

The Labrador Trapper: A Traditional Cultural Practice

By

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Summary

Humans have been trapping in the Labrador peninsula since pre-historic times, but the introduction of European trade and trappers into Labrador in the 1600s changed how and why trapping was carried on. Labrador trappers developed a multiethnic society that maintained varied traditions while also sharing technology and culture. For over four centuries, trappers pursued their livelihood with innovation and adaptation, but when fur prices dropped in the 1940s and 60s, and other means of earning a living became available, the old trappers began to die off and younger trappers either left the practice or evolved into part-timers. The ethics, songs, stories, clothing, rituals and knowledge that made the trappers unique began to die out with the old trappers, but they left a lasting cultural inheritance in Newfoundland and Labrador, and their presence secured an economically significant legacy for Newfoundland with their eventual 1927 testimony, in the more than one hundred thousand square miles of territory of what is today one of the greatest sources of natural wealth in Canada. This paper will outline the traditional culture of the Innu, Inuit, Métis and European trappers of Labrador and demonstrate how their presence in Labrador affected the future of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada as a whole.

I: History of Trapping in Newfoundland and Labrador

Fur-bearing animals were caught by aboriginal people in Labrador from the earliest times. (Fitzhugh 38) Prior to the introduction of metal traps, Innu and Inuit used stones and trees to create deadfall traps, and used the meat for food and the skins and furs for clothing and tools. Trapping solely for furs as a trade item came with the European travelers and settlers. Seasonal workers, such as the Basque and West Country English, trapped on the coast from the 1500s, and in time trading began to draw aboriginal people from the interior. Eventually, trapping for trade spread from the coast to the Height-of-Land and for more than a century, trapping was the reason permanent communities were established inland from Lake Melville.¹

By the 1930s, the bottom was out of the fur trade and starvation threatened all the Labradorians who trapped and hunted for a living. However construction of the Goose Bay Air Base began in 1941, offering year-round work for wages and bringing about the end of trapping as a way of life (Zimmerly 199-200).²

The practice of trapping in Labrador was not consistent throughout the area but varied according to local conditions. On the coast, “Men trapped within a radius of

twenty five to thirty kilometers from their winter homes for periods ranging from a day to a week” (Kennedy 141). Trapping was more important in places like Paradise River, (Kennedy 14). Just as trapping competed with caribou hunting for the Innu and seal hunting for the Inuit, it competed with fishing and sealing for the settlers on the coast.³

Inland trappers could do commercial salmon fishing, but Lake Melville was too fresh to support cod stocks. As trapping areas got claimed or hunted out, people in Central Labrador found it necessary to travel farther and farther away until eventually they went right to the Height-of-Land, travelling in by canoe in the fall and hauling out their furs by toboggan.⁴

Generally speaking, the Innu and Inuit trappers did only enough trapping to pay for guns and ammunition, tea and flour, and relied on hunting as their primary source of food and clothing. The Métis and European trappers of Central Labrador did other jobs when they could get them, but were primarily trappers.⁵

The term “trapper” generally referred to a man, but in reality, women were trappers also. According to Harold Paddon, the trapper’s wife had to be “not only a housewife, but a hunter, a trapper and a fisherman...in order to survive” (100).⁶ Although most women stayed at home when their husbands went trapping, a woman would occasionally accompany her husband on a shorter trapping trip.⁷ It was not unusual for both women and children to have a few traps near home, and some women, like Elizabeth Goudie, travelled farther once their children were old enough to be left.⁸

II: Distinctive Cultural Traditions and Practices

It is difficult to talk about the Labrador trapper as if he were one single character or homogeneous group, for in truth at the height of the trappers’ activity there were at least five distinct ethnic groups of Labrador trappers—Innu, Inuit, English settler, French settler and Métis—each with their specific traditions and characteristics. These groups broke down into what Harold Paddon calls the “backyard bunny hunters” and the “long-distance men” (271), by which he meant the men and women who maintained trap lines within easy distance of their homes, and those men who travelled long distances and were away and alone for up to three months at a time. There is no question that the “long-distance men,” or “real trappers,” also called the “Height-of-Landers,” were the trapping elite most people have in mind when they talk of Labrador fur trapping, but all the groups contributed to the trapping lifestyle. Each had their own cultural traditions of language, songs, stories, and ethics as well as their tools, knowledge and habits, but they were all pursuing the same goals, using roughly the same methods, adapting from each other and coping with the same difficult conditions.

