

Epistemological Distinctiveness and the Use of “Guided History” Methodology for Writing Native Histories

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Abstract

Writing Native history has traditionally conformed to traditional methodological approaches. This essay argues that inherent differences in the ways Native and non-Native cultures view the past directly impact the production of histories focused on Native populations. With this point in mind, the second half of this essay presents a methodology entitled “Guided History,” which not only allows for community input in the production of local histories but also actively promotes this participation.

Introduction

Beginning in the 1970s, historians focused for the first time on how European contact affected North American Native populations, rather than simply examining Native impact upon settler populations.¹ This was a bold move, for Native people were now recognized as possessing a history without having to depend upon European-trained historians for its confirmation. A number of collections dealing with the philosophy of writing Native history soon followed as historians began to closely investigate the exigencies involved in producing Native histories.² This investigation delved into issues as diverse as the ethics of writing Native history and how culture and environment influ-

enced the production of Native history; these varied approaches were designed to aid scholars in their “effort to be fairer in their portrayal of Indians in their own history and American (and Canadian) history in general.”³ In spite of the effort directed at producing more accountable Native histories, it is clear that many historians continue to distance themselves from the communities and peoples they are writing about, altogether unconcerned with the descendants of the people they are investigating. Regardless of the innovative nature of the works produced during this period, it is disturbing to see how little appreciation these same writers had for the contemporaries of their “Native American subjects.”⁴

It is also telling how little credence most academics give to going to community input for aid in guiding their research. The concern here is that Native people are still considered objects whose histories can be written within the sterile confines of the university. And, since archival documents and secondary sources are the primary materials required to produce written history, thereby ruling out personal contact with the descendants of the people being written about, it is surmised that accurate histories can in fact be produced *sans* any personal contact. This is an important issue, as written histories have the power to influence events within contemporary Native communities that were once in the hands of politicians or the courts. Consequently, it is vital to examine how Native histories are produced, since we are dealing with peoples’ lives; we, as writers of Native history, have to move beyond the philosophical and accept that what we write can and oftentimes does have a direct impact upon the communities about which we write.

The purpose of this essay is twofold. First, I will analyze how different Native and non-Native cultures view history at the philosophical level and how these differences directly impact the way history is written; it is important to fully understand how each culture views and interprets the past. The second part of this essay presents a methodology entitled “Guided History,” which not only allows for community input into the production of local histories but also actively promotes this participation. This methodology will be expanded upon by demonstrating how it was employed by the author to facilitate the data collection and writing of a Manitoba regional history between May, 1999, and July, 2000.⁵

History as Catalyst for Change

An examination of two recent court cases illustrates how history can affect people at the community level and why it is important for historians and writers of tribal histories to accept local input in the production of these works. These two cases are relevant for the purpose of this paper since case law based upon the interpretation of the historical record establishes the legal precedent that guides Canadian courts—further emphasizing the need for the production of culturally-specific and -relevant histories.

The Supreme Court of Canada case *Mitchell v. Peguis* attempted to verify the historical record with respect to Crown intentions during the treaty process. In that case, the Peguis First Nation sued Manitoba Hydro for inadvertently imposing a tax on the sale of electricity. Despite the fact that the government of Manitoba had initiated a prejudgment garnishee order against the cost of representation fees, they settled the Peguis Band's claim for return of the taxes paid. The First Nations argued that "personal property given pursuant to treaty and deemed to be on a reserve is not subject to attachments by a non-Indian" according to s. 90(1)(b) of the Indian Act, a conclusion with which both the trial judge and Court of Appeal agreed.⁶ The Court therefore held that the garnisheed monies were personal property given to a band under an agreement between the band and Her Majesty, and that the words "Her Majesty" included both the provincial and federal crown.

In this instance, the historical record was the guiding force that, from a legal perspective, led Mr. Justice LaForrest to conclude:

The historical record leaves no doubt that native peoples acknowledged the ultimate sovereignty of the British Crown and agreed to cede their traditional homelands on the understanding that the Crown would thereafter protect them in the possession and use of such lands as were reserved for their use.⁷

Furthermore, it was concluded that there was an obligation to the Native peoples on behalf of the Crown, which "has recognized at least since the signing of the Royal Proclamation of 1763" that it is "honor-bound to shield Indians from any efforts by non-Natives to dispossess Indians of the property which they hold *qua* Indians, i.e., their land base and the chattels on that land base."⁸ This decision does interpret the historical record in relation to the intent of the Crown during this historical period.

As with *Mitchell v. Peguis*, the recent Marshall case compelled the Supreme Court of Canada to once again interpret the historical record as a guide for its decision.⁹ In this case, Mr. Justice J. J. Binnie stated that the courts "have attracted a certain amount of criticism from professional historians for what these historians see as an occasional tendency on the part of judges to assemble a 'cut and paste' version of history."¹⁰ The issue in this case is how the court chose to use historical facts, since "the judicial selection of facts and quotations is not always up to the standard demanded of the professional historian, which is said to be more nuanced."¹¹ And, unlike the professional historian, the court is limited by time constraints and allowable sources, both of which can lead to inaccurate pronouncements of history that, once decided, become the official history recognized by the courts. Accordingly:

The law sees a finality of interpretation of historical events where finality, according to the professional historian, is not possible. The

reality, of course, is that the courts are handed disputes that require for their resolution the finding of certain historical facts. The litigating parties cannot await the possibility of a stable academic consensus. The judicial process must do the best it can.¹²

Despite the recognition that its interpretation of history is inherently flawed, the court in the Marshall case proceeds from the assumption that “the Crown’s approach to treaty-making (honorable), which the court acts upon in its approach to treaty interpretation (flexible) as to the existence of a treaty.”¹³ With both Mi’kmaq and British interpretations of history frozen in an historical stasis, the court was faced with the chore of choosing “from among the various possible interpretations of the common intention [at the time the treaty was made] the one which best reconciles.”¹⁴ Notably, the court spent a significant amount of time discussing the exigencies involved with interpreting the historical record, with the key to each case being the attempt on behalf of the court to interpret the historical record in order to determine, with finality, historical fact. Interestingly, as alluded to in the Marshall decision, the courts believe that the power to pronounce upon history resides with them, which effectively freezes a reading of historical fact into historical truth that, from that point on, will guide the courts.

