

A Few Fabulous Fragments: Historical Methods in James P. Howley's *The Beothucks*

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Since it was published in 1915, James Howley's The Beothucks has been an essential source for historians and novelists alike. Howley's training as a geologist and surveyor shaped his scholarship. Rather than seeing his book as a history of the Beothuk, he saw it as preserving the memory of the Indigenous people of the island of Newfoundland. He deferred to philologists and ethnographers on issues of theory and most effectively marshalled his critical sense when evaluating the oral testimony he collected. This reading of the book revisits the foundational text and shows the lasting legacy of Howley's scientific method and cultural assumptions upon the historiography and popular culture of the Beothuk.

Depuis sa publication en 1915, The Beothuks de James Howley s'est révélé une source essentielle tant pour les historiens que pour les romanciers. La formation de Howley comme géologue et arpenteur transparait dans son travail de recherche. Plutôt que de voir son livre comme une histoire des Béothuks, l'auteur l'a perçu comme un ouvrage préservant la mémoire des Autochtones de l'île de Terre-Neuve. Il s'en est remis aux philologues et aux ethnographes à propos des questions de théorie et a fait appel à son sens critique au moment d'évaluer les témoignages oraux recueillis par lui. La présente lecture de l'ouvrage permet de réexaminer ce texte fondateur et de présenter le legs durable de la méthode scientifique de Howley et de ses hypothèses culturelles sur l'historiographie et la culture populaire au sujet des Béothuks.

WE KNOW when James Patrick Howley started collecting anecdotes and artefacts of the Beothuk. In July 1871 he was travelling in Notre Dame Bay on behalf of the Geological Survey of Newfoundland when he met John Peyton Jr. Then in his 78th year, Peyton was the furrier who, along with his father, had seized Demasduit and in whose household Shanawdithit had lived. This chance

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encounter set Howley on a path of more than 40 years of research, and culminated in the publication of *The Beothucks or Red Indians* in 1915.¹ It remained the definitive collection of texts on the subject until 1996 when Ingeborg Marshall's *History and Ethnography* was published.² While Howley's book served as the essential source for historians, archaeologists, novelists, filmmakers, and poets, many readers have felt ambivalent towards it. A compilation of original texts with critical commentary can be an effective persuasive technique; the reader is invited to believe that the author is just presenting evidence and not imposing an interpretation. A few readers have seen this as a weakness. The book was "more published archive than narrative history" in one's view.³ Another reader suggested that it was a narrative, one that embodies a "colonial" point of view.⁴ The historian and archaeologist Ralph Pastore judged Howley "a diligent collector who applied a strong critical sense to both oral and documentary material."⁵

In reconstructing Howley's practices as a scholar, I have also relied upon his posthumously published *Reminiscences*, which he wrote in 1913 and 1914, just after finishing *The Beothucks*. First-hand observation was important for Howley—he mapped the topography and geology of the island. Accuracy and completeness in collecting data was uppermost in his professional practice as a surveyor, and description rather than didactic statements was his preferred method of exposition. He reproduced all the documents that he judged had interesting information about the Beothuk, even including those of which he was sceptical, and deployed a light editorial pencil. While historians use the book, Howley did not call his book a history of the Beothuk; he said that writing such a thing would be impossible. He referred to *The Beothucks* as "reminiscence." For him, the book and his assemblage of artefacts that formed the foundation of the collection at the Newfoundland Museum were means to remember the Beothuk.

His choice not to have explicit conclusions has led some readers to understate the degree to which his book has an interpretation. Howley implicitly set out several propositions that make an overarching argument about the effects of Beothuk/European interaction. First, the Beothuk were not by their nature violent, but their scavenging items belonging to European settlers set off a cycle of revenge and retribution.⁶ Second, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European and

1 James P. Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians: The Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915).

2 Ingeborg Marshall, *The History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

3 Richard Budget, "The Beothuks and the Newfoundland Mind," *Newfoundland Studies*, vol. 8, n° 1 (1992), p. 15.

4 Christopher Aylward, "The Beothuk Story: European and First Nations Narratives of the Beothuk People of Newfoundland" (PhD dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2014).

5 Ralph T. Pastore, "Archaeology, History and the Beothuks," *Newfoundland Studies*, vol. 9, n° 2 (1993), p. 260.

6 It is impossible to employ value-neutral language to describe this activity. My choice of the word *scavenge* is an attempt to be accurate. Europeans thought of the Beothuk taking their possessions as *theft*. The Beothuk may not have shared a similar notion of property and may have seen nothing wrong with gathering items the Europeans left behind. Alternatively the Beothuk might have taken tools and supplies as a sort of economic warfare in an effort to encourage the Europeans to leave their territory. Or the Beothuk might have conceived of their actions in ways that I cannot imagine.

colonial social elite condemned atrocities that rural fishermen and furriers had reportedly perpetrated against the Beothuk. Third, when Europeans journeyed into the woods to establish peace, they were fated to fail because earlier hostilities had provoked in the Beothuk an overwhelming distrust of the white man. Over the next century, many scholars echoed these interpretations, and Howley's work presented an essentialist picture of the Beothuk that lasts in popular culture to today.

This essay works within a now common historiographical frame. In the spirit of intellectual self-reflection, scholars read between the lines of writings about Indigenous peoples to illuminate patterns of Europeans' thought.⁷ A few of these researchers have argued that the writing of the history of Indigenous peoples, and the collection and interpretation of their material culture, often served the goal of erasing Indigenous peoples' agency and establishing the legitimacy of European occupancy.⁸ Jean O'Brien, for example, in a study of authors similar to Howley, points out that whites writing about Indigenous peoples were sometimes emphasizing their own modernity. At the same time, in the age of scientific racism, she continues, the purity of past Indigenous peoples could be contrasted with the mixed ancestry of contemporary Indigenous peoples to deny the latter's legitimate claims to sovereignty. White authors portrayed the cultural adaptations of Indigenous people as making them less authentic, and colonial societies could feel comfortable with the illusion that real Indigenous peoples were extinct.⁹ Such interpretative threads can be seen in Howley's thought too. In the late nineteenth century, nationalists also used archaeology to link themselves to glorious original peoples or to justify dispossession by presenting Indigenous people as primitive and unable to develop on their own.¹⁰ Howley was a late-nineteenth-century man with many of the attitudes of his day, but a description of his thought cannot be deduced from accounts of the prevailing cultural currents in the Americas.

Howley's Research

James Howley apprenticed under Alexander Murray of the Newfoundland Geological Survey and spent three decades mapping the island, searching for mineral deposits, and collecting information on the Beothuk. The chance meeting with Peyton whetted Howley's lifelong fascination with the Beothuk, but how could the then 21-year-old know of them?

[Peyton was] the best living authority on the subject of the Aborigines. He seemed delighted to relate his experiences with those poor unfortunate people when he

7 Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996).

8 Douglas Hunter, "Stone of Power: Dighton Rock, Colonization, and the Erasure of an Indigenous Past" (PhD dissertation, York University, 2015).

