



# Recording Their Story: James Teit and the Tahltan

*Judy Thompson*

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## **Recording Their Story: James Teit and the Tahltan** Judy Thompson

*Recording Their Story* describes the life of James Teit, one of Canada's earliest ethnographers, and his work among the Tahltan people of northern British Columbia almost a century ago. Teit's work collecting artifacts, taking photographs, recording songs, transcribing myths, and gathering information about social organization, ceremonial life, customs, and beliefs has proved invaluable. Today, this collection is the most important extant assemblage of the Tahltan's heritage.

James Teit emigrated from the Shetland Islands to British Columbia in 1884, at the age of nineteen. He reveled in the outdoor life and became, among other things, a hunting guide, a linguist who spoke several aboriginal languages fluently, and an activist for Native rights. Teit's connection to the Canadian Museum of Civilization and his ethnographic work among the Tahltan began in 1911, when he was invited to join the staff of the new Anthropology Division of the Geological Survey of Canada. Teit then worked among the Tahltan, at their request and with the participation of many within the community, in both 1912 and 1915.

Judy Thompson's examination of Teit's extensive correspondence, fieldwork notebooks, diaries, and manuscripts illustrates how James Teit's life and work impacted his major ethnographic studies.

*Recording Their Story* is part biography and part catalog of the Tahltan ethnographic collection. The book is richly illustrated throughout with 71 rare historic photographs, 51 beautiful color images of ethnographic artifacts, six line drawings, and three maps.

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