As these two cases illustrate, what Native peoples in Canada are able to secure in the courts results directly from what history has written about them. In both cases, the losses to each community were minor, and in the Marshall case the gains in certain respects were significant. However, because the potential losses or gains hinge on the accuracy of the written record, the fact that there was no community involvement in the writing of either of the aforementioned histories needs to be addressed.¹⁵ And, since it is impossible to write history until one can “achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing,”¹⁶ the question of how to get the community involved in the creation of its own history becomes all-important. There is a need for the historian to consult with community members, as this is the most effective means of achieving this “contact with the mind” with those about whom the historian is writing.

Is Western History Native Reality?

More than three decades ago, the British historian, Hugh Trevor Roper, commented that the pre-contact history of Africa was one of “darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not the subject of history.” It was not the role of historians to write about the “unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the world.”¹⁷ This was not an unfamiliar sentiment, and it echoed the words of European philosopher, Georg W. F. Hegel, who stated in the mid-nineteenth century that the Indigenous peoples of Africa and America, those peoples who lacked nation-states and writing, were in essence people without history.¹⁸ Europe, in this

instance, was the center of all worldly events, whose history and grand narrative radiated outward and enveloped the world's peripheral cultures, including the Indigenous peoples of North and South America. Interestingly, this is a trend that persisted unabated until the 1970s, when for the first time a group of scholars, including Arthur J. Ray and Francis Jennings, began to write histories in which Native peoples were recognized not only as influential components, but also as central players within a narrative that viewed European influences upon North American Native populations as peripheral.

The concept of history is the one constant when analyzing and writing about past events for both Native and non-Native peoples. History has been defined "as a corpus of ascertained facts" that are "not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments" that do not exist prior to their "being created by the historian."¹⁹ The historian is considered the collector and arranger of facts that s/he determines to be integral to the telling of the story, and the written history is an interpretation of the facts based upon the historian's culturally-influenced personal bias. Subsequently, even though written history is often viewed as the truth, we must recognize that history "can never be definitive. It can only attain probability," due to the fact that the historian's raw materials, the facts, are not pure and have already been filtered by the original writer, whether that person is a historian or a fur trade employee making journal entries.²⁰ History in this instance is "essentially a chronological and analytical narrative of 'significant' human actions, based upon written documentation, particularly when derived from official resources."²¹

Of course, we must accept that this definition of history was created by Western-trained historians, who made the conscious choice to measure the validity of facts by personal subjectivity and to create narratives based on linear time lines. The very fact that history is also "based upon written documentation" confirms this Eurocentric bent. This differs significantly from the way Native people view history, as it is common for their histories to be traced through stories "that tell of their development as human beings through their relationship with the spiritual powers, with their land and all its varied forms of life, paying little or no attention to chronology."²² The reason for this difference relates specifically to epistemological distinctiveness. Epistemology is concerned with how we know and understand the way we do. When discussing history and the ways Native and non-Native people view history, there will be inherent differences in how history is portrayed due simply to the way each culture views the production of knowledge, which can be traced back to how each culture views the surrounding environment. I will expand on the importance of tribal territories below.

Understanding these epistemological differences is vital, considering that history has a social role. Every society requires a usable past.²³ This usable past will be culturally specific because history is the foundation of who we are. In this sense, the production of both Native and non-Native history is closely tied to each culture's view of the surrounding world, which is epistemologically

influenced. Noted British historian E.H. Carr stated that the serious historian is the one who recognizes the historically conditioned character of all values, not the one who claims for his own values and objectivity beyond history.²⁴ He goes on to declare that it is impossible to write history before the historian achieves “some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing.”²⁵ Herein lies the challenge historians continue to face when attempting to write Native history: often there is not only a lack of contextual understanding about the surrounding environment that informs these histories, but also of the world view that explicates events. Historians trained in the Western mode may be “confronted with form and content that often bear little resemblance to what they know and work with,”²⁶ which can result in the production of inaccurate or culturally insignificant histories.

Calvin Martin challenged this approach to writing Native history in the late 1970s by asserting that Native people are people of nature rather than people of history, arguing that for Western history to further ignore Native epistemology would only result in the production of substandard histories.²⁷ Despite his carefully crafted argument, Martin does little more than demonstrate his romantic proclivities by categorizing the “Indian” as intrinsically connected to his or her environment. A more appropriately worded thesis would have allowed Martin to avoid promoting the same dichotomies that place Native people in an historical stasis (or ethnographic present for those ethnohistorians), which fails to recognize that Native cultures possess relative contemporary status—a present. A failure to recognize that a Native present exists results in the belief that there was in fact no past, or, for that matter, a need for one. Accordingly, this position negates the need for written Native history because the past simply does not exist. In all fairness, Martin does bring to light the previously ignored importance of understanding and incorporating Native epistemology into the writing of Native histories by both Native and non-Native authors. In short, the issue can be distilled down to the recognition that “the Western preoccupation with history as a chronological description of reality was not a dominant factor in any tribal conception of either time or history.”²⁸