9 Jean M. O'Brien, *Indigenous Americans: Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. xxi-xxii.

10 Bruce Trigger, *Artifacts and Ideas: Essays in Archaeology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transactions Publishers, 2003), p. 78. See also Bruce Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2006).

found an interested listener. From the very first I became intensely interested in his stories about them, and ever since have followed up the subject and tried to gather every item of interest concerning them. It was such an absorbing subject it seemed to take full possession of me from that day forth.¹¹

Howley believed Peyton was “the best living authority” by virtue of the older man’s first-hand experience, social status, and skill at storytelling. As the two travelled on the same vessel, Peyton “again entertained us with many stories about the Red Indians during his sojourn aboard, all of which I jotted down.” “From this time forward,” Howley wrote, “I became intensely absorbed in the subject, and began to gather all possible information concerning those ill-fated children of Nature with a view to subsequent publication.”¹²

Whenever his fieldwork gave him the opportunity, Howley collected oral history about the Beothuk. Thomas Peyton, John Peyton Jr.’s son, later related “many stories about the Aborigines that he heard from the old furriers in his father’s employ” and a few Beothuk words learned from his mother, in whose house Shanawdithit had lived.¹³ Howley knew that such family stories were indirect evidence rather than eyewitness testimony, and he recognized them as *traditions* in the sense of beliefs handed down through generations.¹⁴

In fact, the subject was one that seemed to appeal to them more than anything else, and they all took a delight in relating what they had heard from the old folk. The traditions had been handed down from father to son for generations. But the Peyton family being the most intelligent and best educated persons I came across were the source from whence I gleaned the most reliable information. With the exception of old Mr Peyton and his wife there were indeed few living persons then who had actually seen a Red Indian in the flesh.¹⁵

Howley was not the first person to realize that information about the Beothuk had been filtered as it had passed through oral tradition. Joseph Banks, for example, wrote of what he had heard about the Beothuk when he had visited Newfoundland in 1766. He commented that “if half of what I have written about them is true it is more than I expect, tho’ I have not the least reason to think that the man who told it to me believed it, and had heard it from his own people, and more of the neighboring planters and fishermen.”¹⁶ Storytelling was an important part of Newfoundland culture, and, while many men welcomed the opportunity to tell Howley about their families’ interactions with the Beothuk, some women were less forthcoming. A woman who had lived in the Peyton household “gave me a

11 James P. Howley, *Reminiscences of Forty-Two Years of Exploration in and About Newfoundland*, edited by William J. Kirwin and Patrick A. O’Flaherty with the assistance of Robert C. Hollett (St. John’s, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2009), pp. 206-207.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

14 There were also a number of people who had family traditions to relate. John Gill, for example, had heard many stories from his mother who had worked in the Peyton household. See Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 752-753.

15 Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 207-208.

16 Joseph Banks quoted in Howley, *The Beothuks*, p. 28.

lot of interesting information, but at first was very reticent and did not care to talk Red Indian.”¹⁷ “Mrs Jure also pronounced several [Beothuk] words for me which from the fact of there being derived direct from Nancy [Shanawdithit] whom she said perfectly understood them when she pronounced them may be taken as quite correct.”¹⁸ John and Thomas Peyton may have delighted in recounting stories of the Beothuk, but Mrs. Peyton (Eleanor Mahaney) also “seemed rather reticent and disinclined to talk much on the subject.”¹⁹ Howley privileged first-hand over second-hand information and judged the veracity of information based upon its consistency with “authorities,” noting when the oral testimony of one informant confirmed that of another.²⁰

Land surveying allowed Howley to visit some sites where Beothuk had lived.²¹ In 1875, for example, he examined the North East Arm of Red Indian Lake, where Lt. David Buchan had met a group of Beothuk in 1811. Although they were by then overgrown with forest, Howley recognized the circular mounds of earth that remained of house pits. On the north side of the lake, Howley matched the location with the historical record and identified the place where Peyton captured “poor Mary March” [Demasduit] and where “her noble spouse, No-nos-ba-sut was slain.”²² The event was something he wanted to memorialize. He named a brook after Mary March, “a name which I hope may ever be retained. Should our nomenclature committee ever attempt to change it, I trust there will be sufficient public spirit shown to prevent any desecration.”²³

The stories Howley sought were supplemented by the collection of artefacts, but there is little in Howley's *Reminiscences* to suggest that he saw material culture as evidence to be used to understand their way of life. In 1880 he met Jabez Tilley of Sops Arm, from whom he heard “many interesting tales of olden times, of Red Indians ... [and] obtained possession of the mummified body of a Red Indian boy, found in Dark Tickle near Pilley's Island, which he exhibited in St John's a year or two ago.” He noted, “This relic is now in the St John's Museum.” Howley's choice of the word *relic* reflects something of his thought. *Relic* was often used in the sense of the physical remains of a saint, or an object owned by a saint, and preserved as an object of veneration. *Relic* might also be used in the senses of the remains or residue of a nation or people, a surviving trace of the past, an object vested with interest because of its age, or a physical reminder or a surviving trace of an occurrence or a people. Each of these evoke memory and reveal his interest in remembering rather than analysis, as suggested by the twentieth-century archaeologists' sense of the word *artefact*. *Artefact* had been used since the seventeenth century for an object made by human workmanship,

17 Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 711-712.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 712.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 766.

21 In 1878 when surveying mineral claims at Indian Bight, he observed several of the circular hollows of a former Beothuk encampment, but went on to observing the mineral outcropping. See Howley, *Reminiscences*, p. 441.

22 Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 326-327.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 327.

but the OED first notes its use in reference to items from an archaeological context in 1890.

Howley collected the relics to have tangible items by which to remember the Beothuk. On August 7, 1886, he was able “to gratify an old time longing to explore a Red Indian Burying place.”²⁴ Decades later, he recalled the experience. Howley and his men dug with pick and shovel, recovering some human remains, bone pendants, and square blocks with incised lines. Based on his knowledge of games gained from spending many months working with Mi’kmaq guides and citing a paper by the ethnologist Albert Samuel Gatschet, he inferred that these were gaming pieces. “If the above supposition for the use of these articles be correct, it would prove an interesting fact that two tribes so hostile to each other should have anything in common,” he wrote. “It may point to more friendly relations in former times, but of this we have nothing of a definite nature.”²⁵ Howley and members of his survey crew had a few scruples about what they were doing: “One of the men, Connors a St John’s man, did not hold with such ghoulish work and would not leave the boat or take part in the search. He said neither luck nor grace would follow our robbing the dead in that manner. I must confess it looked like a great act of desecration.”²⁶ His characterization of their digging as an “act of desecration” seems hollow in light of his subsequent excavation of other burials.²⁷ Howley soon went to another island on which he found human bones and artefacts. “It was a most interesting and exciting day. We were laden with the spoils of the Poor Red men whose unfortunate and mysterious existence no doubt lent zest to our exertions in trying to gather these poor relics of the departed aborigines of our Island.”²⁸

Howley thought more like an archaeologist when he collected stone tools. In 1886, for example, he walked around Cow Head on the island’s west coast:

This was a famous factory for the manufacture of chert implements and a prodigious number of flakes and spalls, left by them are scattered along the beach whenever the sod has been worn away and the fine sand has been blown off. They must have resorted here for a long time judging from the amount of debris, seal, deer, whale and bird’s bones etc. There are distinct traces of numerous fires down on the beach. I noticed that in the vicinity of the fires especially, the flakes were most numerous and I have an idea that they must have heated the rock and then threw water on them to cause them to spall. We only succeeded in finding a few poor spear and arrow heads. All the best have long ago been picked up and carried away. I am told several bone needles were found here amongst other things, but we were not so fortunate as to come across any.²⁹

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 720-721.

