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Oral Traditions and Written Accounts: An Incident from the Klondike Gold Rush

Julie Cruikshank

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Article abstract

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Oral Traditions and Written Accounts: An Incident from the Klondike Gold Rush

Julie Cruikshank
University of British Columbia

Dans le nord du Canada, il est fréquent d'entendre différentes versions de certains événements historiques, l'une écrite, l'autre encore vivante dans la mémoire des aînés autochtones. Nous comparerons ici des récits d'un incident particulier qui eut lieu entre autochtones et nouveaux venus pendant la ruée vers l'or au Klondike. Nous ne mettrons pas l'accent sur la «véracité» ou la «valeur de vérité» des récits mais plutôt sur les problèmes d'ordre méthodologique qu'entraîne le recours à plusieurs sources; nous étudierons en outre les genres de narrations qui façonnent le récit écrit et oral.

In northern Canada it is frequently possible to hear contrasting accounts of specific historical events, one imprinted in written records, another living in the memories of Native elders. This paper compares accounts of a specific incident of conflict between Natives and newcomers that occurred during the Klondike gold rush. Instead of focusing on the 'veracity' or 'truth value' of the accounts, it focuses on the methodological problems of using different kinds of sources, looking specifically at the narrative genres shaping *both* written and oral accounts.

Oral history has been embedded in a broad controversy in northern Canada during the past two decades, specifically, how researchers can draw on Native oral traditions to reconstruct a more balanced picture of the past (Slobodin 1963, McClellan 1970, Arima 1976, Cruikshank 1982). Northwestern Canada seems to offer attractive opportunities for research into oral history. Reliable records are rarely available before the twentieth century. Even when they are available, journals and reports invariably reflect perspectives of short-term visitors. As Native people express a growing commitment to documenting their own past in their own voice using their own orally transmitted narratives, ideas about oral history take on rather elastic promise.

The problem of treating orally narrated accounts about the past as though they can be equated with western notions of history has long been recognized in anthropology.¹ As ethnohistorians look more closely at oral testimonies about the past, considerable attention has been paid to ideological, symbolic and metaphorical meanings in oral narrative (see for example Rosaldo 1980; Price 1983; Vansina 1985; Cohen 1989). Combined with a sensitivity to ethnocentric bias in western writings, awareness of the spoken word has led to a more cautious handling of written documentary sources. Steinhart points out in

a recent comparison of trends in African and American oral history that conventional archaeological, documentary and ethnographic sources continue to be used as the standard against which oral accounts can be judged to establish the 'factualness' of the event (Steinhart 1989:5).

Rarely, though, is consideration given to similar processes that may govern both oral and written traditions.² My own attempts to combine oral accounts about a particular event with written documents describing that same event suggest that written records and oral accounts may share common problems not always addressed in ethnohistory. A critical handling of the symbolic and mythical elements in written, as well as oral, accounts may direct us back to issues of social process in which both are embedded, raising questions about the privileged status of documentary evidence as a reference point for establishing, truth, falsehood or factuality.

This paper presents and then discusses summaries of oral narratives and written accounts about a particular event associated with the Klondike gold rush. The oral accounts come from individuals with whom I have been recording life histories for a number of years: each narrator discussed the event as part of a longer life story (Cruikshank 1987). The written accounts come from archival documents - police reports, court records, newspapers - located while I was trying to put the oral narratives into historical context.

In analyzing these accounts, I will stress that they cannot be treated just as historical evidence to be sifted for 'facts'; nor does combining oral with written accounts really give us a synthesis, the 'real story' of what actually happened. Instead, both kinds of accounts have to be understood as windows on the way the past is constructed in different contexts, from the perspectives of actors embedded in culturally distinct networks of social relationships. All societies have characteristic narrative structures that help members construct and maintain knowledge of the world. The exercise here is less one of 'straightening out facts' than of identifying how such distinct cognitive models may generate different kinds of social analysis, leading to different interpretations of events, one included in official history, the other relegated to memory culture.