Non-Native cultures measure the significance of events according to when they took place and how these events affect us today. Incidents such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the Stock Market crash of 1929 or 1969’s lunar landing, for instance, weigh heavily on our collective psyche, while the Charlottetown Accord debacle of the early 1990s is simply an historical anecdote largely forgotten by the general public. Whereas the recollection of these events by Western-trained historians first entails specifying when these events occurred, Native history takes a different tack and concentrates on themes rather than temporal placement. In this instance, the themes remain consistent because the facts are not permitted to alter the telling of the story. In cases where specific events are mentioned or happen to be recalled, they are often integral to the story’s theme and may be required to add detail in order to promote a better

understanding. Those who write Native histories must come to realize that, just as the surrounding environment may change over time, the geographically-framed cultural context of the stories is also prone to modification. The histories are thematic devices that do not deal specifically with each event that went into the creation of the oral history; rather this episodic continuum, transpiring over a familiar landscape, coalesces into history that is catalogued and recounted later in oral narratives. There is no need for the professional historian to assess the validity and importance of the facts for the creation of an historical narrative—history in this case just is and is internally validated by the consistency of the themes being presented within the stories.

Once again the main reason for these differing approaches to viewing history is epistemological. Time is the primary referent by which Western society measures its existence. In Native epistemology, however, the land is where the repetitive cycles of creation occur, where the stories are told, where songs are sung, and, as such, it becomes the primary referent for Native people. Native people and their history cannot be separated because Native people cannot be separated from their territories.²⁹ This results in the existence of Native history, both philosophically and physically, whether or not Western-trained historians choose to recognize it as such. The land is the mother and has the power to always care for the people within the territory. As such, the stories that emanate from the land are the foundations of Native epistemology. They also, upon closer analysis, reveal Native thought and world view to be interchangeable at the fundamental level due to an interconnectedness of all life and spirit.³⁰ Therefore, “it is impossible to generalize about ‘oral discourse’ as it is about ‘culture.’ They are inseparable from and specific to a particular people, either as the people interact with one another from a shared knowledge base or with groups (or individuals) with a different knowledge base and history.”³¹ Accordingly, our job as historians is to try and see what lies beyond the spoken word and contemporary context and expand upon the larger context of the stories themselves, all of which can be traced back to the tribal territory.³²

In Native oral histories, concern is focused on what happened at a particular place when the people themselves happened to be there. This approach to detailing history has been termed “sacred geography” by Vine Deloria, Jr. He explains:

Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a ‘sacred geography,’ that is to say, every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produce a tribe in its current conditions.³³

According to Western-trained historians, what is lacking in the stories that help define tribal territories and retain history is a linear chronology that explains when events occurred. Oral history is simply a combination of individual

events that combine to form the tribal history, with no beginning, middle and end, yet the stories preserve the essence of the people who occupy the territory. These histories are spatially constructed and outline the geographic features that play a role in the development of the themes in the stories. Regardless, because this information is concerned with the events themselves as opposed to when these events occurred, using oral history to create a time line is inherently difficult. The people's local knowledge of weather patterns and animal migration cycles, combined with their own regular migrations across the physical landscape, resulted in stories that contain the history of the people, and that were also versatile enough to incorporate new content into the telling of the story. Temporal specificity from this method is limited.

These epistemological differences hamper Western-trained historians in constructing culturally-appropriate histories. Attempts have been made during the past four decades to alter historical methodologies to allow greater latitude when producing Native history. Ethnohistory is the most notable of these developments. Defined as "the use of historical and ethnological methods and materials to gain knowledge of the nature and cause of change in a culture [or cultures] defined [ethnologically]," ethnohistory seeks to bridge the gap between the disciplines of history and anthropology to create written histories that recognize culture change as a significant variable in Native peoples' historical development.

Ethnohistory was originally viewed as a sympathetic approach to the investigation of Native history, because now culture would also be evaluated by historians. The impact of culture upon historical actions, in this instance, answers the question "Why?" for the historian. Bruce Trigger has stated, "My primary goal has been to demonstrate that Native behavior was based on a rational pursuit of desired ends at least to the extent as that of Europeans."³⁴ By forcing an assessment of culture in the overall analysis, ethnohistory sought to provide a unique way of gauging Native history that does not exist in contemporary historical methodologies. Ironically, it has done little to promote among Native people the existence of a separate and unique history. Evaluating culture can be constraining since it is difficult even for the descendants to accurately describe culture and how it may have influenced their ancestors several centuries past. Also, the literature produced by ethnohistorians is imbued with language that further promotes the researcher/subject dichotomy as being traditional within both history and anthropology.

Another of ethnohistory's limitations is the way it views culture. According to James Axtell, people attempt to view culture as whole, "as all of their social parts and sub-codes interact functionally and symbiotically to produce a single cultural origin, which is potentially knowable and translatable to other cultures."³⁵ Approaching Native history this way can result in the further homogenization of Native cultures into one all-representative "Indian" group, a process that provides historians with a static information base that can be readily accessed. I argue, however, that historians should take the next step

when attempting to translate these cultural idiosyncrasies and recognize that each individual community is culturally distinct and in possession of its own unique past. Again, the fact that people emerge from a territory plays an integral role in the development of that group's identity. For instance, Canada is regionally distinct, and to suggest to Albertans that they are the same as people from Ontario would cultivate feelings of indignation due to inherent cultural distinctiveness. Regionally-specific populations are culturally distinct. Viewing Native culture as smaller bands that combine to form one universal Native culture does little more than limit one's approach.

