portrait here), before going to the Séminaire de Québec where he became a priest. Although talented, friendly and beloved and quite handsome, he had proven no model as a priest. The bishop then had decided not to ordain any other seminarist belonging to the red breed, for Prosper Vincent had been too unsteady and nomadic in his ways. He was fit only (being eloquent) for preaching in the pulpit, and for giving entertainments in colleges. The friendship which developed between us in the short while of recording songs and tales was to be brief, for he died soon after. But I was to remember him fondly throughout my career.

Of the 80 Huron and Algonkin songs recorded at Lorette in the spring of 1911, nearly 70 were from abbé Prosper Vincent, and the rest from a few other members of the tribe, in particular Caroline Groslois, who survived until the 1930's -- the last singer and moose hair embroiderer of the tribe. I transcribed some of these songs from the phonograph and learned them at once; these are as given here. A few others were written down from the phonograph and prepared



THE LATE ABBÉ PROSPER VINCENT, HURON PRIEST OF LORETTE.



ZACHARIE TEHORIOLLEN AND HIS SON CYPRIEN, HURONS OF LORETTE, ABOUT 1845, FROM WHOM ABBÉ VINCENT HAD LEARNED HIS SONGS. IN A PORTRAIT BY TEHORIOLLEN.



by Margaret Sargent, musicologist at the National Museum, and published under the title of "Seven songs from Lorette" (Canadian Number of *The Journal of American Folklore*, April-June, 1950, pp. 175-180). The others are still awaiting transcription on the original Edison wax records, in the collections of the National Museum, at Ottawa.

The number of Huron songs and dances recorded at Lorette was greatly increased soon afterwards. But elsewhere, my field work for the National Museum took me to the Detroit River, where a few descendants of the widely-scattered Wyandots still survived. These had quite lost their identity in a densely-populated area. But I learned there that in the Indian territories of Oklahoma survived a band of Wyandots, some of whom still spoke their Iroquian dialect. I spent two seasons there among them, at the Quapaw Government Agency, in 1911 and 1912. The harvest of folk songs, tales, and the knowledge I acquired of the language proved rich and worthwhile. In songs alone, the total recorded was 470. The leading singers who contributed most numbers were old folk who spoke only the Wyandot dialect: Smith Nichols, Catherine Johnson, and John Kayraho. Out of a band of over 300 members of the Wyandot tribe, only about 20 spoke the language, which has now been extinct for several decades. The songs were given under the following titles: stump dances, green corn, naming songs, adoption, snake and lion dances (ritual), war, medicine, moccasin or peach-stone game, ustura or big turtle, false-face or shuck, peace pipe, chicken, puzzle song for children, raven dance, flute song, duck stump dance, old men's, Buffalo, gambling, etc.

In the season of 1912, nearly 300 Cayuga and Seneca were recorded -- also some dances of neighboring tribes: Shawnee, Delaware -- from an excellent singer named James Logan, who performed to the accompaniment of a turtle shell, a gourd rattle or a water drum. Other singers, with smaller repertory were Andy Ball, Henry Stand, and John Kayraho. Their songs were: sun or war dances, naming songs, green corn dance, strawberry and blackberry dances, hoghead, fish, bear dances, drinking songs, white dog sacrifice, etc.

A further set of Iroquois songs was recorded much later, in 1949, at Oshweken, Ontario, with the singers Ezekiel Hill, Joseph Williams, Alec General and Red-jacket. Their songs belong mostly to the long series of the Ohkiwey or Death chants.

The songs and dances of the Hurons, Wyandots, and Iroquois are usually strung together in series of ten to fifteen items. Most of them are variants of the same themes, and when words are used a few there are crystallizing the subject as a whole. For instance, each stanza of the Snake, the Lion or Kenrich, and the Ohkiwey dances contain two or three words. The Ohkiwey alone consists of more than a hundred songs slightly different from one another. Other songs especially for stump dances, usually rest upon meaningless burdens, and are monotonous.