The Written Account:

The event happened in May 1898 close to the head of the Yukon River, on the McClintock River at the north end of Marsh Lake (map 1). It is the kind of event likely to be included as a sentence or a footnote in contemporary historical writing, cited as an ex-

ception to the usual pattern of cultural contact in northern Canada. In his doctoral dissertation on Native-white relations in the Yukon between 1840 and 1950, Coates notes:

Natives were seldom implicated in serious crimes against whites...A notable exception occurred in 1899 (sic) when two prospectors were attacked, apparently without provocation. One died while the other, feigning death, escaped to the Tagish detachment of the North West Mounted Police (Coates 1984:310).

Most of the thousands of prospectors heading to Dawson City between 1886 and 1898 made the laborious climb with food and equipment over the Chilkoot Pass, then built boats or rafts and travelled through the southern lake system past Tagish (where a police post was established) along Marsh Lake to the Yukon River and then downriver to Dawson. Two prospectors, Christian Fox and William Meehan, attempted to take a shortcut by turning up the McClintock, planning to portage their goods across the divide and to rejoin the Yukon River at Hootelinqua.

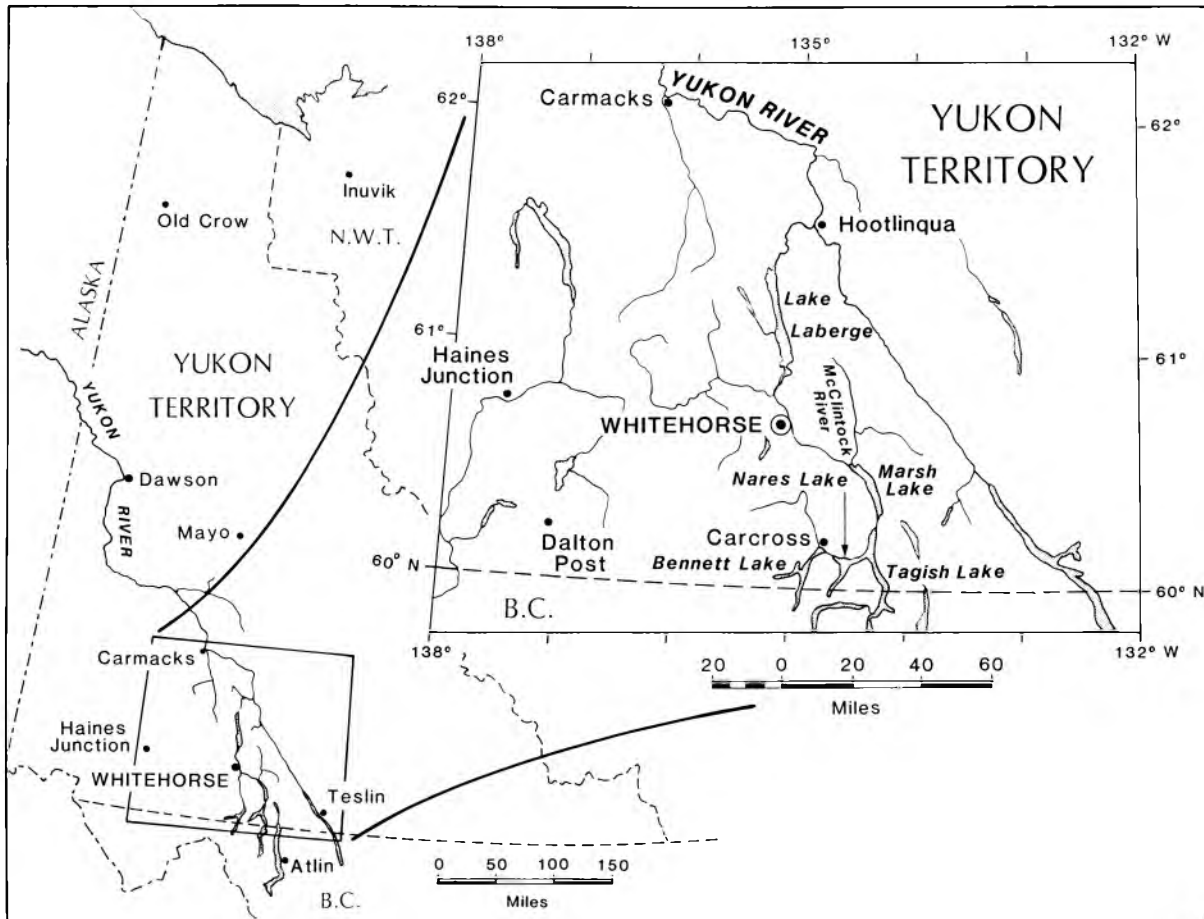
Inspector Z.T. Wood was in charge of the police post at Tagish when the incident occurred. He reported that on May 10th, Fox stumbled into a cabin at the foot of the McClintock River explaining that his partner had been killed when their boat was fired on by Indians (Wood 1899:42). A medical doctor was called to attend the wounded man and travelled with police to confirm that Meehan had been killed. Both the doctors and the police provided sworn statements later entered as evidence at the trial.³ Two of the suspects were apprehended within three days and the other two shortly after.