25 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 290.

26 Howley, *Reminiscences*, p. 724.

27 On another occasion, he noted, “the truth was these Micmacs do not wish to see anyone examine or remove bones or relics of the Red men” (*Reminiscences*, pp. 478-479).

28 Howley, *Reminiscences*, p. 725.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 1552-1553.

When his team recovered what they believed to be fragments of clay pipes from graves they excavated, Howley was sceptical that the Beothuk had used tobacco since “all authorities say not.”³⁰ Oral tradition from authorities trumped physical evidence. On October 19, 1888, he excavated some Beothuk house pits. “About two miles below Noel Paul’s [Brook] we stopped at a pond to look at the remains of several Red Indian wigwams, or rather the circular hollows where they once had stood. . . . It was quite evident this had been a place of considerable resort by the Beothucks, being well situated for intercepting the herds of crossing deer. It was in fact a considerable Indian village in its time.”³¹

By 1912, Howley had assembled his book. The small size of the Newfoundland market, the lack of local publishers, and the desire to participate in wider intellectual discussions often encouraged Newfoundland authors to publish in Britain. Howley asked Premier Edward Morris to have the government purchase some copies and to inquire whether the Royal Geographical Society would aid in its publication. A representative of that society recommended either Clarendon Press at Oxford or Cambridge University Press, since either might undertake a publication for which the market would be too small for the book to repay publishing costs.³² Cambridge consulted the pioneering anthropologist W. H. R. Rivers and agreed to publish *The Beothucks* on commission.³³ The Newfoundland government committed to purchase 100 copies, the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company 130, the St. John’s fish exporter W. C. Job 20, and others smaller numbers. Nearly the whole of the first printing had been subscribed at 15 shillings per copy, but Howley soon worried about the estimated publication costs of £350.³⁴ “I did not expect to make much upon the book, and will be quite satisfied if I can clear expenses,” he wrote. “However I must now go through with it, but I would ask you to try and reduce the cost of publication as much as possible.”³⁵ When the book was published in 1915, the war interfered with the book market in St. John’s, and sales to libraries in the United States were slow.³⁶ Selling the book at \$5.00, but paying Cambridge \$5.11 each, Howley never recovered his costs.³⁷

Reading *The Beothucks*

Howley imagined the Beothuk as a unique and culturally bounded group who were culturally superior to the contemporary Mi’kmaq men with whom he worked, essentially unchanged from remote times and unmixed with other Indigenous

30 *Ibid.*, p. 722.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 974.

32 Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador [hereafter PANL], The Rooms, GN 2.05.307, Colonial Secretary Correspondence, Howley to Edward Morris, April 23, 1912; J. Scott Keltie, Royal Geographic Society, January 25, 1912.

33 Cambridge University Archives, UA Pr.V.78, Press Syndicate Minutes, January 17, 1913.

34 Cambridge University Archives, Pr.A.H.920, Howley to A. R. Waller, January 10, 1913.

35 Howley had hoped to include a map showing where the Beothuk had lived and where he had retrieved artefacts, but the publishing cost was prohibitive (Cambridge University Archives, UA, Pr.A.H.920, Howley to A. R. Waller, February 18, 1913).

36 W. J. Carroll to Mr. James, December 3, 1915, letter in the possession of Calvin Hollett.

37 PANL, The Rooms, GN 2.05.307, Colonial Secretary Correspondence, J. P. Howley to Richard Squires, Colonial Secretary, November 23, 1917.

peoples. Howley's logic was common. Just as the mound builders among prehistoric North Americans had been supplanted by more warlike successors, Howley supposed, the Mi'kmaq might have driven the ancestors of the Beothuk out of eastern North America, only to find refuge on the island of Newfoundland.

Here, isolated and undisturbed, for several centuries, untainted by intermixture with other tribes they could retain all their original traits of character, language, etc., which remained with them as distinctive features down to the last moments of their existence. All this is, however, merely conjectural, as there is now not the slightest probability of ever arriving at the real facts, it only remains for me to give, in consecutive order, the actual recorded history of this strange, mysterious race.³⁸

American scholars invented "the Mound Builders" as an ancient and superior cultural group and denied any link between them and contemporary Indigenous peoples, as they justified dispossessing the latter of their land.³⁹ Such idealized notions were possible because there were no Beothuk alive to undermine Howley's romantic ideas of them, little could be known of their early history, and many late-nineteenth-century Newfoundlanders thought the Beothuk had been fated to disappear in a Darwinian struggle or doomed by their obstinate distrust of the white man.

Howley surveyed the accounts of European explorers to find the earliest accounts of the Beothuk. It was only with the seventeenth century "we at length come upon an era replete with information about the Beothucks in every respect trustworthy," he commented. "It is not second hand as has been most of the preceding, but comes direct from the authors themselves, and might almost be looked upon as the beginning of the true relation of their sad history."⁴⁰ After quoting a passage from John Guy in which he recounted a friendly encounter with a group of Beothuk in Trinity Bay, Howley drew the conclusion that the Beothuk's "natural disposition, when fairly treated, was one of trust and friendliness, by no means the blood-thirsty vindictive characteristics attributed to them by later writers."⁴¹ He implied that European hostility had affected the Beothuk's interactions in subsequent centuries. Late-nineteenth-century Europeans rarely attributed reason or political calculation to Indigenous peoples, but assumed them to be motivated by simple emotions such as hatred, sadness, or fear. While Howley criticized his sources for supposing the Beothuk to be motivated by revenge, he imagined them as a "child-like innocent race."⁴²

With the paucity of direct historical documentation, he relied on his collection of oral history and oral testimony that had been transmitted in earlier published accounts. Much of this came from fishermen of European ancestry, but some had

38 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. xix.

39 Hunter, "Stone of Power," p. 346; Gordon Sayre, "The Mound Builders and the Imagination of American Antiquity in Jefferson, Bertram, and Chateaubriand," *Early American Literature*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1998), pp. 225-249.

40 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 14.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

been collected from the Mi'kmaq. Howley carefully recounted the transmission of the traditions.

A tradition existed amongst the Micmacs as related by Mr W. E. Cormack, who had it from some of themselves, that on their first coming over to this island, amicable relations existed between them and the Beothucks, until a certain act of diabolical treachery upon the part of the former, put an end for ever to all friendly intercourse. Mr J. B. Jukes, Geologist, had the relation of this event from Mr Peyton, to whom it was told by an old Micmac Indian. It was also confirmed by another Micmac whom Jukes met in the Bay of St George.⁴³

Peyton's report that the Beothuk feared the Mi'kmaq and traded with the Innu of Labrador was collaborative evidence for Howley. Silas Rand, a Nova Scotia protestant clergyman and ethnographer, had collected an oral tradition that the (Roman Catholic) French had paid a bounty to the Mi'kmaq for Beothuk scalps, which precipitated the massacre and resulted in enmity between the two peoples. While commenting that the tradition came from the Mi'kmaq and had been collected by three different people, Howley (himself a Roman Catholic) expressed that this was "hard to believe" as it was inconsistent with the way the French treated Indigenous peoples.⁴⁴ He also cited a couple of instances, again from oral tradition, of Beothuk men feigning peaceful intentions in order to get close enough to kill Europeans, which "if true, would seem to prove the Indians were really of a sanguinary [i.e. bloodthirsty] disposition."⁴⁵ Howley thought that other accounts, which presented the Beothuk as essentially peaceful, did not support such an interpretation. While Beothuk had killed some Europeans, Howley thought these incidents were retaliation for whites having murdered Beothuk, and that there were many instances of Europeans being unmolested when the Beothuk could have killed them all had they chosen to.