Customary Laws of Trapping

Trappers had their own set of laws prior to the introduction of wildlife regulations. Trapping customs included rules such as the one that said a trapline that was left for two years was free for the taking and the old tilts could be sold or burnt, and if a shoreline was taken, one must go five miles inland or over the hill before starting a new line.⁹ The right of a trapper to use or lease his own ground forced younger men to go well back into the interior, according to Isaac Rich, and “That’s what took some of the younger

generation away back beyond the Churchill Falls” (“Trapline Rights” 7). J.M. Scott wrote that “Each man needs on an average about two hundred square miles of hunting country” to support his traplines (Scott, *Cain* 34).

Métis and non-native settlers laid claim to their trapping areas and did not trespass on one another’s lines, but “Indians were free to go where they liked (McLean).¹⁰ Joe Abel of Hopedale said that an Inuit hunter could set his traps in the same place each year but “could not claim or restrict the use of those places for himself” (Brice-Bennett, 67).¹¹ Settlers had different rules for trapping near their places in the bays than they did for trapping on the coast or in the interior. According to Brice-Bennett, “they accepted the principle of free access to game in outside places, because the species found there were unpredictable in their movements and availability, and they were not depended upon to provide a cash income”(167) as were valued fur-bearers in wooded areas. Each of the three groups of trappers had different rules, but they understood and respected those differences and found ways to live with them.¹²

Language

The languages used by the Labrador Trappers (English, French, Inuktitut and Innu- aimun) tended to become integrated and blurred. French died out after a time, and Inuktitut is now weak in many areas, but Innu Aimun and English are still widely spoken. Some of the English expressions can be found used in Newfoundland, but many have a meaning specific to Labrador.¹³

Song

Singing was and is popular among Inuit, but the old tradition of singing to bring animals, as recorded by Rasmussen and other ethnographers, either died out or went underground at an early stage in Labrador.¹⁴ Moravian church music and Bach chorales quickly filled the vacuum left by the suppression of traditional hunting songs, and stringed instruments were introduced in 1824 (Peacock, “Music” 27).

Among Innu, traditional singing is still very strong. Although some people will sing Christian hymns in the sweatlodge, it is also common for drummers to sing their own compositions (McGrath, “Healing Sweat” 8). According to Trudy and Julia Sable, a drummer might sing about going hunting, or about going in search of a dream that he has. When the drummer is looking for caribou, he has visions and then sings about his vision. (Sable & Sable 2.) The Innu singing tradition is not as strong as it once was, but it is far from dead.

Song and verse in English was a strong expression of trapper culture. According to Alicia Eaton, “the trapper folk song was a natural defence against the depression of isolation and hardship” (117). J.M. Scott notes that on Sunday evenings, the trappers “took out their hymn books, the only literature that they carried” (Scott, *Gino Watkins* 37), but at other times they had a “considerable repertoire” of songs (Scott, *Cain* 77).¹⁵ While many of the trappers’ songs were popular numbers from the music hall or radio, they also wrote their own satiric,¹⁶ sentimental, religious, and descriptive lyrics.¹⁷ Trapping song lyrics generally contain specific names and geographic locations, and are a record of who trapped where and with whom.¹⁸

Stories

Trapping stories are still common in Labrador today, and one has only to look at almost any issue of *Them Days* magazine to find good examples of the genre. Innu trapping stories are to be found in the autobiographies of Thomas Poker (Henricksen) and Mathieu Mestokosho (Bouchard), while Inuit trapping stories are told by Paulus Maggo and Alex Saunders. Métis and European trapper stories can be found in books by George Cartwright, Chesley Lethbridge, Horace Goudie, and Elliott Merrick.

Inuit stories generally fall into several loose categories; the creation myths, epics, beast fables, and cautionary tales of murder and revenge, and memoirs or recollections. All of these types of stories involve the natural world. The creation myths and many of the epics take place before the world as we know it existed, when animals could talk and transform themselves in various ways. In the beast fables, the animals act like humans but retain some of their animal characteristics. All of these stories encourage the trapper to think like his prey but also to bond with it (McGrath, *More Tales* vii).¹⁹

Innu stories, too, draw very little distinction between the animal and the human world, so by their nature they revolve around the interaction between the two, which includes not just hunting and trapping but sexual and social relations and the spiritual connection.²⁰

The tradition of the English and Métis storytellers are probably best represented in Harold Paddon's work where he gives numerous versions of trapper tales, including stories of encounters with bears, ghost stories, homebrew misadventures, tall tales, practical jokes and above all accounts of drownings, starvation, deprivation, loss and misadventure.

