

Turning the Page: Ethnohistory from a New Generation

Keith Thor Carlson, University of Saskatchewan
John Lutz, University of Victoria
David Schaepe, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management
Centre

Ethnohistory is not for the faint of heart, navigating as it does between the Scylla (rock) of Anthropology and the Charybdis (hard place) of history.¹ This is no mean challenge and it is only in recent decades that researchers have tried to pull this off — this specialization can be dated from the advent of the journal *Ethnohistory* in 1954. Ethnohistory, simply put, is the combination of the oral history, cultural focus, and field work of the ethnographer with the archival research and temporal context of the historian. Put another way, ethnohistory seeks to meld the temporal sensitivities of the historian with the cultural sensitivities of the anthropologist. This combination of skills is rare enough, but the challenge became even more exacting when the tides of post-modern and post-colonial critiques began to run through the channel in the last two decades. The post-modern critique brought home the idea that what we see in other cultures will be a combination of what we want to see and what our own cultural blinkers allow us to see. The post-colonial critiques suggested that anthropology and history had been closely tied to colonialist projects, facilitating them, in the case of anthropology, and justifying them, in the case of history. Meanwhile, court cases adjudicating Aboriginal rights emphasized that scholarship was never politically neutral, and that researchers could no longer afford to be disconnected from the people they studied, or the impact their studies had upon people. A new type of ethnohistory was called for.²

But where to look? The skills of ethnohistory, new and old, are not often, and never systematically, taught at university. There are no departments of ethnohistory and comparatively few courses. In most cases scholars trained in history or anthropology self-teach some tricks of their partner discipline. But if ethnohistorians are to be more than disciplinary poachers with mastery over only one half of the ethno-history divide a more deliberate effort at training is needed.

Over the past decade, the Stó:lō Nation/Tribal Council of the lower Fraser River watershed in Southwestern BC and the History Departments of the University of Victoria and the University of Saskatchewan have collaborated to help answer the call for a new

¹ Homer's *The Odyssey* describes Scylla and Charybdis, two sea monsters situated on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and Italy posing an inescapable threat to passing sailors. Scylla lived in a rock and ate sailors but avoiding her meant being sucked up in the whirlpool created by Charybdis and vice versa.

² John R. Wunder, "Native American History, Ethnohistory, and Context," *Ethnohistory* 54, no. 4 (2007): 591–604; Jill Doerfler, "Recent Works in North American Biography and Ethnography," *Ethnohistory* 55, no. 2 (2008): 331–334.

way of training people to “do” a new form of ethnohistory. Together they have formed a genuinely respectful relationship that has allowed the development of a unique Ethnohistory Field school program and educational experience; one that provides the critical inter-disciplinary methodological training and theoretical perspectives required in the contested middle-ground between academia and meaningful community-based scholarship. The innovative papers comprising this collection are products of this process. Collectively, they conspire to turn the page on the era of cross-disciplinary dabbling and disconnected-from-the-community research as they introduce a new chapter in the evolution of scholarship.

The new ethnohistory aims to resolve the key academic tension revolving around the imbalance between the two parts of that awkward compound ethnohistory. It recognizes that the real dilemma has been researchers’ lack of methodological preparation at integrating the methods and insights of ethnographic study into those of the historic analysis, and vice versa. Inevitably, a practitioner’s training or inclination resulted in a lopsided privileging of one over the other. As Marshall Sahlins recently noted, “If anthropology was for too long the study of ‘historyless peoples,’ history for even longer was studying ‘cultureless peoples’.”³

One of two key thrusts in the new ethnohistory is the respect it accords differing world views. Less an exercise in cultural relativism than in finding cultural relevance, ethnohistorians are now expected to step into a world view that does not necessarily “make sense” to them and do their best to see how it makes sense according to rules of others. Attention to cultural context has been a hallmark of the new ethnohistorical literature, as exemplified by Julie Cruikshank who argues that the meaning of a story is largely dependent on the context in which it is told. Cruikshank argues that aboriginal stories are less about historical events than they are didactic responses to the situation in which they are told. They are important and interesting to outsiders, not as a means to merge two histories but to learn how the stories are used by storytellers and listeners. She asks us to focus on the social life of the story — as she says, rather than the embedded truth in the story.⁴

If indigenous stories have a social life, the same must be true of the non-indigenous tales. A fundamental contribution to the rebalancing of ethnohistory that the new scholarship offers the larger field does not ask that we treat indigenous, folk, or other non-scholarly stories as factual, but that we treat our western historic sources (both primary and secondary), and by implication our own inscriptions, as stories. In other words we treat the interpretations of the observer and the observed as equally mytho-historical and we examine them as a single field. Treating the interaction as a single field means putting both parties under the same ethnohistorical lens, posing the same questions to the different sources in the field about the relationship of myth to history.