The documentation available to Howley increased in quantity and improved in quality when he turned his attention to the end of the eighteenth-century. At that time, the British state moved toward creating a civil government for the island, and a humanitarian movement concerned with the fate of Indigenous peoples captivated the attention of policy makers in Europe. A parliamentary inquiry into state of the fishery in 1793, for example, focused upon the advisability of establishing a civil court and indirectly resulted in the collection of evidence about the Beothuk. For several of the witnesses to that inquiry, the argument that settlers preyed on the Beothuk supported the view that judicial institutions were necessary. George Cartwright, for example, felt there was hope of peaceful trade that would put an end to the Beothuk scavenging and consequent European revenge killings. It would require, in his view, a Court of Civil Judicature, which would bring fishermen to justice.⁴⁶ Similarly, Chief Justice John Reeves argued that the Beothuk were subjects of the King and thus deserved protection of life and

43 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

property. Only through providing security to the Beothuk, he thought, would the depredations end and opportunities for trade be realized.⁴⁷ Each of these witnesses had an interest in portraying the relationship as hostile, and none had lived in the area frequented by the Beothuk, so all of their stories were based upon things they had heard.

The late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century colonial elite focused its attention upon rescuing the Beothuk. Reeves' successor Francis Forbes reported that a group of the "principal inhabitants" of St. John's, a "Committee of Gentlemen," resolved to extend "peace and the protection of law" to the Beothuk.⁴⁸ Governor Hamilton was similarly pleased with "the liberality with which they have come forward in the cause of humanity."⁴⁹ To that end the committee proposed sending Demasduit back to her "countrymen" as a way of opening peaceful relations. As a first step, she was to be transported to Twillingate and given to the care of John Peyton, "a respectable inhabitant of that place."⁵⁰ Through primary documentary research Howley presented this new phase of Beothuk-English interaction as a history of the government's attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the Beothuk. The evidence of the Beothuk lives came from the perspective of outsiders who knew of rural life only through what they had heard. Consider the following excerpt from John Bland's letter to the Governor:

There was at that time in St John's a Mr Salter ... and it was from him that I obtained the information which made the subject of my letter. I introduced this man to Mr Graham, that he might hear his story from his own mouth. I have not at this distance of time any recollection of the names of the persons who were accused, but the Indians murdered, if I remember right, were a man and his wife.⁵¹

This directs our attention to the role of memory, and also to the judicial nature of the collection of evidence. The colonial elite in St. John's was concerned that killings were not being prosecuted. In 1875 the Presbyterian minister and natural scientist Moses Harvey, whom Howley quoted with approval, reflected upon the tragedy of the Beothuk in language that reveals condescension toward the working-class rural people who lived on the coast. "The rude fishermen, hunters and trappers of those days were a rough lawless order of men," Harvey wrote. "In fact, for two hundred years they seem to have regarded the red men as vermin to be hunted down and destroyed."⁵² Such vivid storytelling helps explain the enduring appeal of *The Beothucks* among subsequent historians and novelists.

Howley reproduced one of the few extant first-hand descriptions of some Beothuks: the "Narrative of Lieut. Buchan's Journey up the Exploits River In search of the Red Indians, in the winter of 1810-1811."⁵³ Buchan and his men

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

48 Francis Forbes to Governor Charles Hamilton, May 31, 1819, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 109.

49 Hamilton to Forbes, June 5, 1818, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 113.

50 Francis Forbes to Governor Charles Hamilton, May 31, 1819, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 110.

51 Bland, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 56.

52 Moses Harvey, "Memoirs of an Extinct Race," as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 62.

53 Howley, *The Beothucks*, pp. 72-91.

dragged their sledges up the frozen river, faced difficulties, and surprised a group of Beothuk in their camp. Buchan attempted to communicate his desire for peaceful trade, which initially seemed to meet with success, making the failure of the mission more poignant. Buchan's report embodies the central argument of Howley's book in a set piece. The effort failed because the Beothuks' experience had taught them a suspicion and fear of the white man. Buchan's narrative also included an imaginative recreation of events and speculation as to the motives of the Beothuks who killed two of his men:

I shall now turn the imagination to the wigwams; behold the natives thrown all commotion and expressing themselves in vehement gesticulations and hasty preparations for making their departure. Our men view these motions with astonishment and are perplexed as to the reason: various ideas rush on the mind, they fancy me to have been attacked by another body of them, and in the skirmish suppose the Indian to have escaped. Their span of life is drawing to a crisis, the natives are now setting out, and of course taking them along with them. Courage heightened into madness by their critical situation, they determine to make an escape. Alas! fatal error, had cool reason been their guide she would have pointed out the impossibility, for the appearance of fear is certain death from an Indian, thus in looking for security we often rush into inevitable destruction, and thus we reason when secure from danger.⁵⁴

"Of a people so little known or rather not known at all," Buchan wrote in words that might have been Howley's, "any account, however imperfect, must be interesting."⁵⁵

The seizure of Demasduit and killing of her husband Nonobawsut seized the attention of subsequent authors. "Various versions of this event have appeared ... but as numerous discrepancies characterize these accounts," wrote Howley, "I prefer to give the story as I had it from the lips of the late John Peyton, J.P. of Twillingate, himself that actual captor of the Beothuk woman."⁵⁶ It's written in a manner to provoke sympathy for the Beothuk, and in relating Demasduit's reaction Howley reveals both his admiration for Peyton and class snobbery. "She made no further attempt [at escape] but kept close to Mr P. all the time, as though for protection," Howley commented, "no doubt recognizing in him the leader of the party and a man superior in every way to his fellows."⁵⁷ Howley also related "another version of the capture of Mary March" by an anonymous participant, E. S., in the expedition, who he thought "bears every evidence of being reliable, so ... I will give, in his own words, such further facts as are of interest in this connection."⁵⁸ E. S. revealed a prejudice toward the settlers, who, he asserted, had "been for several generations without religious or moral instruction of any kind,

54 David Buchan, quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 90.

55 David Buchan, quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 85.

56 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 91.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

were immersed in the lowest state of ignorance and vice.”⁵⁹ He acknowledged that when a church was built crowds travelled great distances to attend, so his implication of lack of religiosity must be taken with scepticism. E. S. prefaced that account by repeating oral traditions of atrocities. The third account of Demasduit’s capture was that of Joseph Noad’s 1859 lecture to the Mechanics’ Institute, which, Howley believed, based on internal evidence in the narrative, Noad had learned from Peyton and from Cormack.