Despite the problematic nature of ethnohistory, it does have its supporters. Axtell, for instance, claims ethnohistory to be the "sharpest, most comprehensive, most inclusive, most flexible tool we have for writing and teaching the history of America's Native people."³⁶ This is a rather optimistic pronouncement—to date, the most important development within ethnohistory is the attempt by its practitioners to recognize that a shared conversation can take place, and that there are multiple histories that combine to create the master historical narrative. Yet ethnohistorians made the conscious choice of maintaining an antiquated approach that promotes creating histories within the confines of the university rather than venturing out into the communities to view the surrounding terrain or to speak with the descendants of the people these historians would be writing about. To proclaim inclusiveness is somewhat sanguine, especially at a time when Native people are still considered subjects rather than participants in an ever-evolving historical narrative. This is highly demonstrative of how influential anthropological thinking is to practicing ethnohistorians.

In order to write Native histories that are culturally acceptable, one must begin to adopt a sense of time that is not linear but holistic.³⁷ Embracing this approach will result in a need on the part of the historian to understand the "lay of the land," which will provide both a geographical and a cultural context for the stories being told, and will ultimately result in greater understanding of the Native past. Writing history from a community point of view will provide insight into how the people themselves tend to view their past and what events they recognize as culturally and historically significant. The importance of involving individual communities in the creation of local histories cannot be stressed enough at this point. In light of such commentary, the discussion will now focus briefly on the method that must be used to obtain the information necessary to write these tribal histories, but which also forces a distinct approach to data gathering—the use of oral histories.

The Oral History Dilemma

Oral history, long considered the vehicle by which the corpus of Indigenous knowledge is transferred, is still placed under rigid scrutiny by "serious" historians.³⁸ Oral history is narrowly defined by the academics who utilize these stories as personal reminiscences or life histories.³⁹ These historians are concerned

with accuracy, truth and perspective, all of which are required before veracious history can be written. What is intriguing is how written documents are accepted over oral histories even though written sources are still suspect to rigid analysis to extract snippets of "truth." Oral history is frequently discounted due to the notion that the human memory is questionable and that memories are not verifiable. Also, memories may change over time, which poses a problem for the historian trying to assess the facts. Nevertheless, Binney states that these concerns are unfounded, claiming that "a good Western Eurohistory has a lifespan of about 10-15 years and then it gets reinterpreted; in contrast, the life of an oral history is considerably longer."⁴⁰

There are scholars who claim that the past is "clouded with mystery and informants can only guess at the meaning of traditional Indian values."⁴¹ Historian John Friesen argues that oral tradition is little more than a speculative body of knowledge. Furthermore, he claims that if this information does not correspond with the available written record, it cannot be viewed as authentic or authoritative knowledge.⁴² The issue in this case has to do with conflicting epistemologies, for the problem can be traced back to the nature of the information, how it is passed on and how the stories are told. Slim and Thompson argue that the perceived unreliability of oral histories was "created by the bias of the educated and political elite, which tend to exaggerate the objectivity of something that is 'down on paper,'" thereby limiting the words of the elders in academic research projects.⁴³

Currently the social sciences lack an effective methodology to counteract these problems. Recent attempts have demonstrated that oral histories could be utilized in conjunction with various other methods for the purposes of verification.⁴⁴ What is missing in many methodologies is a discussion of the context from which the words emerged. Huron scholar, George Sioui, utilized similar ideas "to assist history in its duty to repair the damage it has traditionally caused to the integrity of Amerindian cultures."⁴⁵ His approach recognizes that Native history varies both contextually and culturally from those histories produced by European scholars.

In sum, oral tradition and oral histories have the power not only to validate the written record, but also to guide research. The use of oral history is an Indigenous methodology, a decolonizing methodology if you will, which must be used to obtain the knowledge required to proceed. This demands that the information be presented in context, and requires writing skill to convey to the reader the significance of the information and its origin. Historian Angela Wilson states that "those specializing in the field of oral history . . . attempt to make oral accounts from other cultures conform to Western notions of respectability, truth, narrative form, categories, significance, terminology, sensibility and so forth,"⁴⁶ and adds that, "I do not believe that they [oral accounts] should be tested and evaluated by Western standards, or any other standards of any other cultures for that matter. The only standards that matter are those set within the culture, and if stories are still being told within the oral tradition then they have obviously

passed these internal checks."⁴⁷

Recognition that oral histories are the primary method by which the transference of knowledge occurs is required before the historian develops a written history of a Native community or their population. Ignoring this corpus of information when producing Native histories is tantamount to foregoing the literature review necessary for writing conventional histories. The question that now arises is: how does one go about integrating traditional historical methodologies with epistemologically distinct methods from Native and non-Native culture? The following section will expand upon this issue.

"Guided History": A Methodology

In October 1998, I approached Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (IRTC) officials in Winnipeg to offer my services as a researcher. I had just begun graduate studies at the University of Manitoba and was encouraged to undertake the field research from which my thesis would be written. IRTC officials expressed interest in having archival research conducted that would later be used to demonstrate continuity of regional occupation for a number of projects the council was developing.⁴⁸ The community of Fairford, located at Lake St. Martin in the Interlake region, was at the time involved in litigation with the federal government and required archival data for its case. It was also thought that this information could one day be utilized in Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) negotiations. After a brief consultation, the IRTC decided to support my work, thereby permitting me access to community resources. This would also provide me with the opportunity to produce a regional history that the IRTC could then use for the variety of projects it had on the go.