What the Innu, Inuit, Metis and European stories all have in common is that they offer both positive and negative models for how a trapper should behave. They warn against overhunting, cruelty to animals, and carelessness in the wilderness, while also advising of the importance of cooperation and innovation, the indifference of Nature and the need to propitiate the Creators.

Dance and Performance

According to Trudy and Julia Sable, the Innu were like other cultures in that they danced on happy occasions such as weddings, but they also danced ritually before and after caribou hunts. The drumming and singing often brought a vision of where the caribou were, and the dancing "had the power to bind the legs of the caribou spirit so that the caribou could not move" (Sable 1).²¹

Inuit, too, had dance rituals that were closely tied to successful hunts. Hawkes describes the sculping or skinning dance that was photographed by Robert E. Holloway on board the *Home* in 1906, in which a greedy hunter skins an animal for its valuable fur only to be disappointed when the animal runs away and the skin proves to be worthless (140).²² The Inuit dances and festivals were replaced by Moravian brass bands, violins, parades and feast days, but these are tied to the church liturgy and calendar, not to the hunting and trapping seasons. Drum dances, which were common through the circumpolar world, died out completely in Labrador and were only reintroduced by Greenlander Jens Lyberth about a decade ago and are now very popular with youth.

Settlers had their Christian feasts and festivals, and since their families generally didn't travel with them, their dances by necessity took place when the men were home from their trap lines. Elizabeth Goudie describes how, when she was growing up, "The only real entertainment we had was listening to Uncle Peter Michelin playing square dance music on his violin and singing folk songs" (14).²³

Rituals and Festive Events

In general, the rituals that were attached to trapping were tied to religious beliefs. For example, the Inuit initially had magic amulets and incantations to draw game towards them (Hawkes 162) but once they came under Moravian influence, such practices were forbidden and were replaced by Christian prayers. The settlers primarily adhered to the Anglican and Methodist practice of not hunting or doing any work on Sundays, even when they were alone in the bush (Merrick 56).²⁴

Innu life, which was so deeply tied to hunting and trapping, was imbued on all levels with religious ritual related to the animal world (Henriksen, *I Dreamed* 2008, p.109). Dreams, drums, sweatlodge, shaking tent, were and are all ties to the animal world (Turner 108). John Poker, the Innu hunter Kaniuekutut, noted that "they cultivated and created ties between themselves and the land" so that "the land is not only part of his mind and memory but is indeed part of his body" (Henriksen, *I Dreamed* 110).²⁵

Métis and European trappers adhered to some of the non-Christian rituals, such as the use of sweatlodges which Robert Michelin described to J.M. Scott (*Cain* 59). They sometimes celebrated festival events that Inuit and Innu trappers celebrated, but they also had a few of their own that tended to be tied to the seasonal shift from village to camp.²⁶

Material Culture

The material culture of the trappers came from all the ethnic groups, but primarily from the aboriginal side. Guns, steel knives and traps were obtained from the Europeans, but the ability to use them in harsh Labrador conditions came primarily from the Innu. According to David Zimmerly, the settlers of Lake Melville "learned the skills of trapping and survival in the interior from the Innu, and adopted many of their tools, including the canoe, crook knife, and toboggan" (Qtd. in E. Goudie x). The canoes were made of canvas, the knife blades were made from beaten steel, and in time the snowshoes were laced with nylon rope, but the basic designs came from the Innu. The crook knife or crooked knife, which is extensively used by Innu and Inuit, is "one of the few implements which those widely differing people have in common" (Turner154).

While Innu trappers tended to live in tents because they were moving from area to area, and Inuit worked from their home communities or employed the temporary shelter of snowhouses, trappers of Métis and European origin built semi-permanent shelters that they used and repaired year after year.²⁷ Although the tilt was clearly of European origin, it did have elements borrowed from the aboriginal tradition, such as a spruce bough floor, a low doorway with a raised sill, and a door, often of skin or canvas, that could be propped up from either inside or outside so that the trapper would be able to open the door even if the tilt was snowed in (Budgell 19). The metal stoves and stovepipes were initially made for them by the Hudson's Bay tinsmiths.