Quite different and more tuneful are the Indian songs of the Canadian Rockies and the North Pacific Coast. Distinct from each other, they contain words. Sometimes they consist of several stanzas, and are frequently lyrical, with beautiful tunes and lofty poems. Occasionally the voices of animals or birds are imitated; Indians excell in mimicry

An excellent opportunity offered to collect the best of them when a delegation of elderly chiefs of the Thompson River, Shuswap, and Lillooet bands of southern British Columbia arrived in Ottawa on business with the Federal Government and were available for me at the Museum for a good part of January 1912. A set of songs and dances were taken down on the phonograph and in full text with translation and explanation. In spite of these being the best ever recorded in Canada, they still remain unpublished, except for a very few which I have transcribed. To give an idea of this repertory on wax records, here are the names



JOHN LARAHNITZ, A GITKSAN SINGER WITH COSTUME AND SKIN DRUM, OF THE SKEENA RIVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, IN 1924.



AN IROQUOIS SINGER FROM OHSWEKEN, ONTARIO



of the singers: Tetlenitsa of Spences Bridge or Thompson River upper Salish (the majority of the songs were from him, the best singer and informant of the group); Roipelst, Yopatko, and Xaiseeka, also of the same nation; Ignace Jacob, a Lillooet, of Pemberton Meadows; and Chief Francois, Paddy Ususelst, Njo, and others, of the lower Shuswap.

The songs of this inland Salish group were entitled: First group, songs referring to animal spirits or snakes-- Uncle Coyote, Fox and Coyote, Prairie Chicken, Loon, Fawn, Eel, Ptarmigan, the Bear and the Twins, Lizard, Owl, Horse, Sockeye Salmon. Second group, lyric songs: "Emilie", song of Loneliness, Farewell, Cradle in a dream song, Praying dance, Song of Longing, Drinking, Home-going, Women's lyric, Grass dance, Berry-picking, Love and Lament, Weeping song, Love song, Longing song of Chief Casimir. Third group, war songs, ritual songs or medicine songs, sweat-house chants. Fourth group, gambling or lahal songs, dancing, riding songs.

James Teir, a Shetland Islander settled in the Thompson River country and married to an Indian woman, acted as interpreter, for, having learned the language, he enjoyed the confidence of his adopted friends. Besides he had already done ethnographic work among them for Dr. Franz Boas; and a monograph by him had appeared in the Jesup ... Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History. So it was agreed that he should go on collecting more songs of the same type after he had gone back. The result is one of the most comprehensive collections at the National Museum, that is, 143 Interior Salish songs and dances.

From 1920 I collected 187 songs of the Tsimsyan in two areas, the upper Skenna River and the Nass River of Northern British Columbia. These songs still conjure up vivid tribal recollections. They express the soul of a bold and restless people and arouse emotions seated deep in the lives of the singers.<sup>1</sup>

Hunters sang implorations over slain bears and mountain goats to appease their spirits. Medicine men clamored their incantations and loudly beat their drums. Warriors intoned hymns of victory, or chanted their grief at the thought of fallen brothers. Peace was sealed to the tune of Haida Kawagyenees. The chiefs in the feast house boasted of their prestige, invested hereditary names upon new owners, and brought out their grandchildren, while the guests acknowledged their assent in song. Privately owned lullabies and dirges greeted new-born children and sped the departed on the threshold of death. Lyric songs were the solace of many lonely and love-lorn souls, whether in the wooded valleys or the open mountain solitudes. Women gathering wild berries were fond of singing, as were the men who trod the paths of their trap lines. Singing reached out for greater things and larger spaces. It was the outcry of transient emotions in terms of power and permanence. Hence the importance and the diversity.

While the songs of the Tsimsyan resemble those of their neighbors, they differ on the whole from the dance tunes of the nations east of the Rockies. They are vastly more varied and interesting by comparison. Their scales are often different, more exotic to our ear; their melodic range more extensive and colorful; their themes, much richer. Their rhythms are also complex and tantalizing. The custom of the Tsimsyan and their neighbors of singing to words rather than to meaningless syllables, as other Indians frequently do, opens wide vistas of historical and literary interest. Their songs are valuable for their texts no less than for their melodies. They belong to a world rather apart in America, a world that is reminiscent of Asia and the Pacific. The continued study of our large museum collections of songs from the Northwest Coast will undoubtedly lead to comparisons with similar materials from eastern Asia. It is likely that the genetic relations already hinted at on other grounds between the tribes on both sides of Bering Sea will meet with further confirmation.