³ *Waiting for Foucault, Still*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), 72.

⁴ “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues,” *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1999): 403–418; Julie Cruikshank in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Vancouver, BC: UBC, 1991).

The second intellectual thrust driving the new ethnohistory involves heeding the call to recognize that cultural change is as likely to be the outcome of indigenous agency as coercive colonialism, and that continuity should be no more or less valued in an assessment of indigenous society than innovation. As Alletta Biersack observes, the fact that the historical outcome of colonialism and imperialism has not been the universal and complete destruction of indigenous societies, but a world in which the “other” has found new ways to be different reveals that colonized communities were not, and are not, without agency.⁵ The new ethnohistory embraces notions like hybridity; is comfortable finding and critiquing power relationships of various kinds — including within Aboriginal society; recognizes that cultural change, even colonial-induced cultural change, need not be unidirectional; embraces the tensions between tradition and innovation; and does not need to be reminded that non-Native newcomers are not always the most important thing in Aboriginal society and history. We have come to recognize that Aboriginal people can be appreciated not only as minor players on the stage of “Indian-white” relations but as leading characters in plays which they co-authored if not composed outright themselves. Thus, ethnohistory today asks us to explore less the story of Aboriginals in western and colonial history than the saga of western newcomers in multiple Aboriginal histories.

This new ethnohistory is still taking shape in the work of young and established scholars such as those contributing papers to this collection. From this work, some additional characteristics are clear. The new ethnohistory is collaborative with the people we are trying to understand, and brings mutual benefits. Each of these essays is the result of a collaborative process with the Stó:lō. The new ethnohistory is reflexive. This means it is both conscious of the role of the researcher in the community and the way in which research changes the subject of study, and self-aware (to the extent that is possible) of the cultural baggage the researcher brings to the project. Bruce Trigger long ago called for a broadening of the notion of ethnohistory to include the skills and insights of archaeology and since then ethnohistory has drawn in a range of additional skill sets from cultural studies to law to statistical analyses.⁶ This richer “Expanded Ethnohistory” is characteristic of the papers here. As part of the reflexivity of the new scholarship, authors have become increasingly aware of their analytical tools and more willing to foreground the theoretical and methodological influences. As often as not these tools come from the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology where “field-based methods” are fore-fronted.

While field schools have long been integral components of social science research; seldom are they associated with the humanities, even less so as a community-university relationship. Yet, as the insightful and innovative papers in this collection make apparent, the field school experience has much to offer as an enriching experience integrating research, education, and in this case, a cross-cultural sharing of knowledge.

⁵ *Clio in Oceania: Towards a Historical Anthropology*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 14.

⁶ “Ethnohistory: Problems and Prospects,” *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982): 1–19.

Beginning in the early 1990s, collaborative anthropology and archaeology field schools developed between a number of universities and the Stó:lō Nation/Tribal Council. Field schools among these disciplines became annual occurrences. Professional staff at the Stó:lō Nation/Tribal Council office networked with academic archaeologists and anthropologists about research projects — negotiating topics that in many cases integrated community- and university-based questions and points of interest with specific student training. Stó:lō community members directly participated in most archaeological field schools. Such social science field schools, though much more collaborative than in previous generations, fell within a long intellectual and pedagogic tradition — one historians had not seen fit to participate in. Most historians preferred the model of the solitary scholar sitting in a dusty archives reviewing the records left by non-Native observers to the often politically charged arena of community-based, collaborative, oral history research. But times were changing, and the dominance of social history coupled with the insights provided by the post-modern turn in scholarship meant that historians could no longer in good conscience claim to be writing Aboriginal history when they were not speaking with Aboriginal people. And the benefits of the interdisciplinary methods emerging within the sub-field of ethnohistory meant that historians could no longer easily absolve themselves of training their graduate students in the methods of fieldwork.

But if shifting academic expectations encouraged historians to get out in the field, it was the political and judicial system that gave the final impetus. Provincial and Canadian supreme court rulings on cases involved in defining Aboriginal land, fishing, and hunting rights emphasized that history mattered. Neither Aboriginal society nor colonial society unilaterally shaped and defined the contemporary expression of Aboriginal rights. Rather, these rights were forged in historical relationships, and to understand them required acquiring a sophisticated understanding of not only Aboriginal people in Canadian history, but colonialism in multiple Aboriginal histories.