Police reports about this incident are brief; the 'facts' seem to vary slightly from telling to telling, though no one denies that the Native men shot at the prospectors, killing one and wounding the other, least of all the accused. In a sworn statement, Fox described the events leading up to the shooting: a series of friendly visits to his camp by the four Native men; the decision of the two prospectors to leave by boat on the morning of the shooting; shots fired by Native men on shore; the death of Meehan; Fox's own decision to escape by paddling to shore and then pushing the canoe out into the current; his surprise as he watched the Native men take goods from the canoe.⁴

The prisoners were taken to the police post at Tagish and were kept there until they were removed to Dawson City for trial a month later. During their detention at Tagish, various travellers photo-



Figure 1: The Nantuck brothers photographed at Tagish Police Post, 1898, prior to their trial. Caption reads "Indians at Tagish Post that shot Meehan and Fox on the McClintock R."



Map 1: The Southern Lakes District, Yukon Territory

graphed or sketched them and mentioned them in their journals; in fact, the prisoners seem to have become almost a tourist stop for those en route to the gold fields (Price 1898: 127). A Presbyterian missionary was moved by their interest in stories of Jesus (Dickey 1898:72). A French traveller seems mildly disappointed by their ordinary appearance: "...rien sur leur visage impassible ne denote le criminale"; he sketched them eating dinner at a long table (Boillot 1899:88-89). In photographs, two of the men look self-assured; a third looks less certain, while the fourth - a boy of perhaps fourteen - appears bewildered and frightened.⁵ Their names are recorded in written records as Joe, Jim, Dawson and Frank Nantuck. The inscription beneath one photo reads "Indians at Tagish Post that shot Meehan and Fox on the McClintock R." and beneath the other, "Group of Murderers, Police Camp, Tagish."

Immediately, the question of appropriate jurisdiction for a trial arose. The Yukon Territory was given separate status from the Northwest Territories on June 13th, 1898, a month after the incident, but no court system was in place by the time of the trial. The police superintendent at nearby Bennett Lake, British Columbia, tried to convince his superiors that a judge should be brought in from the province of British Columbia so that the men could be tried near home at the Tagish police post and the wounded witness saved the difficult trip to Dawson, but his petition was unsuccessful (Steele 1898).

This was a show trial, the first murder trial in Dawson. Newspaper accounts of the events of that summer are far less cryptic than the police reports, and they tell us much about the interpretive genre of the day. Headlines in the 1898 issues of the Klondike Nugget confidently pre-date the trial: "Indians Shoot White Men to Rob them of their Supplies" (June 16), "Deliberately Tried to Kill their Benefactors for the Outfits" (July 27) and "The Treacherous Instincts of the Aborigines Will Get their Necks Stretched with Hemp" (July 27). The same newspaper describes the prisoners as "villainous looking Indians" (July 27), the event as "one of the most cold-blooded crimes committed since the rush to the gold fields began..." (June 16) and goes on to predict that "...from the evidence at hand there is not much doubt but the four murderers will stretch hemp either here in Dawson or back at Tagish" (July 27).

But as the trial gets underway, what incenses the spectators is refusal of the accused either to provide an elaborated explanation or to show remorse. Their silence is taken to mean that the 'facts' speak for themselves. The men come to symbolize an unfamiliar 'other' dimension of life associated with treachery, betrayal, and brutal insensitivity. The very act of

displaying this symbolic opposition between 'savagery' and 'order' affirms the appropriateness of the newly installed British judiciary. Not only do the accused fail on the grounds that they don't respond in institutionally acceptable ways in the courtroom, they also fail to conform to the stereotype of noble savages:

"The questions put to the murderers by the judge through the interpreters showed them to be wholly deficient in the most ordinary morals. Their cunning, also, was of a low order. They could plot to destroy the two men in the boat and steal their goods but appeared to be stolidly indifferent to the results of the admissions they were making, though it was repeatedly impressed on them. Questioned about their knowledge of God or a future state everyone was surprised to find that they knew nothing about either one. Even the 'Great Spirit' and the 'Happy Hunting Grounds' of the North American Indians were unknown to them" (August 3).