At this point in his book, Howley shifted attention to the formation of the Beothuk Institution in November of 1827. William Cormack’s speech at the founding of the Institute exemplified the humanitarian impulse and the desire to document the Indigenous people’s culture among “gentlemen of rank.”⁶⁰

The Hon. Chairman stated, that the primary motive which led to the formation of the Institution, was the desire of opening a communication with, and promoting the civilization of, the Red Indians of Newfoundland; and of procuring, if possible, an authentic history of that unhappy race of people, in order that their language, customs and pursuits, might be contrasted with those of other Indians and nations.⁶¹

Cormack, whom Howley regarded as “a man of intellect and superior education,” reported Shanawdithit’s “testimony” on the state of her people, something supported by the “reports” of European settlers.⁶² Cormack prefigured Howley’s method of inquiry, assumptions about the nature of the Beothuk, and pessimism about writing their history. Cormack gathered every “fact and relic” of the “bold heroic and purely self dependent nation” whom he believed to be “superior to all others adjacent to them.” He also thought that the study of the Beothuk was justified because “every fact relating to this isolated nation similar or dissimilar to what has been met with amongst other tribes is interesting because it concerns man at a time more remote than any history.”⁶³

The preface of Cormack’s history, which Howley reproduced, is worth quoting. It illustrates his assumptions of the Beothuk’s unique nature, their superiority over others, the futility of historical writing, and their doomed nature.

To begin in the year 1829 to write a history of the Red Indians of Newfoundland, is like beginning to write the history of an extinct people. All that they have left behind them being their name ... Although Newfoundland has been occupied by Europeans for two centuries and a half ... nothing of consequence has been collected and preserved relating to the aboriginal inhabitants, the Red Indians. The Island has often changed hands from one European power to another, but from among all these vicissitudes all that has been preserved relating to the aborigines

59 E. S. as cited in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 97.

60 W. E. Cormack as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, pp. 182-184. The archaeologist Donald Holly referred to Cormack as “perhaps the Beothuk’s first, last and only ethnographer” based upon his opportunity to interview a Beothuk woman. See Donald H. Holly, “A Historiography of an Ahistoricity: On the Beothuk Indians,” *History and Anthropology*, vol.14, no. 2 (2003), p. 128.

61 A. W. Desbarres as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 189.

62 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 300.

63 Cormack manuscript, in Howley, *The Beothucks*, pp. 210-211.

of the country, are a few fabulous fragments, which have shone out now and then as connected evidence of the contention of the existence of this remarkable tribe, inhabiting this island. The stories about them have not been credible. ... We have traces enough left only to cause our sorrow that so peculiar and so superior a people should have disappeared from the earth like a shadow. The only considerable search has at length, but alas too late, been made to prove that they are irrevocably lost to the world.⁶⁴

The only Beothuk history was “a few fabulous fragments,” in which the word *fabulous* means false accounts of the past, and the “stories about them have not been credible.” Such was Cormack’s view of the sources, and his search for survivors had only proved the Beothuk had been “lost to the world.” The traces of them showed them to be *peculiar* in the sense of unique and “superior” to other Indigenous peoples.

Howley had access to Cormack’s unpublished papers, which contained the information Cormack gleaned from working with Shanawdithit. Cormack took her from “obscurity” (i.e. a place where her knowledge was not being recorded for posterity) and brought her to St. John’s.⁶⁵ Cormack “elicited from her most interesting facts, and a history of her people which together with my own observations when in search of them in the interior, form nearly all the information that can ever be obtained relating to these aborigines.”⁶⁶ “As she acquires the English language she becomes more interesting,” Cormack commented, “and I have lately discovered the key to the Mythology of her tribe, which must be considered one of the most interesting subjects to inquire into.”⁶⁷ The most evocative of the documents were the drawings by Shanawdithit, which, although produced in collaboration with Cormack, “represent scenes in the closing history of the unfortunate tribe.”⁶⁸ Howley recognized that the “first five drawings ... are more or less of an historical character.”⁶⁹ Each map represented a narrative—with the Beothuks drawn in red pencil and the Europeans drawn in black pencil—and the events at different times were represented on the same sheet of paper so the story of what happened can be read. The first drawing told the story of Buchan’s 1811 expedition, about which Howley commented, “It will be found to agree, in most particulars, with Capt. B’s published narrative, but there is some additional information contained in the former, which it was impossible to obtain except from the Indians themselves.”⁷⁰ The second drawing also depicted Buchan’s expedition, the killing of the marines, and the later capture of Demasduit. The third represented Buchan’s 1820 mission to return Demasduit’s body to her people. Since the drawings related to known moments in time, and Shanawdithit graphically depicted the members of her band, Howley used the drawings as a

64 Cormack, *History of the Red Indians of Newfoundland*, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 222.

65 Cormack, quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 225.

66 Cormack manuscript, in Howley, *The Beothucks*, pp. 210-211.

67 Cormack to Bishop English, October 26, 1828, as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, pp. 208-209.

68 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 238.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

census. Sketch iv “depicts in the most faithful and striking manner the last sad scene in their history, at least as known to Shanawdithit and has copious notes by Cormack written all over it,” he commented. “[I]t contains beyond all question the last authentic information of the miserable remnant of the ill-fated Beothucks, we can ever now hope to obtain.”⁷¹ As Fiona Pollack pointed out, when Howley reproduced Shanawdithit’s drawings, he changed them in ways that made them clearer to the reader, but which also effaced the process of collaboration between Cormack and the Beothuk woman.⁷²

“The history of the original inhabitants of Newfoundland,” Cormack commented, “can only be gleaned from tradition, and that chiefly among the Micmacs.”⁷³ Based upon his understanding of that oral tradition, Cormack thought the Mi’kmaq and Beothuk had once been on good terms. He conjectured that the French had offered a reward for the killing of particular Beothuk individuals, which some Mi’kmaq attempted to redeem by killing a couple of Beothuk and taking their heads as proof. When these were discovered, the story had it, the Beothuk invited the Mi’kmaq to a feast, and at a prearranged time the Beothuk slew his guest. From this point on, Cormack recounted, the two peoples were at war. As Howley recognized, it is improbable that the French paid rewards for killing Beothuks, and no documentary evidence has been found to support that oral tradition. Such stories of treachery are common folklore motifs used by many cultures to explain hostility with other groups, which reminds us to be cautious about its foundation in actual events. Among the English, the story shifted some of the blame for the Beothuk’s fate to England’s long time rivals—the French and their Native allies. It is impossible to be certain whether Cormack was sceptical of its historical accuracy.

During the late nineteenth century, scholars’ principal method to establish relatedness among ethnic groups was philology, so it is not surprising that Howley cited “eminent scientists” who had examined the fragments of the Beothuk vocabulary.

It is not my intention to pose as an authority on the ethnological, philological, or linguistic affinities of the Beothuk. These subjects have been treated by several of the most learned scientists in all such researches. Various theories, have been advanced, and deductions arrived at, which, while I would not attempt to constitute myself an umpire to decide upon, I must confess leaves the question of their real origin about as much in the dark as ever. It would be presumption on my part to even express an opinion, favourable or otherwise, upon any view entertained by such eminent authorities. I shall only here give the gist of their views as they have come to me, and leave the readers to judge for themselves as to which carries most weight. All the attempts made to solve this great problem, are of an exceedingly interesting character, and there is a strong temptation to elaborate thereon, but with

71 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

72 Fiona Polack, “Reading Shanawdithit’s Drawings: Transcultural Texts in the North American Colonial World,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2013), <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed October 15, 2015).