This experience was my first major foray into the community as a researcher. I had been involved with a number of research projects as an undergraduate student, but I had never been required to design and implement a research project on my own. As a student of Native Studies, I understood that European and Native epistemology differed significantly, and knew this would impact upon my research design since one of the IRTC requests was that I spend time within the community. Moreover, it was evident early on that Saulteaux life ways and epistemology differed significantly from what I was reading in the general literature about writing Native history and Native philosophy. Consequently, it became clear that in order to write an accountable regional history, I would have to obtain an understanding of the epistemological exigencies of the people I would be investigating. Since it was impossible to write the history requested of me prior to achieving "some kind of contact with the mind" of the people I would be writing about, I endeavored to engage the community in a discussion about their history.⁴⁹

The first step I took was to forsake all existing historical methodologies and approach this project as one in need of a unique methodology. This often began with the acknowledgment that all education, whether at the university

level or among community members, is in one form or another a guided learning process. Guided learning, primarily through stories, is how Native cultures have traditionally passed historical information to the young, a process involving years if not decades of applied listening on the student's part.⁵⁰ Even today elders are viewed as sources and teachers of the North American intellectual tradition.⁵¹ Accepting that information and guidance are available at the community level that cannot be found elsewhere became a motivation for the development of my "Guided History" methodology. At the time, I described my methodology as an ethnohistory of Saulteaux people of the Interlake Region of Manitoba, for lack of a better term. Upon further reflection, the process listed in my thesis is not, in fact, an ethnohistory, but rather a "guided history."

"Guided history" methodology can be described as a partnership between a community and an academic, whereby the expertise of both parties combine to produce a history that, due to the unique blend of methods and community-based information, could not otherwise be assembled. The onus is still upon the historian to ensure a well-crafted work that is accessible to all. At the same time, the community members can play an active role in the development of what is, for all intents and purposes, their history. This role can range from determining who the target audience will be to deciding what type of research is required. Early on, peers were critical of my approach. Some professors claimed that it was physically impossible to visit those people I was going to be writing about due to the fact that they had died generations ago. Others were concerned that the community would negatively influence the development of the history, thereby compromising the project's academic integrity. At the same time, I realized that the majority of the names I came across during a cursory examination of the archival data were still common names within the community, and that what I was going to writing about could in fact have an effect upon the community. This became a governing issue that would have to be dealt with during the process of writing the local history. Hence, I would need to visit the community and consult with local people about these issues to include those descendants in the interpretation of events listed in the archival data.

Community input was also vital to aid in my better understanding the Saulteaux world view, which would assist in my better understanding which archival data was significant for the purposes of the project. It became important to emphasize "the relative nature of differences of identity and recognizing the inevitability of competing subjectivities in the development of knowledge."⁵² In other words, community members would help the author to better understand the reasons for seasonal migrations, why certain regions were utilized and why others were not, and how certain land formations came to be named. Questions about governmental structure and process that emerged during archival research would be answered by community members. And, when the archival record differed from oral histories, further conversations were to take place to analyze why these differences may have existed. Community input was vital to my producing a relevant regional history.

Indeed, my intent was to develop a history that would not aspire to Martin's "people of nature" musings. I intended to argue the opposite, that in fact Native people are more attuned to their history and their ancestors' motivations than contemporary historians are willing to concede: this is a result of Native epistemology which recognizes time as holistic and cyclical. This means that the ancestors were (and still are) accessible through a variety of means, and it is through this contact that teachings can re-emerge which not only guide the people in their current situation, but also inform the people as to how it once was.⁵³ For this reason alone, community input into the production of any local history is vital. In this case, although sole authorship was mine, I viewed myself as an author writing on behalf of the community. This does not mean that the community guided each and every facet of the research and writing. Rather, the research was conducted and the history developed independently, and the findings were presented at a later date or when it was requested of me. What resulted was a community-guided view of its own history, which was constructed by employing an outside researcher to gather the archival data and create the original rough drafts. Ultimately, it was anticipated that the archival data would provide the project with the legitimacy an oral-based research project has yet to be accorded. However, the history produced does correspond with local oral histories. The only difference is that archival data was used to verify the oral record.

The most challenging yet favorable aspect of this project was the development of a relationship between the author and the community members. Developing good working relations with community members is a key component in determining the success of a community-based research project.⁵⁴ Relationship gives birth to conversation, which takes the form of storytelling that in turn allows the conveyance of information to take place. The development of a strong relationship led the community to trust the writer, which put community members at ease when it came time to outline the significant oral histories. The development of this relationship led the community to trust the conclusions being made about cultural issues that would not have been understood without community input.

In Saulteaux epistemology, relationship is a foundational tenet⁵⁵ that concerns itself with sharing, honesty, and kindness—each one an important concept when the "collective heritage is recorded in the minds of the people."⁵⁶ Accordingly, an individual's worth to the community is judged through his or her participation in community affairs,⁵⁷ making it possible for an outside researcher to form a meaningful relationship that is beneficial to all.⁵⁸ However, this is a delicate balance that ultimately places community leaders and historians in a difficult position. The issue at its most basic level is temporal, as community representatives need time to evaluate a person independent of his or her role as researcher. Focusing on relationship and introducing oneself to community residents develops camaraderie, allows trust and the flow of ideas to begin, and a truly reciprocal relationship to evolve. Initiating this relationship

is vital and can begin simply by speaking to the chief and council or with a local elder or an elders' organization. Through such a conversation, a social contract (coming together of the minds) is established that will outline roles for both the researcher and the community.⁵⁹ Both parties then construct the regional history in tandem. I will now outline the various steps involved in data collection and creation of the regional history.