In a handwritten review of the case sent to Ottawa with his judgement, Justice McGuire articulates another, more official narrative script, the one governing the legal proceedings.⁶ He begins by noting that the prisoners were "very imperfectly acquainted with English", speaking "Tlinkat"⁷ and expresses his conviction that the non-native interpreters selected by the court, "two gentlemen, McLoed and Lear, who swore they could speak and understand the language of the Indians" were competent to ensure that "the proceedings (were) very carefully and fully explained ... to the prisoners charged." Justice McGuire goes on to explain how he, through these interpreters, spelled out the alternatives available to the prisoners, outlining the kind of excuse that might be considered appropriate:

"(the prisoners) were asked if they had any excuse or justification or reason for so doing - any quarrel - but they said they and the whites were 'good friends' but (that) some white man a year or two years ago had killed two Indians."

Dismissing the explanation they offered with no further ado, the judge wrote,

"On these statements, I entered a verdict of 'guilty' in the case of... 'Joe Nantuck' and 'Dawson Nantuck'."

No Indian witnesses were called. Jim entered a plea of not guilty; he and Frank were tried separately,

each by a jury of white males. Both were convicted, though the jury recommended clemency for Frank because of his youth and his willingness to discuss the events.⁸

When the prisoners failed to play their expected part in the pageant, the focus of attention shifted to the judge. As he sentenced each of the accused to death, the record notes:

"It is seldom that a judge can repeat the formula without being much affected, and yet it had to be gone over to each of the four prisoners. Not one in the courtroom but was sympathetically affected by the venerable judge's suppressed emotions at sentencing those intellectual children to death..." (August 3).

From here, the rules must have become even more opaque to the prisoners. The sentence was to be carried out on November 1, 1898. Appeals were launched on various grounds: first, that November 1st was 'All Saint's Day' and the prisoners could not be hanged on a statutory holiday, even one celebrated only in Quebec; secondly, that the Sheriff responsible for carrying out the executions had not been officially sworn in.⁹ At the last moment, early on the morning of November 1st, the execution was postponed to March 2, 1899. A further appeal was launched in January, charging that the prisoners had been tried in the wrong court and sentenced by the wrong judge.¹⁰ The Yukon Territory was established as a separate jurisdiction by the time of the trial, but no judge had been appointed; consequently, the case was heard by the supreme Court of the Northwest Territories which by then had no legal jurisdiction over Yukon affairs. Once again, the date of execution was postponed, this time until August 4th.¹¹

Letters from missionaries representing Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist churches asking that the sentence be commuted and the young men placed in the care of one of the missions were sent to Northwest Mounted Police in Dawson and to the Minister of Justice in Ottawa. Further appeals came from Bishop Bompas who suggested that it would be preferable to give clemency with a stiff warning, and possibly a fine for the Tagish "tribe" instead of hangings,¹² but the requests were denied.¹³

As the process dragged on, the prisoners became demoralized and ill. Both Frank and Joe died in February, 1899, of "pulmonary troubles". Writing to Ottawa, the Sheriff predicted that the other two would die before the sentence could be carried out¹⁴ and the police officer in charge noted in his annual

report that "...the suspense of a long reprieve had very much disheartened these Indians." 'Jim' and 'Dawson' Nantuck were executed on August 4, 1899 (Primrose 1900:44).

The Oral Accounts:

This event had enormous repercussions for Native families in the southern Yukon and is recalled in considerable detail by elders. Oral accounts provide us with an interpretation of the events quite different from that in written records. They elaborate on the response Justice McGuire heard but dismissed when he asked the accused men to present him with some excuse for their behavior.