73 Cormack as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, 183.

meagre material at our disposal we cannot hope to arrive at any definite conclusion at this late date.⁷⁴

Howley warned that, given the short amount of time Demasduit spent among Europeans, she could not have learned English well enough to make herself fully understood, and that the English speakers could not have mastered the Beothuk phonology that would have enabled them to make precise renderings.⁷⁵ Turning to “presumably more scientific authorities,” he reported the view of several philologists that the Beothuk were members of the Algonquian linguistic family (which as of a century later remains the accepted view of linguists), while noting that others believed that the Beothuk were related to other more distant peoples or were “‘Sui generis’ a people of themselves, apart and distinct from all others we know anything of.”⁷⁶ Howley republished excerpts of the three papers on the Beothuk language by Gatschet, who had pioneered the study of indigenous languages and had relied upon Howley as an informant and as a source of the fragmentary vocabularies. Gatschet’s conclusion that the Beothuk were unrelated to the Algonquian family of languages appealed to Howley’s sense that they were special and unique.

When Howley discussed the Beothuk’s physical characteristics, he reported that “it has been *customary* [emphasis added] on the part of fishermen and others to describe them as a race of gigantic stature.”⁷⁷ He thought these accounts exaggerated, perhaps resulting from fear or as a justification for violence. Witnesses confirmed that Beothuk were like other Indigenous people. When referring to the Beothuk, Europeans sometimes used adjectives with positive connotations, such as “lithe.” Each of these impressions was based, of course, on culturally specific notions of attractiveness, and, once again, Howley presented the Beothuk as superior to other Indigenous people.

Mr Peyton informed me that the Red Indians as a whole were not such gigantic people as represented by some of the fishermen, they were of medium height only, of a very active lithe build. They were a better looking people than the Micmacs, having more regular features with slightly aquiline noses, not so broad featured, and much lighter in complexion. They did not appear to be so fond of gaudy colours as their continental neighbours, except as regards their custom of using red ochre.⁷⁸

Nineteenth-century Europeans also often ascribed different gender roles to varied degrees of civilization, and Howley invoked these arguments as well. “Amongst the Beothucks,” he wrote, “women seem to have been held in greater esteem and been treated more in accordance with civilized notions of what is due to the weaker sex, than was usual amongst savage peoples.”⁷⁹ Further, Nonosabawsut’s death

74 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 251.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

76 Albert Gatschet as quoted in Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 256.

77 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. 257.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

79 *Ibid.*

in an effort to save his spouse “from the despoilers’ hands” was interpreted as evidence of his nobility.⁸⁰ Howley also cited what appeared to be the earliest oral tradition. When a group of fishermen surprised a group of Beothuk who then fled, the Europeans took a young aboriginal girl home with them. The girl was styled a “chief’s daughter” by the informants. The Beothuk later recaptured her and took several European women captive in retaliation. Those women, who were safely returned to their families, were treated favourably by the Beothuk and described “them as more like civilized people than savages,” he wrote. “[T]hey had but one wife each, and these they treated as well as white people their wives.”⁸¹

Aside from the fragments of testimony from Shanawdithit, only second-hand oral traditions from European and Mik’maq people remained for Howley to draw upon. He thought it impossible to “vouch for the correctness of many of these stories,” but that “there can be little doubt that the majority of them have some element of truth in them.”⁸² The word *story* suggests that a narrative, whether based on real events or fictional, is being told for entertainment or didactic value. These oral traditions were, he wrote, “sanguinary” (in the sense of bloody, not in the sense of hopeful). “As all these stories are more or less interesting,” he wrote, “I shall give them just as they were related to me, except a few which are too revolting a character to put in print.”⁸³ This is the only indication that he censored the stories of lurid details.

Howley was both critical of oral evidence and aware that even first-hand accounts had to be treated with care in terms of their subjectivity and memory. He cautioned his readers, for example, that Sir Hercules Robinson’s description of Demasduit had limitations:

Sir Hercules’ paper was written on board his ship at sea and is dated November 7th 1820. He says he is writing from memory of several conversations he had with Mr Leigh at Harbour Grace some weeks previously. He regrets he did not immediately note them down before many interesting facts escaped his memory. He does not say whether he himself ever saw the Indian woman, but it is not probable he did, as she died on board Buchan’s ship the *Grasshopper* at the mouth of the Exploits, on Jan. 8th 1820, and it was not likely Sir Hercules was then or previously in the country.⁸⁴

Howley established the provenance of accounts of violent interactions between Europeans and Beothuk. He related tales of the revenge and atrocities of fishermen, furriers, and Beothuk in a matter-of-fact tone, as he did with examples of the peoples living side by side with mutual tolerance and acts of friendliness.

An old man named George Wells, of Exploits Burnt Island, gave me the following information in 1886. He was then a man of 76 years of age, and remembered seeing Mary March and Nancy (Shanawdithit) at Peytons. [*sic*] ... His great uncle on his

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

mother's side, Rowsell of New Bay, saw much of the Indians and could tell about them. ... Rowsell used to relate many stories about the Indians, he often lay hidden and watched them at work.⁸⁵

The most "remarkable" story he collected was of a fisherman who was lured away one winter and married into the Beothuk band. As he related, after some months they relaxed their vigilance, and one day when near the coast he saw his old friends and escaped by swimming out to their boat. What stretches the bounds of credulity was that, upon his escape, a Beothuk woman waded into the water and, failing to convince him to return, took a knife and cut an infant in two pieces. She threw one half of the child toward the boat, the story went, while clutching the other to her bosom. Since Thomas Peyton had talked to so many people in the region and had never heard the story, Howley too doubted its truthfulness.⁸⁶ "It has frequently been asserted by others," Howley reported, that the Beothuk "took a delight in befouling everything belonging to the fishermen especially anything in the way of food, they came across, but I expect, if the truth were known, this was merely used as a pretext for destroying them."⁸⁷

We have seen how Howley's scepticism about oral evidence served him, and, as Chris Aylward has shown, contrasting Howley's method with that of the anthropologist Frank Speck reveals much about the two men's theory and methods.⁸⁸ Speck had been a student of the father of American anthropology Franz Boas, who believed that cultures were an amalgam of invented traits with traits learned from other groups.⁸⁹ Speck thought that the Mi'kmaq were "nearer to the scene" and "better acquainted with the former Red Indians of Newfoundland, who naturally have a prominent place in their local legends."⁹⁰ He reported that "the expectation that the present Micmac inhabitants of Newfoundland might have a more extended knowledge of the supposedly extinct tribe, an expectation most natural to the ethnologist, led me to undertake the investigation of material culture."⁹¹ Speck wished Howley had collected Mi'kmaq oral tradition 30 or 40 years earlier. Howley respected the skills and knowledge of the land of the Mi'kmaq men with whom he worked, and he was aware that they had insights because of that knowledge. As he put it:

I have heard during the summer [1888] several anecdotes and traditions relative to the Red Indians from Noel Mathews who had them from his mother and other old Micmacs, especially the Chief, Maurice Lewis. Lewis's father John was one of the

85 *Ibid.*, p. 270.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 273.

88 Aylward, "The Beothuk Story"; Frank G. Speck, *Beothuk and Micmac* (New York: Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1922), p. 12.

89 Donald H. Holly, *History in the Making: The Archaeology of the Eastern Subarctic* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2013), pp. 5-9. See also Holly, "A Historiography of an Ahistoricity."