Archive Data Collection and Analysis

A project of this scope had never before been attempted within the Interlake region; however, IRTC officials were aware that a significant collection of archival material pertaining to the Interlake region was readily accessible at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg. And, since there were no available researchers on staff at the IRTC, the job was turned over to me. Although it was presumed that this archival data could aid the IRTC in its claims against the government, officials were made aware that the research might result in minimal gains, a fact that must be faced when entering into a project of this nature. It was decided that should this occur, at the very least a local history of the Interlake Saulteaux would be produced.

A wealth of data was located within the records of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The Anglican Mission located at Fairford was first established in 1842 under the tutelage of an Anglican minister, Abraham Cowley, who engaged in prolific correspondence with superiors located at the Red River Settlement (present-day Winnipeg) as well as with friends in Canada and England. I was charged with both exhuming and inspecting this information. It was believed that Cowley's journals and letters would provide an excellent glimpse into Saulteaux life that had not been previously available, albeit a European understanding of events; little did we realize how impressive this database was. During his tenure from 1842-1854, Cowley traveled extensively throughout the Interlake region seeking Saulteaux for the purposes of conversion. He then logged in his journals where and when he found Native people throughout the region, indicating the people's reasons for being at various land use sites while also transcribing stories and historical anecdotes. Cowley's successor, Reverend William Stagg, adopted this procedure, and what resulted was an archival record of approximately 1,822 pages of written correspondence and CMS directives produced between 1842-1867.

Additional sources were analyzed, including HBC trading post records and documents housed at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM). In the end, the community and I decided that this wealth of archival data, when triangulated against the existing historical record and the records of the Hind Expedition that traveled through the territory in 1858, could be used in concert with the oral histories that would be collected. This step would be sufficient to produce the regional history of the Saulteaux.

Methodologically, the archival record could have been used as the primary

information source, although we realized that this data required verification. Consequently, a secondary source literature review was conducted with the hope that additional information would provide insight into the archival data. With the exception of recent ethnohistorical works in which the Interlake Saulteaux were acknowledged, there was little information available.⁶⁰ The triangulation of written material was completed by comparing all collected data with excerpts from the Hind Expedition that traveled through the region in 1858.

Further investigation into the ethnological and ethnographic record seemed a prudent move that could expand upon the cultural context that plays an integral role in our understanding of why people acted as they did in the past. This information base was also quite impressive. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, central and northern Manitoba played host to a significant number of anthropologists, who likely equated their role to that of “an antiquarian, scrupulously preserving for history the traditions and literatures of dying cultures,”⁶¹ looking to collect as much information as possible on a vanishing race of people. Accordingly, the existing record for Manitoba is extensive. Yet despite the fact that the field notes and published materials are quite Eurocentric in content, it was believed that the descriptive quality of the work could only enhance our understanding of the past and inform us as to why certain events occurred as they did.⁶² Analysis of this information requires a trained eye. In this case, however, the community played the role of expert by interpreting the textured writings and the multiple meanings behind a number of descriptions. This point is another positive aspect to utilizing “guided history” methodology.

Community Discussions

A number of obstacles surfaced in the course of researching and writing the regional history of the Saulteaux. And, in most cases, when I came across such an obstacle to understanding, the community members who chose to take part in the project were available to provide insight that helped clarify the issue. Again, those critical of my approach were concerned that the community would gain too much control over the work and that academic accountability would suffer. This later became a balancing act as I needed not only to produce a work that the community members were pleased with, but I was also required to fulfill academic requirements in order to complete my graduate work. This problem is not confined to production of theses or dissertations, for scholars produce work that is regularly gauged by peers. Overall, my concern was with how the community would react to my work, for it was their history I was responsible for writing. The importance of history in this case transcended academia's confines due to the fact that it had the power to affect people at the community level. Furthermore, despite prevailing issues of academic accountability that would have to be dealt with, I was first and foremost ethically obligated to focus on the

community's concern, for it was the IRTC who placed the responsibility for this project in my hands. Due to the versatility of the discipline of Native Studies, I was able to assuage many problems prior to presenting my thesis, although it is acknowledged that history as a discipline is not as methodologically or professionally forgiving. However, the history produced for the IRTC was satisfactory to the community and was written from a Saukteaux perspective, something that could only be done with community assistance.

The community assistance varied from personal discussions to e-mails and letters being exchanged. When a problem was ascertained, whether it was an interpretive error on my part or that the archival record was considered to be inaccurate, a discussion took place and the dilemma was resolved. And despite the sole authorship claimed on my thesis, the production of the work could not have been realized without community input and guidance.

Interestingly, community discussions in certain cases led to corroboration of the archival record. At other times, stories were recounted over and over by community members with little deviation, with each re-telling of these stories acting as an internal system of corroboration. Mostly, the discussions allowed input regarding how the Saukteaux viewed their history during the process of converting the archival and oral record into a written text. For our purposes, we were not concerned so much with whether or not archival data could be corroborated specifically, but rather we were focused on producing a regional history that told the story of the Saukteaux from a Saukteaux perspective. Fortunately, we were able to provide corroborating archival, historical, and ethnological material to support oral histories, which legitimized this history according to academic standards.

One final note has to do with the ownership of the final work that was produced. In this case, it was decided early on that I would be acting as author on behalf of the community, which would guide my efforts as the written Saukteaux history was produced. I was authorized to later publish my findings, permitted I acknowledge both IRTC and community input. One issue the parties involved had not considered was the requirement on my part to sign over my copyright to the Canadian government so that my thesis could be transferred to microfiche for placement in the National Library of Canada. The federal government in essence now owns the work produced. The community understood that such events can occur in projects of this nature and did not object to the copyright transfer.