Some brief context provides a framework for understanding the oral accounts from Tagish and Southern Tutchone narrators. At the turn of the century, Tagish speakers and their Southern Tutchone neighbours made their home at the head of the Yukon River. They were hunters and fishers who travelled widely in the course of a year, dispersing and regrouping as seasons and resources required. This apparent fluidity in group composition has led some anthropologists to characterize Athapaskan social organization as "flexible". However, in the southern Yukon, day to day activities were profoundly influenced by two exogamous matrilineal moieties, Wolf and Crow. Because rules of exogamy were strictly enforced, every family grouping was composed of members of both moieties: alliances between moieties were repeatedly forged through marriages, partnerships and trade, linking people from widely separated groups in networks of clearly understood relationships. Moiety and clan arrangements were expected to guide behavior at such events as birth, puberty, marriage, death and other less formal occasions (See McClellan 1975). Expectations attached to moiety affiliation provide essential context for interpreting oral accounts of the events. Mrs. Kitty Smith, born approximately 1890, was a child at the time, the daughter of a Southern Tutchone woman *Tatlerma*. Both mother and daughter were members of the Crow moiety. One of the four men accused of killing the prospector was Kitty's mother's brother; in fact all of the accused were Crow. During the crisis, *Tatlerma*, like other members of the Crow moiety, was 'called home' from where she was living with her husband's people, two hundred miles west:¹⁵ two of her maternal uncles (both members of Crow moiety) came with the news that *Tatlerma's* mother was in deep despair because of her son's arrest and no longer wanted to live. *Tatlerma* returned with them, arriving back at Marsh Lake at the height of an influenza

epidemic. She became ill and died without ever seeing her daughter again.

Mrs. Smith describes what she was later able to learn about the events. Sometime prior to the shootings, she says, an old lady from Marsh Lake either found or was given a can containing some white powder which she mistakenly identified as baking powder. In fact, the powder was probably arsenic, used in the refining of gold.¹⁶ The powder was used to bake bread and people even tested it first by feeding it to a dog, but the poison did not take effect immediately. An elderly man and a boy, both members of the Crow moiety, ate the bread and died.

Mrs. Sidney was born to Tagish parents in 1902, and grew up close to the site of the events. She heard the story from her (Crow) mother and (Crow) aunts who knew the actors personally. Her understanding is that the can was found by the boy who died. He took it home to his opposite-moiety (Wolf) aunt, whom she carefully identifies as his uncle Tagish Jim's first wife. At her urging, the boy made some bread. He fed it to the dog, then ate some himself and gave some to an older man, his classificatory grandfather. By the time they realized the dog was dying, it was too late to save the men.

By custom, the responsibility for avenging the deaths fell to clan members of the deceased. Mrs. Sidney states this explicitly:

"They were all Crow, all one nation - brothers, cousins - like that."

There were conventional, customary ways of resolving such a painful incident, and they were understood by everyone. When a victim was a member of one moiety and the attacker a member of another, formal negotiations were necessary to arrange fair compensation for the death. The social group to which the attacker belonged had the responsibility for opening negotiations. Either the death of a social equivalent of the victim or a negotiated repayment in goods would be satisfactory compensation (McClellan 1975:497).

Mrs. Sidney's account suggests that the two prospectors, Meehan and Fox, were chosen as representing the 'clan' of white people responsible for the incident, that the prospectors were chosen as social equivalents of the deceased. The visits made by the Native men to the prospectors' camp may have been intended to give the men 'responsible' for the deaths their opportunity to open negotiations. Mrs. Sidney prefaces her account with the name of the hill where the Crow men decided to act, *Tl'adaake Tene* (Cruikshank 1987:356-359). The fact that only one prospector was actually killed when two people had been

poisoned may account for the accusation in court that the prospectors' goods were also "stolen". Whatever the interpretation, it is very likely that the 'Nantuck brothers' saw themselves as taking absolutely appropriate action to settle the deaths of their kinsmen.

But when they returned home and explained what they had done, Mrs. Sidney says, their uncle urged them to flee and to go into hiding. They travelled sixty miles north to Lake Laberge, but there they were advised by an influential Native man, Jim Boss,¹⁷ that they had nothing to worry about and should return home. Clearly there were conflicting expectations about how their actions would be interpreted by the white newcomers who were very powerful. In Mrs. Smith's words,

"Well, they don't know, that time... They don't know police business."

