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The Sign of the Goat

By

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THE SCENE IS A FAMILIAR ONE to visitors of the Canadian Rockies: a large tour bus rolls into the parking lot of a Banff souvenir shop. Tourists pour off the bus and file into a shop where they are offered everything from plastic totem poles to fine china and postcards. What they buy usually depends on what they want to remember most about their holiday. With bagged purchases and memories in hand, they reboard the bus ready to head off to the next stop.

The role of tourism has changed little in Banff over the last one hundred years. In 1905, for example, middle- and upper-class travellers from Europe, the United States, and eastern Canada visited The Sign of the Goat Curio Shop, run by Norman Luxton, to pick up a few souvenirs as mementos of their holiday before leaving the resort town of Banff for other stops along the Canadian Pacific Railway line. Horse-drawn carriages – known as “talley-ho’s” – which ferried tourists along the scenic roads laid out around the Banff townsite, had The Sign of the Goat as a scheduled stop on their route. Visitors would briefly browse among the many items and return later to buy. Luxton was a young entrepreneur of 26 when he opened his curio business and he found a ready market for his merchandise.

Luxton’s shop in Banff was successful and popular with visitors and therefore gives insight into early twentieth century western Canadian
As a tourist attraction, Luxton’s shop provides insight into how the upper- and middle-class tourists were entertained, and how they saw themselves. Through Norman Luxton’s shop it is possible to glimpse into what was taking on in Banff during its infant years as a tourist resort. The Sign of the Goat and its contents shed new light on attitudes towards nature and native people in the first half of Canada’s 1900s.

Arriving at the CPR Banff station in 1910, a visitor would survey the mountainous and forested horizon, breathe the pine-scented air, and have a porter carry the heavy leather travel cases to the horse-drawn taxi. The comfort of a river, and up to the grand CPR hotel. The tourist would occasionally serve him a beer before returning him to his post at the shop.

The Victorian style building that housed the shop was erected on the riverside in 1904. The Sign of the Goat presented another reality inside its doors, however: snarling wolves, trophy deer, flocks of wild birds, animal pelts, and native crafts. The sign of the Goat presented another reality inside its doors, however: snarling wolves, trophy deer, flocks of wild birds, animal pelts, and native crafts. The sign of the Goat catered to every possible customer. From suppliers in eastern Canada and the United States, it offered trinkets with which wall space, in turn, was entirely occupied by hundreds of animal skins, heads, antlers, and other trophy parts. The sign of the Goat and its contents were a microcosm of Banff’s environment as tourists imagined it to be. In reality, the Banff forests had been burned and scarred by the building of the railway, the Indians of the region had taken residence on their reserves, and wildlife was becoming increasingly difficult to sight in the Banff area. The sign of the Goat offered mementos of their holiday. The popularity of the objects offered by the shop during that period challenges the typical conception of public tastes being conservative. The souvenirs bought by the tourists at The Sign of the Goat were often “exotic” items, indicating that the tourist was fundamentally and specifically interested in the non-European nature of the Banff environment and its inhabitants.

The inventory lists of the shop, the ledger books of 1908, 1909, 1911, and 1912, as well as invoices for goods ordered, give an indication of the interests of the average tourists in their quest for mementos of their holiday. The Sign of the Goat catered to every possible customer. From suppliers in eastern Canada and the United States, it offered trinkets with which

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**Footnotes:**
1. The Sign of the Goat Curio Shop was located on the south side of the Bow River, en route to the popular Cave and Basin hot pools. Now known as The Banff Indian Trading Post, the original Victorian style building still stands on the site and continues to house a souvenir shop.
2. From suppliers in eastern Canada and the United States, it offered trinkets with which

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**Image:**
Norman Luxton, at left, surveys the parade during Banff Indian Days about 1915.
visitors were already familiar as luxury and necessity items: purses, bookmarks, view books, pen wipers, dusters, plaques, photo albums, combs, mirrors, coin purses, jewelry, and ornaments, in addition to sporting equipment, clothing, and paperwares. The items in greatest demand were not those familiar objects, however. What made The Sign of the Goat especially attractive was its relatively large stock of "Indian curios." A great deal of the "Indian" wares were obtained from a San Francisco company, A.L. Hettrich and Co., and from a Toronto supplier, W.E. Goulding. Items from these firms included "...snowshoe match holders, hunch [sic] bark framed paintings, painted Indian card cases, pow-wow bags, doll moccasins, Indian finger puzzels [sic], Indian pin cushions, sweet grass baskets, quilled handkerchief boxes, and Indian snap shots..." The list is a lengthy one. At least a quarter of Luxton's stock seemed to be this "Indian material."

Finally, on the more exotic side, The Sign of the Goat handled a considerable number of items made by the Stoney and Sarcee Indians of the nearby Morley and Sarcee reserves. Proprietor, Norman Luxton had a close association with the Stoney Indians through a trading post he briefly managed on the Morley reserve, east of Banff. The family of Luxton's wife, Georgina McDougall, had a long standing relationship with the Stoney people through mission work and trade. The Stoneys provided Luxton's shop with headdresses, shirts, belts, saddle bags, moccasins, rattles, spears, and bows and arrows. Luxton bought what was offered him and encouraged the production of more items.

Many visitors to Banff were particularly thrilled with the exotic authentic Indian material. The Sign of the Goat received many written requests for such objects:

Sir, I want to know if you can get me a pair of real Indian moccasins and what they would cost.

Dear Sir, Would you be kind enough to send me a moose hide shirt as soon as possible. If you have not moose hide, buck skin will do, or any kind of leather shirt.

Not only were requests for the Indian crafts numerous, but also for his taxidermy works:

Dear Sir, Kindly send by earliest express the coyote skin rug with head set up, and mounted on green felt that my wife and I admired so much on our many visits to your store last week.

What was it about the Indian curios and the taxidermy that so fascinated these visitors? Perhaps the taxidermied animals, Indian headdresses, and imitation Indian crafts from the East caught their attention, not only because of their exotic appeal, but because they embodied the ideals people were struggling with and striving for: closeness to nature and a sense of spirituality. Tourists saw in this material what they wanted to see. The objects seemed to embody attributes they felt were lacking in their own society at that time. By purchasing this material as tourists they were, in effect, attempting to make the objects and the attributes their own.

The Indian clothing available in The Sign of the Goat - moccasins, gauntlets, shirts, leggings, and belts made of hide, feathers, and fur - symbolized through material and styling a freedom and closeness to nature. In a society where constricting whale-bone corsets and stiff shirt collars were the rule, Indian dress and its associated "wild and free" culture was perhaps perceived as a desirable contrast to the more rigid urban, industrial society. Man's position in nature was a question uppermost in the minds of people at that time. A man saw in this Indian-style clothing the "wild and free" culture was perhaps perceived as a desirable contrast to the more rigid urban, industrial society. Man's position in nature was a question uppermost in the minds of people at that time. A man saw in this Indian-style clothing the animal man and landscape change in the Canadian Rockies, 1957-1979 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

NOTES

1. Personal communication, Eleanor Luxton, July 1990.
2. See A. Roger Byrne, Man and Landscape Change in Banff National Park Area Before 1911 (National Park series No. 1, 1968) pp. 131-132, as well as Eleanor Luxton, Banff: Canada's First National Park, (Banff: Summerthought, 1975).
4. Norman Luxton papers, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, file 211.
8. Ibid., file 162.