Conclusion

Native history cannot be studied according to the same criteria and methodologies that historians use to study non-Native cultures. As demonstrated, Canadian courts will pronounce upon history and utilize their own interpretations of events to guide future jurists, the impact of which can be significant at the community level. We are also discovering that current methodologies are

often ineffective for research within Native communities.⁶³ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) commissioners went so far as to design their own ethics protocol for research.⁶⁴ Further, Euro-Canadian approaches to Native education,⁶⁵ justice issues affecting Native peoples,⁶⁶ and Native psychology,⁶⁷ to name a few, are now viewed as ineffectual. Researchers, academics, and political analysts create new methods daily to promote innovative ways of gathering data to enhance our ways of knowing. Despite the formulation of these new and unprecedented approaches throughout academia, historians still uphold antiquated approaches that do little to embrace Native history as it exists. Ethnohistory was developed to provide a culturally-sensitive approach to writing Native histories, albeit from a European perspective that mostly recognizes the Native influence upon settler populations. Interestingly, ethnohistorians have yet to develop a logical and fundamental research design, let alone define what ethnohistory is.

We, who, produce Native history are at a crossroads. Native history is real and in need of recognition by mainstream historians who are still resistant to new ideas. This area is where "guided history" or similar methodologies can come into play. Steps such as this will facilitate the interaction of equals who seek, in a research project, to establish a relationship of mutual understanding, sharing and benefit. Consequently, an atmosphere in which both parties agree not to interfere with each other's way of life will also develop. Once trust has been established, an effective working relationship can be established. The best approach at this point is simply to recognize that history as a discipline is inherently flawed when it comes to producing Native histories and proceed accordingly—develop culturally-sensitive methodologies that inspire community involvement in all phases of production.

Notes

1. See, for example, Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Francis Jennings, *The Invasion Within: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), for two examples of writings that dealt with European impact upon previously autonomous tribes and Native peoples in North America. These two authors attempted to place Native peoples within their own historical realm, which relied little upon academic affirmation (although each work was received with tremendous fanfare).

2. See, for example, Donald L. Fixico, ed., *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Colin Calloway, ed., *New Directions in American Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987). See also D.A. Muise, ed., *Approaches to Native History in Canada: Papers of a Conference held at the National Museum of Man, October, 1975* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man Mercury Series, 1977).

3. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Cultural Pluralism Versus Ethnocentrism in the New Indian History," in Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New

York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 36-37.

4. Calvin Martin, "The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History," in C. Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 27.

5. Yale D. Belanger, "The Region Teemed with Abundance: Saulteaux Concepts of Territory and Sovereignty," in John Nichols, ed., *Papers of the 32nd Algonquian Conference* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 17-34; Yale D. Belanger, *Saulteaux Land Use Within the Interlake Region of Manitoba: 1842-1871* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 2001, Master's Thesis, Department of Native Studies); see also Yale D. Belanger, "Saulteaux Land Use: Manitoba Interlake Region, 1842-1871," in Jill Oakes, Rick Riewe, Marlyn Bennett, and Brenda Chisholm, eds., *Pushing the Margins: Native and Northern Studies* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba, Native Studies Press, 2001), 399-410. This last article is a revised version of chapter 5 of my Master's thesis and the methodology used also went into its production.

6. *Mitchell v. Peguis Indian Band* [1990] 2 S.C.R., 85; see also Ken Coates, *The Marshall Decision and Native Rights* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), for a detailed, academic discussion of the court's decision.

7. *Ibid.*, 85.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Regina v. Marshall*. [1999] 4 C.N.L.R., 182-185.

10. *Ibid.*, 182-83. See also Robin Fisher, "Judging History: Reflections on the Reasons for Judgement in *Delgamuukw v. B.C.*," in Robin Fisher and Ken Coates, eds., *Out of the Background: Readings on Canadian Native History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), 391-400. Fisher is critical of Judge McEachern's course in *Delgamuukw v. B.C.*, claiming that the Justice created history vis-à-vis cut-and-paste methodology. He also questions the legitimacy of non-historians writing histories such as McEachern's, especially when the transfer of large sums of money and territory depends upon these court-generated conclusions.

11. *Regina v. Marshall*, 183.

12. *Ibid.*, 183.

13. *Ibid.*, 174.

14. *Ibid.*, 174.

15. In the recent *Mitchell v. M.N.R.* [2001] S.C.C. decision, which upholds the Aboriginal right of cross-border transport of goods without the payment of duty, legal advisor Paul Williams recently stated that of the 396 articles submitted as evidence, only two were written by Haudenosaunee people (one by Arthur Parker, one by John Mohawk). Personal communication, Peterborough, Ontario, February 26, 2001.

16. Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 27.

17. Hugh Trevor Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 9, cited in Shephard Krech III, "The State of Ethnohistory," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 20(1991): 345.

18. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, H.B. Nisbet, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

19. Carr, *What is History?*, 6-22.

20. David Bebbington, *Patterns in History* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 12.

21. Olive Patricia Dickason, "Twenty-five Years of Progress in Doing Native History," *Social Sciences and Humanities Aboriginal Exchange*, <<http://www.sshare.aboriginalcanada.com/articles/sadick97.htm>>, 12 August 1999.

22. Olive Patricia Dickason, "Some Aspects of History and Otherwise," in Donald B. Smith, ed., *Forging a New Relationship: Proceedings of the Conference on the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Kingston: Queen's University, 1997), 21-24.

