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Review of Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians and Indian Agriculture in America

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Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians. By Gilbert L. Wilson. New introduction by Jeffrey R. Hanson. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987. Reprint (1917). Photographs, illustrations. xxiii + 129 pp. \$7.95.

Indian Agriculture in America. By R. Douglas Hurt. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987. Illustrations, preface, notes, index. xiii + 290 pp. \$29.95.

The study of Native American agriculture has been revived recently by Gary Nabhan's *Gathering the Desert*, which concerns Southwestern Indian agriculture. The two books reviewed here deal more with plains agriculture. Wilson's book is an account of Hidatsa gardening practice in the nineteenth century as told to Wilson by Buffalo Bird Woman, a lady who continued to practice traditional ways long after most Hidatsa had adopted Western agriculture; the book gives a picture of traditional Hidatsa practices regarding corn, sunflowers, squash, beans, tobacco, the tools used to grow them, their storage, their field culture, and the like. Hurt's book, on the other hand, is much more general, and tells very generally of the agriculture of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Pawnee, Omaha, and so forth. The book is useful to the beginning

student or, in the case of the more advanced student, for its bibliography.

Though both books are valuable, particularly the Buffalo Bird Woman one for its account of Hidatsa conservation and soil practices, neither does what needs to be done. We need a full account of the plant species used by Plains Indian agriculturalists, their responses to specific soil types and drought conditions, plant uses in the total diet, and their ethnobiology. Further we need a picture of the sacred system that governed agricultural practice. If plains Indian agriculture is to inform present practice at all, we have to know enough about the total system so that we can both recreate and emulate it. These two books will help in the process, but they do not complete it.

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