Meanwhile, it is evident that the songs of the present collection are not homogeneous in type. Like the Tsimsyan themselves, they are made up of two or three contributory elements that have not yet merged beyond recognition. The coast tribes have songs and ways of singing that differ markedly from those of the interior and northern tribes. The Tahltan and Carrier of the headwaters of the Stikine and the Skenna, for instance, are among the most musical tribes of the continent; the Interior Salish of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, no less.<sup>2</sup>

The mountain songs are swaying and ethereal. The voices of the singers, especially the women, are beautifully lofty and lyrical in character. Like the songs of Mongolia and Siberia, they are imbued with color; color and expressiveness of the voice and an essential feature of native singing on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. These songs often rise to a high pitch and vibrate with longing and passion; then they descend from the heights like cascades of sweet and remote sound. The Whites at Hazelton, whenever they heard these songs on the hillsides, call them "love songs" or "mountain songs". Yvette Guilbert, the famous French "diseuse", who heard some of our phonograph records, exclaimed, "I feel as if I stood on a mountain top and looked at the deep blue sky!"

The coast songs, on the other hand, are not so musical or attractive. Their compass is far more restricted. They are usually sombre and brooding. The voices of the singers, no less colorful, are deep and throaty, sometimes harsh. The function of singing at the edge of the sea is largely confined to rites and ceremonies. The majority of these songs are the exclusive property of definite clans and families. Like crests or coats-of-arms they are heirlooms. They almost never changed hands in the past. If someone challenged their ownership, quarrels would follow and, failing compensation, bloodshed.

The coast songs differed from those of the interior and so did their respective drums. The coast drum was made of a thin slab of red cedar bent into a large square box and was suspended from the roof of the house by a cord which fanned out at the bottom like the fingers of a hand. The interior drum, like the Siberian drum, consisted of the dressed skin of a moose, beaver or caribou, stretched on a slender wooden frame, round and perfectly even, and was held in the singer's left hand and beaten with a drumstick. The sound of the coast drum was cavernous and muffled; that of the interior, clear, tuneful, vibrant.

1 Seventy-five of these songs have been published under the name of "Tsimsyan Songs" in Publications of the American Ethnological Society, Edited by Marian W. Smith, J.J. Augustin Publisher, New York. Ca. 1942

2 For an analysis of Salish music see Herzog, 1949.





Our Tsimshyan collection includes songs of both types-- coast and interior--as the people themselves trace back their ancestry, some to the interior and the north, some to the coast, and others to the old local stock. It is significant, indeed, that the majority of the songs should belong to the pentatonic system-- a system which is acknowledged as being typically Mongolian.

The drums of both areas, coast and inland, are used according to the type of the songs. A number of songs, besides, belong to the class familiar elsewhere in America east of the Rockies.

3) "The five-tone scale is the one scale commonly employed in practice and constitutes the basis of all music in the Indo-Chinese countries." (The Art of Music, a Comprehensive Library of Information... Editor, Daniel Gregory Mason, in 14 Vol. Vol. I, p. 46.)

*♩ = 132*  
 Drum  $\frac{6}{8}$

Tem-tista angya law - wil-da raw den lun-yau hay — kas-

ya-raet a hal-gya al-kway-dyu skee-way awaw-tsee na-ha-nay ay-hay-ayfer

nay hanay - ha-lae-it-nay ranoe — mox-ee na-hay — gyal-wil-

tahl we-hee mee-tem an tauren ayhaw - tee nay hae yay he-ho-he-ye-hee nay

*Mm. = 104*  
 Drum (18)

ya... ha... hi — i-wa-den — wi-ken — du — ho —

ya... ha... ha — yu-na — wi-he... no — ho — a...

hi-ya-ho-ya-ni — a-hi-ya-ho-ya-ni hi-yo-ha-ya-ne hi-yo-

Variation

ha-ya-ne — wi... ne — ha — ya-he-na — ye-wa-ke —

ya — wa — ni — ken — no — ho —

*♩ = 88*  
 Drum  $\frac{2}{4}$

A-guhl-arn ha-gwee-hae ha-guhl-arn ha-gwee-hae ha-guhl-arn

etc...

- ha-gwee --- hae ha-guhl-arn ha-gwee-hae ha-guhl-arn ha-gwee-

- hae ha-guhl-arn ha-gwee-hae ha-guhl-arn ha-gwee-hae

- tee-wil sagun weelu-wil-hae tee-wil sagun - wee-lu-wil-hae ma-gan-ush ee-lee-

Sae wee-gwee-gwee-ush tee-lip-gwa-hu-wae-lam ksem-git-ha-ten-gye a-nae-ig-wae...