Mrs. Sidney's mother remembers going to Tagish post and seeing the men, chained:

She said they went to the post for tea or sugar or something - they had a little store there. And here she saw those boys. They all had chains on their feet and a big ball on the end, and she just cried and lifted up her hands toward them. Nobody knew what year it was or how long after they got killed. That's what I heard. That's the way I understand it. That's what my mother told me.

Likewise Mrs. Smith reports her grandmother's words:

"When her son was hanged, my grandma said, 'I don't know if I can forget it, that Whitehorse River way. I wish they would throw me in the water when I die so I could follow down. My son got lost that way...'"

Contrasting Frameworks for Social analysis:

These accounts reflect radically conflicting visions of society and ideas about authority and social justice. The perspectives are so starkly opposed because they occur in a context where a new institutional order has dramatically replaced the old in the matter of a few years. Between the discovery of gold in August 1896 and the arrest and trial of the Nantuck brothers in summer of 1898, more than thirty thousand would-be prospectors and miners converged on one small area of the Klondike River. The newcomers' prototypes were Horatio Alger, and the virtues they extolled were individualism and plucky self-reliance. An attack on two prospectors was

disconcerting and incomprehensible to the newcomers because it challenged their view of their enterprise. Hence it could only have been perpetrated by 'bad Indians'. The first Northwest Mounted Police inspector, Constantine, reached the area which is now the Yukon Territory in 1894. Four years later we have a full force of the Canadian judiciary imposing the death sentence on Natives for upholding their own traditional justice system. And yet the 'facts' are essentially unaltered by these contrasting perspectives: what changes is the context in which they are interpreted.

From the Native perspective, their classification of the newcomers as members of a cohesive group - like a clan - and their attempt to impress upon them the rules of the country met with an incomprehensible reaction. There is never any sense in oral accounts that the accused want to deny what they had done, but the explanation they gave to the judge - the one that he recorded in his notes - that "...they and the whites were 'good friends' but that some white man a year or two year ago had killed two Indians..." was so meaningless to the outsiders that it was given no weight, and was excised from the written record, appearing only in one hand written letter by the judge.

Written accounts, too, follow a culturally specific genre.

In the writings of early travellers to the Yukon, Native people are always present, but they are there as part of the landscape, the backdrop, not as actors in their own right. Accounts at the time of Meehan's death begin with self-righteous indignation, continue by denigrating the accused, and conclude by wallowing in *tristesse* about the enormity of the white man's burden. Years later, this theme is reformulated as a triumphant moment for northern justice in Longstreth's history of the Northwest Mounted police: he describes the incident as creating "a serious racial situation," noting comfortingly that "it was largely due to this forgotten incident that the thousands of prospectors in the Yukon solitudes far from the main river could rummage for their precious customs in peace" (Longstreth 1927: 209).

There has, of course, been a shift in genre in writings of this kind. The image of bearers of civilized values bringing enlightenment to lawless savages is more likely to be replaced by one of insensitive colonial oppressors extorting land and imposing their own arbitrary economic, political and legal codes on peaceful indigenous populations. The picture remains black and white, but the ground has shifted. Such clear positions often obscure the un-

derlying reasoning, motives, accidents and intentionality that make up daily experience.

In his recent study of narrative discourse and historical consciousness, Hayden White reiterates Hegel's suggestion that in human history there is an intimate relationship linking historical self-consciousness, law, and the narrative impulse. White proposes that any narrative representation of reality presenting itself to us as history invokes a social system. A social system is, after all, a system of human relationships governed by law (White 1987: 14). Both written and oral narratives about the deaths at Marsh Lake moralize the events. They construct, manipulate and recast the events. Each perspective resonates with symbolic statements of culturally appropriate behavior.

The result, though, does not provide us with a comfortable synthesis. Because there is ambiguity and ambivalence about the status of the legal system, there is no closure. The accounts are not complementary; no seamless whole emerges. Instead, because they are deeply embedded in social process, their contribution to ethnohistory is to identify points of entry for social analysis, rather than provide evidence to establish the most plausible account of 'what really happened.' Paying attention to the symbolic and structural nature of written accounts might direct us away from a search for facts and closer to investigation of social processes in which all narrative accounts are embedded. A history of northern Canada that conveys only some of the meanings or a restricted record of truths does not adequately or coherently do justice to the complexities of the events.

