The Life and Times of James Willard Schultz (Apikuni).

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Warren Hanna here gives us a splendid, complete biography of James Willard Schultz (1859-1947), a not-so-well-known but excellent writer on the American West. In 1877, at seventeen, Schultz arrived in Montana Territory and “began to live intimately the life of an Indian [among the Blackfeet] almost from the day he arrived in the West. He ate their food, slept in their lodges, and began to learn the difficult Blackfoot language; he eventually was able not only to speak it well but to think as the Indians did. He began to see the world through the eyes of the Blackfeet. Though his skin was obviously white, his soul had become that of a red man” (p. 282). He fell in love with the country as well, was given a Blackfeet name (Apikuni), married a Blackfeet woman who bore him a son, and spent the rest of his life in his beloved West. During his first six Blackfeet years he often hunted and went on the warpath with his tribal brothers. He witnessed and participated in the near-extinction of the buffalo.

Schultz came to know well the beautiful country that later was made into Glacier National Park, largely because of his writing, and he became a prominent hunting guide and fighter for Indian rights. He gradually became a writer, first of articles, then of thirty-seven books published between 1907 and 1940—works that added considerably to the ethnic and adventure lore of the Rocky Mountain West. His first book, My Life as an Indian, is a classic white-Indian romance of the late nineteenth century West. Three other books of his best articles and stories (available from the University of Oklahoma Press) are: Many Strange Characters: Montana Frontier Tales; Blackfeet and Buffalo: Memories of Life Among the Indians; and Why Gone Those Times? (Blackfoot Tales). Another, Bear Chief’s War Shirt, was completed and edited by W. W. Betts and published in 1983 by Mountain Press of Missoula, Montana.

Warren Hanna writes a clear, carefully researched story of Schultz’s life, giving the full picture of the man, his works, and the substories of his three wives and one son, Lone Wolf, a noted artist. Hanna is excellent at finding the good in the man and his works while not overlooking the errors, sins, exaggerations and memory lapses. Admittedly much of the detail of Schultz’s life is unromantic anticlimax after his exciting Blackfeet youth and early years of marriage. (Is not everyone’s?) Yet J. W. Schultz was the skillful storyteller who did the most to put into English (in his own works and his retelling of others’ stories to George B. Grinnell) the true experience of the
much-maligned Blackfeet people. His books show us that a sympathetic heart and an eager mind can penetrate an alien culture and become a living and constructive part of it.

For readers unfamiliar with Schultz, Hanna opens a large trove of good reading. For confirmed Schultz fans, Hanna has written the definitive biography of their favorite Montana writer.

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