Clothing

Appropriate clothing was and is essential to the trapping life, and is one area where the differences between ethnic groups were quickly eliminated, although superficial stylistic differences still allow for ethnic identification. Inuit and Innu traditionally made all their clothing from local animals, while the Europeans wore imported woollen and cotton clothing. With social interaction and intermarriage, this trend quickly changed for all three groups.²⁸

Hallock observed that acculturation was a two-way process, and that Inuit were induced to adopt the European dress, but necessity “compels the wearing of furs and skins during the long and rigorous winters...and the whites have necessarily assimilated to them” (Qtd.in Zimmerly 94). The Innu caribou coats that have survived show a clear resemblance to the European frock coat (Burnham 5), the clearest example of the fusion that inevitably took place between the groups.²⁹

Since Innu and Inuit clothing, particularly footwear such as kamiks and moccasins, were superior to European shoes for travelling in wet and snowy weather, Europeans and their Métis descendants quickly adopted these. Inuit and Innu style breeches and parkas were warmer and drier, but the preparation and care of the skins was laborious so European textiles such as flannel, melton cloth, duffel and cotton duck were substituted for furs in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, although the fur trim was retained (Goodfellow-Baikie 41).³⁰

Trapping Knowledge and Skills Required

Peter Usher identifies three components of trapping skills: “First, a man must be skilful in the techniques of trapping and travelling” (212). He must know how to toggle, set and bait a trap, and must be a master of the qualities of various kinds of terrain, snow and ice. “Second, he must know and understand the habits and behaviour of the animals he is trapping” (213). He must know what animals will be plentiful and where, what bait they prefer and when, how the animal will approach the trap. “Finally, he must work hard and maintain a good stock of capital equipment” (213).

Trapping skills, once acquired, were eventually handed along to the sons and daughters of the trapper. A child was often coached in “the safe use of firearms and in the setting of traps” by the age of five (Paddon, *Green Woods* 196) and could be working his own trapline by the age of eleven or twelve (Paddon, *Green Woods* 201). Horace Goudie was eleven years old when he started to trap (Goudie, *Woman* 88). Women and children often had a few traps close to home on which to learn and which could be used as a fallback in case of loss or injury to the father (Paddon, *Green Woods* 101).³¹

III: The Trappers' Place in History

Trappers were frequently called upon to act as guides for explorers³² and travelers,³³ and it was their local knowledge and their bush skills which made economic development possible. Medical practitioners were highly dependent on the local trappers to get them

into remote areas for emergencies as well as for regular circuits.³⁴ Clergy too employed guides and drivers.³⁵ Businessmen interested in harvesting the extensive forests of Labrador relied on trappers to lead them into virgin areas suitable for cutting.³⁶ The trappers were frequently called upon to rescue not just one another but many of the outsiders who ventured into the wilderness without adequate preparation or knowledge, the most notable victim being Leonidas Hubbard who starved to death in 1903 while his companion Dillon Wallace was being rescued by “four swarthy men,” led by Donald Blake (Wallace 221).³⁷

The Labrador Boundary Dispute³⁸

In the mid 1890s, A.P. Low, the renowned Canadian geologist, had trekked through the Hamilton drainage area, and observed the huge potential of water power, timber, and iron ore deposits. These were clearly described in his 1896 Report to the Dominion Government. Ottawa attempted abruptly to usurp these resources in the 1898 Act Respecting the Boundaries of Quebec, by arbitrarily moving the Quebec-Labrador boundary northwards to the Churchill River, while only recognizing Newfoundland’s 3 mile strip to support her fishery. This brought Southern Labrador, south of the Churchill River, briefly within Canadian ownership, until the Dickie Newfoundland timber licence challenged the whole situation in 1902.³⁹ After Dickie had been charged with cutting without a Quebec licence, Newfoundland and Quebec agreed to refer the matter to the Judicial Committee of the Imperial Privy Council.