90 Speck, *Beothuk and Micmac*, p. 18.

91 *Ibid.* It is unlikely that his choice of the words "supposedly extinct tribe" indicates that he imagined there was a group of Beothuk persisting in splendid isolation. More likely he believed that the Beothuk had intermarried with people of other cultures, and that elements of their culture might have survived among their neighbours.

party of Indians who accompanied Cormack in 1827 to Red Indian Lake, when he went in search of the natives. I noted down all Noel told me and it is now embodied in my book on the Beothucks. I regret very much while at Conne I did not know about the old Chief possessing so much information, or I should have interviewed him. He is a very old man now and almost blind.⁹²

Unlike Speck, however, Howley did not assume that the Mi'kmaq had any special insight into the Beothuk by virtue of the two peoples having had sustained contact; nor did he believe that the Innu of Labrador might have extensively intermarried with the Beothuk. Howley believed that, for the most part, the Beothuk had avoided contact with other Indigenous people and that there had been little cultural exchange.

While Howley collected accounts of the Beothuk, Speck's method was to examine the cultures of the Mi'kmaq and Innu. "By eliminating what we can safely attribute to either of the above sources, the residual material may possibly deserve to be classed as the result of borrowing through contact with the Beothuk," he wrote.⁹³ He attempted to pre-empt criticism of his cultural diffusion approach, perhaps anticipating scepticism from Howley, who believed that the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq had been implacable foes.

If one is inclined to object strenuously to such a claim, let us recall the fact many of the Micmac families among the present-day natives of Newfoundland are of Montagnais descent. If one attempts to deny categorically that culture survivals from the Beothuk are not to be traced through the Micmac, on account of former hostility, then it cannot be denied on the same ground that influence could have come down through the Montagnais strain in the present population, whose ancestors were known to be friendly with the Beothuk.⁹⁴

Speck was optimistic that more could be learned of the Beothuk through fieldwork among other Indigenous peoples.

The differences between Speck and Howley are best illustrated by the way the two men responded to the claim of Beothuk ancestry by a Mi'kmaq woman, Santu Toney, whom Speck met in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Howley distrusted Toney, whom he suspected might be motivated by a desire for gain.⁹⁵ When Speck visited St. John's in 1914 he met with Howley, who again "expressed his unbelief in Santu's veracity."⁹⁶ Speck was confident that his skills as an ethnographer allowed him to judge her reliability as an informant. In an *ad hominem* judgment, Speck dismissed Howley's view because his knowledge was of history and geography rather than ethnography. "Notwithstanding the fact that Mr Howley's opinions, based on his extensive knowledge of Newfoundland history and physiography, deserve serious consideration," wrote Speck, "I hardly think, under the circumstances, that the

92 Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 926-927.

93 Speck, *Beothuk and Micmac*, pp. 29-30.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 79, n. 48.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

conclusions of one trained in sciences other than ethnology are sufficient to warrant absolutely casting aside information which may be of value, and which on the face of it does bear some semblance of truthfulness."⁹⁷ Ethnology, or anthropology, was emerging as a discipline, and Speck's comments can be read as establishing a boundary between his methods and those of Howley. Speck doubted, despite Toney's senility, that she was intentionally fabricating a story. "My only distrust of the material she was able to give lies in the accuracy of her memory, especially in regard to her vocabulary," he commented.⁹⁸ The theory of cultural diffusion shaped Speck's thinking, just as Howley was affected by his preconceptions that the Beothuk had been a unique and separate people. Accepting Toney's claim would have undermined Howley's belief that Shanawdithit was the last of her people and threatened his notion of the Beothuk as untainted by miscegenation.⁹⁹ Speck, on the other hand, wanted to believe her because her account fit with his preconceptions.

In his review of *The Beothucks*, Speck praised Howley's tireless collection of evidence, but criticized him for wasting time on baseless speculation on Beothuk origins. He also disapproved of the way that ethnographic evidence was buried beneath historical documentation. Speck disliked the *history* in Howley's book and would have preferred the ethnographic description be presented to the reader unencumbered by the account of European efforts to rescue the Beothuk. For Speck, "the incorporation of so much matter that is negligible, except perhaps for its sentimental historical value, really makes the presentation somewhat incoherent, because many of the letters and documents quoted here in full are hardly important enough to merit attention."¹⁰⁰ Too much might be made of the two cultures of science and humanities, however. Both Howley and Speck judged the reliability of oral accounts based on the identity of the informant and upon the testimony's congruence with facts that were, in their minds, otherwise established.

Conclusion

As I have argued, Howley did not see his book as a *history* of the Beothuk, which he suggested was impossible given the meagre evidence that survived, but maintained that it was an exercise in remembering. "It is only now, after a lapse of forty-three years, that I am at length in a position to fulfil that intention," Howley wrote. "[M]y reminiscences of the Beothuks is now in the hands of the Cambridge University Press."¹⁰¹ Part of the enduring appeal of *The Beothucks* was its elegiac posture. It also captivated readers' imaginations through Peyton's, Buchan's, and Cormack's narratives of their experiences. To a degree reminiscent of the European fascination with the abduction of the Sabine Women, the seizure of Demasduit and killing of Nonobawsut entered Newfoundland popular culture as emblematic of the persecution of the Beothuk. Atrocity stories, transmitted to

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the trope of "the last of the . . .," see O'Brien, *Indigenous Americans*.

¹⁰⁰ Frank G. Speck, "The Beothucks or Red Indians, the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland by James Howley," *The American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 19, no. 2 (April-June 1917), pp. 272-280.

¹⁰¹ Howley, *Reminiscences*, pp. 216-217.

twentieth-century Newfoundland by Howley, became a sort of original sin, or a sort of foundational myth like Romulus killing Remus.

Howley set out to document memories of the Beothuk, not to write their history or provide ethnographic description. Rather than explicitly impose a narrative structure on his material, he organized his book by the chronological origin of the evidence. Geology is a historical science, and the chapters of his book presented the data in layers of epochs. Sixteenth-century accounts were followed by the testimony from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the oral tradition from the later nineteenth century, and contemporary expert opinion on material culture and phonology. It is not organized as a teleological narrative, but rather a stratigraphy of evidence. Howley's experience as a surveyor shaped his book; just as he mapped the land, he measured the accounts of the Beothuk. Yet implicit in his presentation of evidence is the story of their extinction.

William Boyd Dawkins, in a book cited by Howley, praised the fruitful combination of geology, archaeology, and history. Geology had established the story of the earth, archaeologists had used the inductive method to establish the sequence of steps by which contemporary society emerged, and historians had established a critical method by which the true could be sifted from the false.¹⁰² Howley usually deferred to the judgment of the experts, whether scientists or those, like the Peytons, who had first-hand knowledge of the Beothuk. Perhaps as a self-educated intellectual he lacked the confidence to express views on questions of theory. He had decades of experience listening to the oral traditions of the men with whom he worked, however, and had experience in oral history. Howley engaged less with geological theory than he practised surveying, and he worked less with anthropological theory than he compiled evidence.

When drawing upon phonology or ethnography, he deferred to experts (sometimes when he should not have). Howley ran through, for example, fanciful theories on the origins of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, then entertained by hyper-diffusionists, and commented, "what elements of truth may be contained in each or all of those theories, it is not my intention to now inquire into."¹⁰³ His scientific methodology also co-existed with romanticism. As with many of his diffusionist contemporaries, he imagined North America being populated from Asia with a civilized people (the mound builders) who were later supplanted by a more barbarous population (the ancestors of his contemporary first nations). His implication that the Beothuk were the heirs of the mound builders might be read as relegating the Mi'kmaq to an inferior position and justifying the European settlement of the island, although he did not write that. Some scholars argue that "extinction" and the notion of "the last of ..." were tropes by which the North American colonizers denied that their contemporary Indigenous peoples were authentic, thus dismissing their claim to the land while romanticizing ancient

¹⁰² W. Boyd Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain: His Place in the Tertiary Period* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), pp. 1-3.