In 1997 the staff historian at the Stó:lō Nation office, Keith Carlson, approached the Chiefs to ask if they would be willing to try an experiment — inviting historians and graduate students to come to live and research within and among the Stó:lō community in a manner similar to an anthropology field school, but on topics that were decidedly historical in nature, where temporal change and continuity were forefronted and where experience in archival analysis would be enriched with oral history methods and theoretical insights. The Stó:lō leaders' response was overwhelmingly supportive. Other Stó:lō staff, and in particular the cultural advisor Sonny McHalsie, archaeologist David Schaepe, and archivist David Smith, along with community members were then consulted and asked to generate ethnohistorical topics that they felt would be beneficial to the community and the research work they were doing or supervising. A list of over twenty potential topics was assembled. John Lutz, at the University of Victoria's history department, was invited to be the faculty supervisor, and he in turn arranged for half a dozen students to embark on Canada's first Ethnohistory Graduate Field School. UVic then seconded Keith Carlson to act as co-instructor for the course.

Over the past decade the ethnohistory field school model has been tweaked to maximize the student experience and the benefits to the Stó:lō community, but the framework has remained essentially the same. The class is offered roughly every second year. Students spend four weeks in the field. The first week they attend daily seminars where they read and discuss an array of interdisciplinary scholarship, some thematic and some specific to the Stó:lō cultural and environmental context. During this week they are orientating themselves to their surroundings, acquiring methodological skills and theoretical perspectives, and working to define the parameters of their individual research projects. They spend their nights during the first week billeted with Stó:lō families in the various communities, and in this way acquire first-hand understandings of Stó:lō social life while building relationships that will facilitate their subsequent research. After the first week students move to the Coqualeetza site in Chilliwack — the administrative headquarters of the Stó:lō Nation — where they live communally, sharing meals and sleeping on wooden benches around open-pit fires inside a dirt-floor cedar longhouse.

In subsequent years, John Lutz's UVic students were joined by those from the University of Saskatchewan, where Keith Carlson now teaches, and the Stó:lō Nation Rights and Title Office has transformed into the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre where Sonny McHalsie and David Schaepe serve as co-directors. Together McHalsie and Schaepe not only generate student topics but facilitate the infrastructure needs of the field school while providing important daily cultural guidance and logistical direction. They are assisted in this by Tia Halstadt and Tracey Joe, among others. Each student's field school paper eventually finds its way to the Stó:lō archives, along with digital copies of any conducted interviews. These reports and associated oral evidence contribute to the Stó:lō Nation's growing archival resources and help build capacity as the Stó:lō engage in ongoing negotiations with federal and provincial authorities over the management and governance of the people and resources of their traditional territory.

Students say that they work harder in the field school than in any other course. They have also described their field school experience as “life-altering,” and “the best academic experience I've ever had.” Certainly, their term papers stand out among graduate essays for their innovativeness, methodological sophistication, and depth of intellectual insight. Many field school students have taken their term papers and used them as the basis of subsequent masters theses or doctoral dissertations.

Presented here are some of the best of the field school papers from the past decade. Working as a team, we have reviewed each paper and selected seven that illustrated elements of the new ethnohistory while offering the most meaning for Stó:lō community members and leaders.

Amanda Fehr's paper, “The Relationships of Place: A Study of Memory, Change, Identity and I:yem,” for example, examines the changing way Stó:lō people have related to a particular site in the Fraser Canyon called I:yem. Identified as a topic with great community currency by Sonny McHalsie, Fehr investigates the multiple ways I:yem has been understood by different people over time, for the site is a disputed location, simultaneously associated with salmon fishing and wind drying, the early Native rights

movement, environmental change brought by industrial developments, and a graveyard where ancestral spirits reside. It is also the site of a concrete cross memorial erected in 1938 by Stó:lō people concerned that their fishing rights and ancestors might be forgotten in a rapidly changing world. Fehr examines the functioning of memory around I:yem to reveal the way relationships are built between people and places and how these relationships change over time.⁷

In a related way, Katya MacDonald's "Crossing Paths: Accessing Stó:lō Fishing Sites in the Twentieth Century" builds from work Keith Carlson is conducting into the history of fishing conflicts, as well as concerns Stó:lō people have over the need to secure their right to fish and their right to manage their fishery. Her focus is not only on the points of physical, administrative, and legal access, but also the broader intellectual, social, and hereditary cultural access — matters often in conflict with one another and always affecting one another.

Anastaziya Tataryn's examination of the changing role of hereditary names among the Stó:lō in recent decades helps explain some of the ambiguity in ownership over fishing sites described in MacDonald's paper. Tataryn asks non-Stó:lō to step into a Stó:lō worldview and understand how the Halkomelem language and the ongoing use of ancestral names in their communities points to a different sense of self and one's relationship to time, place and people.

The theme that meaning changes once you cross cultural boundaries is picked up by Liam Haggarty's paper on the meanings of "welfare" or "social assistance" in Stó:lō communities. Haggarty takes a culturally-reflexive approach which asks non-Stó:lō to apply the same ethnographic lens to their own culture as we are inclined to use to view others. When we do so, he argues, the culturally different views of "welfare" become understandable and offer a constructive foundation for re-examination.