Newfoundland’s case, prepared by a legal team including P.T. McGrath and led by Sir John Simon, produced a number of arguments, one of which hinged on the definition of the word “coast.” A key element in their evidence, however, was testimony taken from the trappers.⁴⁰ The Newfoundland legal team suggested that “in this particular case, ‘coast’ could be read as meaning all the territory between the coasts and the ascertainable height of land or watershed behind it.” (Chadwick 139). Furthermore, Sir John Simon was able to produce “ample documentary evidence to show that jurisdiction had been exercised not only over the coastal fisheries but over a range of activities extending inland to the watershed” (Harris 219).

It was testimony from trappers such as John Michelin and John Blake, who wished Labrador to be considered part of Canada (“In the Matter of the Boundary” 53), as well as those such as Henry Webb and John Winter, who felt that Canada had no claim to the area at all (“Privy Council Affidavits” 22-3), which secured the interior of Labrador for Newfoundland. As Sir John Chadwick put it, “On 1 March 1927 the people of Newfoundland retired to their beds richer by some 110,000 square miles of territory than they had arisen that morning” (Chadwick 132).

Conclusion

Trapping was a small part of the economy in Labrador but it was a vital and unique part that affected most of the aboriginal and settler population. It served to unite people from various ethnic groups into a cooperative society, unified by their blended traditions and cultures, it encouraged the establishment of permanent communities both on the coast and inland, it assisted the exploration of the remote wilderness, and

ultimately secured the territory that eventually became modern day Newfoundland and Labrador. Recognition of trapping as a significant cultural and traditional practice would seem a logical and reasonable step towards ensuring that their lives are remembered as significant to the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Endnotes

¹ When John Guy came to Newfoundland in 1610, he was commissioned to see that his people, “by hunting, shooting and trapping, catch stags, beavers, bears, otters and foxes, preserving their fur” (Williams 74). Inuit began trapping foxes for trade after 1600 in the Lake Melville area. (Fitzhugh 46) and Louis Fornel, a French trader, founded the first year-round trading post in Hamilton Inlet in 1743 at North West River (Goudie, *Woman* ix). In 1771, the Moravian missionaries founded a trading and mission station at Nain, “to protect the Eskimos from intercourse with unscrupulous traders who gave the natives rum and tobacco for fat, fur and whalebone.” (Thoms 18). Cartwright started trapping and fishing south of Hamilton Inlet in 1775, and the Hudson’s Bay Company came in 1836, and purchased posts at North West River and Rigolet. (Goudie, *Woman* xii). In 1901 Revillon Freres broke the HBC monopoly at North West River, resulting in better fur prices for the trappers. The Hudson’s Bay Company took over in 1926 from the Moravians on the north coast.

² Trapping is still done in the Lake Melville area but it is considered a hobble, mostly done by retired men or seasonal workers. Today, Labrador West has over 60 licensed trappers, all part-timers, either retired or employed in the mines. They work in pairs to guarantee that the traps can be checked regularly. The income from a trap line today can run between \$10,000 and \$20,000 (Parsons 26) and is usually just enough to pay for gas and equipment.

³ A man from Norman Bay explained that “if you goes trapping, fits right out for trapping, you can’t go sealing ” (Kennedy 142) because netting seals had to be done just when the fur was best. Trappers on the coast walked to their trapping grounds in the fall and “sometimes used one or two dogs to haul a short (two-meter) komatik” and later in the winter they used dog teams...particularly on short excursions to check traps.” (Kennedy 143). In Central Labrador, dogs weren’t used because of the deep snow (Goudie, *Woman* xi).

⁴ According to Elizabeth Goudie, trappers like her father left at the end of August for three months and “we didn’t hear from them until they returned... We only had them home for one month in mid-winter and then they returned again to their trapping grounds for three more months. This was the yearly routine for a trapper (16).

⁵ It is the Métis who are considered the ‘real’ trappers, and to whom most people are referring to when writing about trapping. Anthropologist Hugh Brody claims that [Métis and European] Labradorians are remarkable in that “ they constitute the only group of Europeans to make lives for themselves in North America more on the terms of

an indigenous population than as representatives of a colonial enterprise ” (Qtd. in Fagan 58).