¹⁰³ Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. xvi.

Indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁴ We should not conclude from that, however, that the extinction of the Beothuk was just a discourse.

Scholars work with the practices of their discipline and within interpretative traditions. Late-nineteenth-century American natural scientists, including geologists, applied their methods to material culture and linguistic evidence and pioneered anthropology and archaeology.¹⁰⁵ Howley worked with the methods taught to him by Murray of the Geological Survey and within a world view informed by Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley. (Howley named his Irish Setter Huxley.) He had the inductive method as a guide to handling evidence and the view that cultural groups competed with each other. For Howley, “The traditional enmity which existed between the Beothucks and the Eskimo, or for that matter, between all the Indian tribes of the surrounding territories and the latter, proves pretty conclusively that there could be no kinship between them.”¹⁰⁶

As he travelled the island, Howley collected three sorts of oral evidence—eyewitness testimony of those who had encountered Beothuk individuals, testimony that others recorded in written documents, and oral tradition. Testimony was affected by contemporary humanitarian agendas, class prejudice on the part of elite members of society, and witnesses’ desire to avoid criminal prosecution. Assuming a dichotomy between oral and textual sources is not helpful. Most of the material he gathered had been oral testimony or oral tradition before it was committed to text, and Howley’s book became the principal vector through which the oral history of violence passed into twentieth-century popular culture and historical scholarship. Howley identified his sources and provided commentary when he believed the source was mistaken. He had criteria for source criticism. First-hand witnesses were preferred to the testimony of second-hand witnesses; “respectable” witnesses were preferred to those of working-class origin. When his preconceptions about the Beothuk, such as his view of them as unique and untainted by miscegenation, did not match the testimony of a highly credible witness such as David Buchan (who suggested that a person of European ancestry lived among the group of Beothuk he met), Howley questioned the evidence. Howley thought it strange that no other witness commented upon a white woman living with the Beothuk, “yet I cannot believe that a man of Capt. Buchan’s intelligence and powers of observation could have made any mistake.”¹⁰⁷ Shanawdithit stated that no European woman lived among her band, testimony that Howley felt might have been dissembling or “more probably however, Shanawdithit may not have remembered the white woman, seeing that she was only some 10 or 12 years of age at the time of Buchan’s first expedition.”¹⁰⁸ “It only remains for me to offer some comments on the foregoing notices,” Howley concluded, “and attempt some

104 Annette Kolodny, “Fictions of American Prehistory: Indians, Archaeology, and National Origin Myths,” *American Literature*, vol. 75, no. 4 (December 2003), pp. 693-721.

105 Regna Darnell, *And along came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1998).

106 Howley, *The Beothucks*, p. xviii.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221, n.1.

solution of apparently conflicting and doubtful statements.”¹⁰⁹ The collection of accurate description was his profession as a geologist and surveyor. He did not advance an explicit interpretation, but focused upon discrepancies in the testimony. There was an implicit interpretation, however. The accounts of European/Beothuk interactions in Howley’s book were not just reports he collected; they embodied an argument about the extinction of the Beothuk. Buchan’s efforts to establish peaceful relations, and Peyton’s ill-advised effort to capture a Beothuk person who could act as interpreter, were undermined by the past hostilities.

Long before Howley met Peyton, the Beothuk had ceased to exist as a cultural group. Many authors romanticized the island’s Indigenous people as children of nature doomed to fade into memory because of their tragic inability to adapt, or saw them as having been murdered by cruel lower-class rural settlers. It is worth reflecting upon the political context within which the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evidence was generated and later interpreted. The governors, clergymen, naval officers, and colonial officials who expressed humanitarian concern for the Beothuk were culturally and geographically distant from the North East Coast fishermen and furriers who interacted with the Beothuk. The English elite’s class prejudices made them credulous when hearing reports of violence, and the evidence they collected then shaped Howley’s analysis. Lieutenant John Cartwright, Royal Navy, for example, was a political radical who was motivated by humanitarian concerns. He had reasons to emphasize the lurid nature of the brutalities of which he was told; the more sensational the violence, the more pressure would be placed upon the government to do something to rescue the Beothuk from ill treatment at the hands of settlers. Subsequent authors drew upon *The Beothucks*, but rarely took the care with evidence that Howley had, and some embellished or invented acts of violence such as an improbable massacre of 400 Beothuk at “Bloody Point.” For a century after 1915, historians and archaeologists, as well as novelists, used the book as their principal source of information about the Beothuk.

Attentive readers of the book will see some of the ideas of late-twentieth-century scholars anticipated in *The Beothucks*.¹¹⁰ Howley raised the idea, for example, that Beothuk refugees might have migrated across the Strait of Belle Isle and intermarried with the Innu. However, Howley and many who subsequently worked within his tradition were straitjacketed by the assumption that the Beothuk people were unique. While Howley was critical of his sources and expressed caution in reaching conclusions based upon fabulous fragments of evidence, some twentieth-century authors did not share his scepticism when they read his book. Most of Howley’s contemporaries, ethnographers and linguists alike, viewed the Beothuk as unique and unrelated to other contemporary Indigenous

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹¹⁰ Since the publication of Howley’s book, archaeological investigations have increased our knowledge of the Beothuk, and a few historical documents have come to light. The principal example, “The Pulling Manuscript,” was written in the late eighteenth century but only made available to historians when it was rediscovered by John Hewson in the late 1960s. It is interesting to note that it recounts oral history collected in the eighteenth century that is consistent with that collected by Howley in the nineteenth century. See Ingeborg C. L. Marshall, *Reports and Letters by George Christopher Pulling Relating to the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (St. John’s, NL: Breakwater Books, 1989).

peoples.¹¹¹ Some subsequent readers, without reflecting on it, were influenced by Howley's premise that the Beothuk were superior to other Indigenous people. This assumption could serve to diminish the Mi'kmaq as racially inferior not only to Europeans, but also inferior to the Red Men.

An interpretative rupture came in the 1970s. Leslie Upton, Ralph Pastore, Ingeborg Marshall, and others had access to archaeological data that Howley did not, and much of their knowledge was founded on interpreting that evidence by analogy with ethnographic description of other northern hunter-gatherer band cultures. These archaeological investigations provided new questions and were able to fill in much about Beothuk lives that Howley believed was unknowable. Not until the last three decades of the twentieth century did linguists such as John Hewson and historians and archaeologists such as Pastore and Marshall conceive of the Beothuk as members of a branch of the Algonquian linguistic family and both biologically and linguistically related to other peoples. When Pastore excavated the Beothuk site at Boyd's Cove, he interpreted the archaeological remains in light of the ethnographic literature on the Labrador Innu. Such a research strategy is potentially more productive than assuming the Beothuk were unlike any other peoples. The later assumption forecloses lines of investigation. The popular image of the Beothuk, however, continues to share more with Howley's romantic notion of the Beothuk as unique than with recent scholarship.

111 The British folklorist E. Sidney Hartland, for example, commented that "hitherto all efforts to connect the Beothuk with any other specific branch of the North American race have failed." See his "Review of *The Beothucks or Red Indians, the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland*," *Folklore*, vol. 26, no. 3 (September 1915), pp. 330-334.