23. John Tosh, *In Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods & New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1991), 10.

24. Carr, *What Is History?*, 108-109.

25. *Ibid.*, 27.

26. Winona Stevenson, "The Othering of Indigenous History," *Saskatchewan History*,

Vol. 50, No. 2, (Fall 1998): 24.

27. Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); see also Martin, "The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History."

28. Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 98.

29. Leroy Little Bear, "Relationship of Aboriginal People to the Land and the Aboriginal Perspective on Aboriginal Title," in *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996); cited in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Treaty Making in the Spirit of Co-Existence: An Alternative to Extinction* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1994), 10-11.

30. Little Bear, "Relationship of Aboriginal People to the Land and the Aboriginal Perspective on Aboriginal Title." See also Leroy Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," in Marie Battiste, ed., *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 77-85; Sakej Youngblood Henderson, "Ayukpachi: Empowering Aboriginal Thought," in M. Battiste, ed., *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 248-278.

31. Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 47.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 122.

34. Cited in Boyce Richardson, *People of Terra Nullius: Betrayal and Rebirth in Aboriginal Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1993), 91.

35. James Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Native America," in Donald L. Fixico, ed., *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 23.

36. Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Native America," 13.

37. Martin, "The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History," 41.

38. Oral history, for our purposes, is the collective memory of the past which exists as part of the oral tradition of Canada's Native peoples.

39. Winona Stevenson, "The Social Relations of History," *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Fall 1998): 29.

40. Quoted in Julie Cruikshank, "Claiming Legitimacy: Oral Tradition and Oral History," in *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996), CD-ROM.

41. John Friesen, "Native Cultures in Cultural Clash," in John Friesen, ed., *The Cultural Maze: Complex Questions on Native Destiny in Western Canada* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1991), 27.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening For a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1994), 150.

44. Julie Cruikshank, "Notes and Comments," *Canadian Studies Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3. See also Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Athapaskan Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

45. George Sioui, *For An Amerindian Autohistory: An Essay on the Foundations of a Social Ethic* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1992), 21.

46. Angela Cavendar Wilson, "Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Tradition in American Indian History," in Donald L. Fixico, ed., *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 109.

47. *Ibid.*, 109-110.

48. The Interlake Reserves Tribal Council represents seven bands in Manitoba's Interlake region.

49. Carr, *What Is History?*, 27.

50. For this general discussion, see Leanne Simpson, *The Construction of Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Issues, Implications and Insights* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba,

2000, dissertation); Leanne Simpson, "Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing," in J. Oakes, R. Riewe, S. Koolage. L. Simpson, and N. Schuster, eds., *Aboriginal Health, Identity and Resources* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Native Studies Press, 2000), 165-185.

51. See *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996.

52. Cited in Lise Noel, *Intolerance: A General Survey*, A. Bennett, trans., (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), 147.

53. Dreams are but one way a person today may access information of the past. Other processes include, but are not limited to, taking part in vision quests, fasts, or ceremonies such as sweats.

54. Yale D. Belanger, "Gaining a Foothold: Native American Studies, Graduate Students, and the Issue of Relationship," *Native Voices in Research* (Winnipeg: Native Studies Press, in press).

55. For his discussion on hunting and the nature of the relationship between hunter and the four-legged, other-than-humans, see A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and Worldview," in Stanley Diamond, ed., *Primitive Views of the World: Essays from Culture in History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). See also Adrian Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters* (London: Hurst, 1979), and Christopher Vecsey, "American Indian Environmental Religions," in C. Vecsey, ed., *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980). For a more general discussion of the issue of relationship specifically see F. David Peat, *Lighting the Seventh Fire: The Spiritual Ways, Healing, and Science of the Native Americans* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994).

56. Little Bear, "Relationship of Aboriginal People to the Land and the Aboriginal Perspective on Aboriginal Title," 51.

57. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 1994.

58. Vine Deloria, Jr., "Commentary: Research, Redskins, and Reality," *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (Fall 1991): 457-468.

59. Pam Colorado, "Bridging Native and Western Science," *Convergence*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (1988): 57.

60. The two primary ethnohistorical reconstructions that involve a brief investigation into the Interlake Saulteaux are Frank Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), and Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1994); see also Peers' Master's thesis, *An Ethnohistory of the Western Ojibwa, 1780-1830* (Winnipeg: Master's Thesis, 1987, Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba, Department of History).

61. Michael Castro, *Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth-Century Poets and the Native American* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Although Castro's thesis deals with how authors have continued to be influenced by antiquated imagery of Native people rather than the existing conditions Native people face, his claim that anthropologists were simply preserving the last vestiges of Native culture in a written format is widely accepted.

62. See Meyer and Klein, "Native American Studies and the End of Ethnohistory," for this discussion.

63. See, for example, Marie Battiste, ed., *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999).

64. See Integrated Research Plan, in *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996).

65. There have been a number of collections in recent years demonstrating how ineffective Euro-Canadian approaches to education among Native people have been and continue to be. See Fyre Jean Graveline, *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1998), Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, eds., *The*

Circle Unfolds: First Nations Education in Canada (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995); Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert, and Don McCaskill, eds.; *Indian Education in Canada: The Legacy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986); and Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert, and Don McCaskill, eds., *Indian Education in Canada: The Challenge* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987).

66. See the *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, Volume 1: The Justice System and Aboriginal People* (Winnipeg: Queen's Printer, 1991), for an excellent investigation into why the justice system, due primarily to its inherent systemic discrimination, fails Native peoples.

67. See Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Post-Colonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).