⁶ Lydia Campbell, writing in 1893 at the age of 75, records that she was at that time maintaining a line of 24 rabbit snares, but that at the winter home where she lived with her widowed son Thomas, there were also “traps for snaring foxes, martens, wolverines mountain cats, muskrats, minks and most of all them kind of things that I have caught in my lifetime” (3). She claimed her elderly sister Hannah, who trapped with her children after her husband died, once killed a wolverine “with a little stout stick...after a long battle” (6) Lydia’s daughter Margaret Baikie recorded that her father Daniel Campbell, an Orkney man, did not know much about trapping. Her mother “used to go with him to set the traps (2). Baikie’s half-sister Susan also trapped (25) as did the wife of Donald Smith—later Lord Strathcona—who once caught a particularly valuable silver fox.(13).

⁷ Elizabeth Goudie went on the trap line with her husband and “made a few trips up Upitik River tending the black bear traps” (*Woman* 47). According to Borlase, a woman often worked alongside her husband at heavy physical tasks on such trips and “If trapping had not been good, she might accompany him on a second trip to another area” (*Labrador Settlers* 114). In the spring of 1937, Mrs.Goudie went with her husband to strike up his traps. She walked fifty miles each way, breaking trail for him (*Woman* 99). They took lynx, fox, mink and otter.

⁸ Harold Paddon cites as an example of a competent woman trapper, Aunt Mary Michelin of Salt Water Pond, twelve miles out of North West River, who “in her younger days, had been a keen rival to her husband in hunting and trapping. There had been years when her catch of fur actually exceeded his” (267). Mary Ford of Zoar injured her foot while trapping, resulting in an amputation, but once she recovered she “continued to hunt and trap near her home” with the assistance of an artificial leg (Peacock, *Reflections* 27).

⁹ According to Louie Montague, A.P. Low helped the trappers develop the laws around 1890, although they were not written down until 1976. Montague said the laws were “based on traditional knowledge and common sense” (“Life” n.p.). The ten rules, as recorded by Wallace McLean, all boiled down to “As long as trap chains didn’t cross, all okay” (McLean 5).

¹⁰ Bert Blake, who went trapping in the early 1900s, reported that he and four others went trapping in near Churchill Falls, and one afternoon Arch Goudie encountered six Innu who “were so cross about us stealing their trappings...that one man took his gun and held it to Arch’s head while the others robbed away all his grub and burned down his tilt” (Goudie, *Woman* 154). This was, apparently, a rare occurrence, though. According to Austin Montague, the Innu “were very honest. If they found something in your trap, they’d hang it where you could find it. But they’d never reset a trap. If they came to your tilt while you were gone, they would help themselves to a bit of grub. They would never take it all” (Montague, “Tha’ Was Nothing” 11-12).

¹¹ Inuit Elders in Nain formalized their rules and wrote them down between 1946 and 1966. They stated that, for example, “if a weasel was trapped inside a den by two men, and if it was killed after tracking it, the price of the fur should be shared evenly” (Brice Bennett 167). Carol Brice-Bennett argues that these rules were concerned with “the just sharing of the crop of pelts in situations that might cause disputes between hunters” (167).

¹² There were also rules that all the trappers respected, except in times of dire starvation. According to Harold Paddon, “We were all fully aware that our lives depended on the game and we took none that we did not need nor did we, except when hunger drove us hard, bother the birds and animals from the time mating began until the young were old enough to look after themselves” (92). It came as quite a shock to all the hunters and trappers when the Newfoundland Ranger force began enforcing regulations that had been drafted in far-away St. John’s under totally different circumstances, and it is no surprise that the trappers were often thought to be reckless scoff laws. When the migratory bird act declared that they could no longer conduct a spring hunt for geese and ducks, at a time of year when there was no other source of meat and little if any flour left, it was inevitable that they would ignore these laws.

¹³ A “raggedy-jacket,” which on the Island can mean an old seal, in Labrador can also refer to a caribou more than two years old which has a poor coat. Such animals are also called “stags,” (Brice-Bennett 375) a general reference to low-value fur. A “barricade,” which on the Island is the forecastle of a vessel or a heavy coating of ice or freezing rain, in Labrador means to spend a night in the woods in a temporary outdoor shelter (Montague, *Life*, n.p.). A ditty bag becomes a prog bag (“Labrador Dictionary”), and a tilt, which is in both areas a small wooden shack, in Labrador also came to mean the distance between two tilts. “Cacachew,” or “carcajou,” from the French for wolverine, is also applied to a man who steals from another’s traps. Since the earliest trappers were aboriginal, many of the words English and French speaking trappers used were borrowed from their languages. A “mukkashan”—an Innu word for a traditional marrow bone ritual—for the settlers was a feast or party (Goudie, *Woman* 103); a “toomuckin” is a skin boot that is run down at the heel (“Labrador Dictionary”). A seal harpoon was a “nauluk” (Goudie, *Woman* 67), a white blind or screen for hunting ducks and seals is a “talluk” (Borlase 115), and “stemou” is tobacco (Borlase 124).