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NOTES

1. Very early, Lowie denied that oral tradition had any historical value (Lowie 1917: 165, 166-7). Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown each argued that narrative accounts served primarily as charters to justify the present social order (Malinowski 1926; Radcliffe Brown 1952). More recently, structuralists argued that oral traditions were statements about the human mind rather than commentaries on the past (Levi-Strauss 1966: 66, 232-37). See Steinhart's discussion of how functionalist and structuralist arguments have tempered the enthusiasm of Africanists concerned with "establishing an unbroken chain of testimony back to an eyewitness account of some past event" (Steinhart 1989:3-5).

2. Some of the most impressive ventures in this direction come from analyses of colonial encounters in Africa (see for example Netting 1987). Certainly, there are historians working exclusively with written documents who pay close attention to symbolic aspects of documents; for example, see Robert Darnton's account of cat trials in pre-revolutionary France (Darnton 1984); Carlo Ginsberg's and Natalie Davis's writings about life experiences in sixteenth century Europe (Ginzberg 1976; Davis 1983).

3. Unless otherwise indicated the written documentation referred to in this section comes from court records filed at the National Archives of Canada, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434, File 'Nantuck brothers'. Ms. Joanne Frodsham, archivist at the National Archives of Canada located this file in the Northwest Mounted Police and Department of Justice files and kindly had it photocopied. The report of post mortem examination referred to here is signed by N.T. Barrett, M.D., sworn before D.A.E. Strickland at Tagish Lake, May 28, 1898.

4. Evidence submitted at trial of Nantuck brothers, signed by Corporal H.E. Rudd, no date, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

5. One photo is in the Yukon Archives collection, #807. Another is printed in Price 1898:127.

6. Letter from Justice Thomas McGuire to the Secretary of State, Ottawa, dated August 3, 1898, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

7. While the Nantuck brothers undoubtedly understood Tlingit, because of trade with their Tlingit neighbours (see McClellan 1975), it was probably a second language for them. The accused men would have spoken Southern Tutchone and Tagish, the languages spoken at the head of the Yukon River at that time.

8. Separate transcripts of the two trials - Jim Nantuck's and Frank Nantuck's - exist as part of the court record, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

9. The appeal was made to the newly appointed judge of the Yukon Territorial Court, C. A. Dugas, by H.C. Lisle, advocate for the accused. Reprieve was granted by Justice Dugas and the execution postponed to March 2, 1899, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

10. Appeals to The Minister of Justice for Canada and to Honourable C.A. Dugas, Judge of the Territorial Court of the Yukon Territory, by H.C. Lisle, advocate for the accused, dated February 26 and February 28, 1899, respectively, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

11. Reprieve signed by Justice C.A. Dugas, dated March 1, 1899. RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

12. Letters to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, signed by W.C. Bompas, T.H. Canham, James Turner, R.M. Dickey, Wm. H. Judge, R.J. Bowen and Andrew S. Grant, August 1, 1898, and from Bishop Bompas to Major Walsh, Commissioner of the Northwest Mounted Police, dated August 1 and August 3, 1898. RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

13. Letter from Joseph Pope, Undersecretary of State, with copies to each of the missionaries, asserting that the extension of clemency to Frank Nantuck should satisfy their request, October 28, 1898, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

14. Letter from Frank Harper, Sheriff of the Yukon Territory to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, March 7th 1899, RG 13, Series C1, Volume 1434.

15. All those "called home" would be members of the Crow moiety from Marsh Lake who had moved (usually through marriage) to other parts of the Yukon.

16. A similar incident was recorded on the Yukon River at Fort Reliance in 1877. In his memoirs, trader Leroy McQuesten noted that his partner, Mayo, had prepared a mixture of arsenic and grease to kill mice in his store. Some women mistook the arsenic for flour and used it for cooking. Three elderly women died and a sixteen year old girl was blinded (McQuesten n.d.:7).

17. Jim Boss was an influential chief living at Lake Laberge and responsible for initiating the first official claim to ancestral lands on behalf of all Yukon Natives. A document, filed by a local lawyer, T.W. Jackson, in 1902 is on file at the Yukon Archives. Boss was widely regarded by other Native people as someone who knew how to deal with 'Whitemen' so it is not surprising that the fugitives took his advice.

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