In his paper "Building Longhouses and Constructing Identities: A Brief History of the Coqualeetza Longhouse and Shxwt'a:selhawtxw," John Clapperton examines and compares the construction of two Stó:lō educational longhouses in the 1980s and 90s. These two community development initiatives are treated as historical events situated within a period of Aboriginal civil and political action. Couched within a framework of "identity hybridity," Clapperton uses archival information and oral history documenting these events to examine the process by which history is created. This case study provides insight into the dynamic relations between politics, history, and the construction of identity as affecting and affected by aboriginal peoples.

Kathy McKay, meanwhile, draws connections between the past, present and future in the treatment of ancestral remains and contemporary cultural heritage policy development at the Stó:lō Nation. The history cultural practices established in her paper, "Disturbing the

⁷ Editors' note: in the autumn of 2008, subsequent to Ms Fehr submitting her article, the I:yem memorial was destroyed by members of the Yale First Nation in the heated and as yet unresolved conflict between the Yale First Nation and Stó:lō Nation/Tribal Council.

Dead: Diversity and Commonality Among the Stó:lō,” are not static, but rather described by both continuity and change. McKay compares the attitudes and beliefs of contemporary Stó:lō elders and cultural workers with descriptions of cultural practices derived from archaeological, ethnographic and historical information. Her work, motivated by a case involving the RCMP and the recovery of ‘found human remains’ being dealt with by Nation’s Archaeologist (Schaepe) and Cultural Advisor (McHalsie) in 2000, provided practical information on Stó:lō protocols involving the taking care of ancestral remains. The results of her work helped inform Schaepe and McHalsie’s development of elements of the Stó:lō Heritage Policy, adopted by the Stó:lō Nation Chiefs Council in 2003.

Examining indigenous Stó:lō views of traditional foods, Lesley Wiebe provides voice — or ‘talk’ — about the value of non-western foods in contemporary Stó:lō society. Increasing incidences of diabetes and obesity are serious issues being contended with by the Stó:lō Nation health program. While driven by community concerns, Wiebe’s research extends beyond the realm of biological issues to provide comment on the importance of traditional foods in the process of cultural revival and changing Native-newcomer relations. Historical changes in dietary practice are connected with attempted acculturational processes of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Wiebe’s research demonstrates the awareness of Stó:lō community members of historical changes as well as their conscientious efforts to change the nature of historical native-newcomer relations and to feed into communities’ revitalization through re-incorporating traditional diet. Her focus on food provides a common ground that elucidates cultural differences and historical power-play.

If the new ethnohistory involves negotiating one’s scholarship between various historical rocks and cultural hard places, these authors have done a remarkable job. Each of the papers here speaks to intimate local Stó:lō concerns, but in a way that illuminates larger intellectual and social issues. The papers, and the field school that spawned them, serve to simultaneously satisfy multiple interests. In this introductory essay we have identified only a few of the most obvious. Striking a balance between the ethnographic and the historic may pose the greatest intellectual challenge, but it is not necessarily the most demanding, nor, in the end, the most rewarding. Knowing that one’s research and analysis will not only be of interest to Aboriginal community members, but that the Aboriginal community was involved in defining and then participated in executing the research brings a sense of satisfaction that has no parallel in academia. The new ethnohistory is closely attuned to community interests and is adjudicated as much by its ability to be intelligible and meaningful to the people whose history is described as by the rigorous scholarly standards demanded of peer review.

Keith Thor Carlson is an Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Saskatchewan. He was employed by the Stó:lō Nation to coordinate and conduct ethnohistorical research and analysis from 1992–2001. With John Lutz, he has acted as co-instructor of Canada’s only Ethnohistory Graduate Field School since 1997. He is the

author or editor of several books and numerous articles on Stó:lō and Coast Salish history, including *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Douglas and McIntyre, Stó:lō Heritage Trust and University of Washington Press, 2001) for which he was a contributing author and editorial board member and most recently with Kristina Fagan and Henry Pennier, *“Call Me Hank”: A Stó:lō Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old* (University of Toronto Press, 2006).

John Lutz teaches Canadian, American and British Columbia history at the University of Victoria and has co-taught the Ethnohistory Field School with the Stó:lō since 1998. He is co-director of the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History project, author of *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* and editor of *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (UBC Press, 2008).

David Schaepe is the Co-Director and Senior Archaeologist in the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, associated with the Stó:lō Nation and Stó:lō Tribal Council. He has worked for the Stó:lō since 1997. He is an advisor on the Stó:lō Xwexwilmexw Treaty Negotiation Team. His publications include *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Douglas and McIntyre, Stó:lō Heritage Trust and University of Washington Press, 2001) for which he was a contributing author and editorial board member, as well as articles in *American Antiquity* and edited volumes including Bruce Miller's *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*.