¹⁴ Hawkes, writing in 1916, recorded a Labrador Inuit example of an animal incantation, “half-sung, half-chanted in a rhythmical sing-song” (Hawkes 162-3).

¹⁵ Trapper Isaac Rich reported that there wasn’t much in the way of entertainment in a trapper’s tilt because you spent your time “tending your furs and trapping,” but the trappers sometimes made arrangements to meet on the weekends, and “if the cakes were all cooked and all that, and if you knew this man knew a lot of songs, you might say, well, Ned, how’s about singing us ‘The Wild Colonial Boy’ or something like that? And so you’d lie back on the bunk with a good feed of meat cooking on the camp stove and you’d listen” (“Good Times”). Songs were also composed in the tilts, as is evident in the last lines of “The Trappers Song” by Douglas Best which runs “I think I’ll boil the

kettle, cheer the bogie with a junk,/ I rhymed this into Apple Lake stretched out upon my bunk.”

¹⁶ Max Blake of Rigolet recorded a typical verse from a trapper song: “The down-the-bayers set their traps so early in the fall,/ Their hunt is large in number while ours are very small./ Half the fur they get are stag while ours are all prime—/ I would not give a skin of mine, no, not for eight or nine” (McGrath, *All In Together* 40).

¹⁷ “The Trappers’ Alphabet” and “The Ode to Trappers” describe the life, while satiric verses such as “The Million Dollar Fox” (about rabies) and “The Game Warden Song” express frustration at the bureaucracy of the government. Women, too, wrote songs about trappers, such as Shirley Montague’s “White on White,” which describes being snowed in far from home, or June Baikie’s “Those Far-off Hills,” which tells of the next generation getting jobs in Goose Bay. More recent songs tend towards the nostalgic. A song composed for a CBC radio contest several years ago, “The Twelve Days of a Trapper’s Christmas,” was an immediate favourite and is now included in community concerts.

¹⁸ “Me and Ockie and Grampa ” describes how Louis and Austin Montague went to Kaipokok River to trap along the beach for water furs (Borlase, *Songs* 120). “The Grand Lake Song” by John Montague lists Uncle Willie, Sid Blake, Robert Baikie, and George Michelin, and describes where they set their traps in Grand Lake. It is interesting to note with regard to the Labrador Boundary Dispute that Byron Chaulk, in “We Sons of Labrador,” documents that the Labradorians “fished and trapped the waterways./ From the coast to far inland” (Chaulk 56), a line that has been quoted extensively by writers such as Elizabeth Goudie (21) and William Rompkey.

¹⁹ For example, the story “Orphan Boy with Raven’s Beak” describes what happens when a trapper catches an owl with a human head but refuses to spare its life (Blake, *Inuit Life* 52). Recollections of real events generally embed practical details that are useful to other trappers. Paulus Maggo describes how he used to watch the foxes he was hunting to see what they were eating, and he would subsequently use that food (mussels for example) to bait his traps (Maggo 91).

²⁰ The story of “Caribou Man” is about a hunter who dreams of a caribou woman who invites him to join her herd; he is occasionally allowed to kill a few animals to cloth himself, and is protected by the herd which he also protects. When he meets Innu hunters, he warns them that “their troubles in life come from killing the caribou too freely” (Speck 88). Interestingly, this caribou man is located in a real, historic past some forty years ago, thus fusing the mythic and the contemporary into one reality.

²¹ During famine, the shaman would drum in the dark to find his vision of where the caribou were, and “After he finished, people would dance and the hunters would leave for their hunt” (Sable & Sable 1). In early times, Innu would often dance following a *mukashan* or caribou marrow feast (Turner 159). Francis Penashue has recorded that “the

drum was used in the country to get the animal spirit, to obtain food...so when I go to the country I use the drum, but I do not use it here in the community” (von Rosen 1).

²² Rev. William Peacock, writing in *Them Days*, recalls his “chagrin and disgust” at finding in the diaries for the mission at Nain in 1771, that the missionary was so appalled by the Festival for the Sun that the Inuit were celebrating that he could not even describe what it was like (26).

²³ The Hudson’s Bay Company sponsored dances, feasts and competitions at New Years right across Canada. When Mrs. Goudie was fourteen, she traveled the 18 miles from Sebaskachu to North West River to attend a New Year’s square dance with her cousin—“lances, cotillions and the Birdy Dance.” (15) At her wedding four years later, they danced until three o’clock in the morning (20).

²⁴ Sundays were a time to rest, pray, and perhaps read the Bible. Trappers who broke the Sabbath rest rule were likely to bring negative consequences onto other trappers as well as on themselves. J.M. Scott called observing the Sabbath “the strictest rule in Labrador” (Scott, *Cain* 23).

²⁵ Innu rituals were extensive and complex. They practiced animal divination through scapulamancy, suspended bear and beaver skulls from trees “to satisfy the spirits of the animals,” (Speck 75) and never allowed dogs to eat caribou bones for fear of offending the animal masters (Speck 90).

²⁶ An example of a settler ritual is the shotgun salute which was given as the trappers pushed off from shore in the fall (Paddon 194), at the New Year’s Eve feasting and dances held by the Hudson’s Bay traders (Rich “Good Times” 7), and at weddings. Some rituals were extended to the whole family, such as the spring tonic made from sulphur and molasses, or from fir with the sap in it (known as the green doctor), which had to be taken every day for two weeks, with a week break in the middle (*Goudie Woman* 11).

²⁷ There were two basic tilt styles. Anne Budgell asserts that the Labrador vertical log tilt of the south coast was “banked and even covered over with grassy sods which were not available in trapping country” (Budgell 27-8). The tilts of the Lake Melville and Height-of-Land area were almost exclusively horizontal log structures. (Budgell 13) Although the main or “stopping” tilt could be quite high enough to stand in, many overnight tilts were small. Harold Paddon describes helping to build a tilt for his partner that was “only five logs, or about three feet high in the walls.” (Paddon 233) The roof was traditionally shingled with moss sods (Budgell 19) or birch bark (Paddon 233), but once roofing felt was available, some trappers brought that in, although it tended to attract bears and porcupines which tore it up (Budgell 17).

²⁸ Inuit clothing at the time of first contact was composed of caribou, seal and other furs, or bird skins with the feathers on; walrus intestine was used to make waterproof clothing, and sewn grass socks were used to line boots. The patterns in which the clothes were cut indicated things such as the onset of puberty (Turner 44). The messages conveyed by the

design motifs of Inuit fur piecing were complex, as were the figures painted on the caribou coats used by Innu hunters (Burnham 21). Hallock describes the Innu garments as “of softest buckskin...most faultless cut, and fancifully decorated with pigments of various colours, and wrought with silk, in designs representing birds, flowers, canoes, etc. Their yellow dye is obtained from the spawn of trout. A scarlet sash, which girds the coat, is worn about the waist, the flowing ends reaching to the knees” (Qtd. In Zimmerly 99).

²⁹ Among Inuit and Innu, rules and rituals related to hunting clothes were strictly adhered to. Inuit complied with various taboos, so that “when caribou hides were being tanned...no one could eat seal meat,” and “when women were sewing caribou clothing...no seals could be caught until all clothing was complete” (Borlase, *Labrador Inuit* 175). Innu painted coats were considered “holy vestments, one of the ritual elements that would ensure the success of the hunt.” (Burnham 3). As the magic power of the coats was considered to have gone out of them by the end of the years, “the coat was no longer of use to its owner and could be sold or traded to someone else” (Burnham 3).

³⁰ A photograph of Sid Blake of North West River taken in the 1940s, illustrates “the culturally mixed heritage of Central Labrador Settlers: a Naskapi embroidered hunting jacket; ‘mukluks’ of caribou hide cured by North West River Indian and sealskin mitts” (Plaice 44). The Labrador dickie, a pullover parka-style blouse with a fur trimmed hood, was usually worn over another layer, a wool undercoat with a canvas cover, cut “wide to allow for easy walking as well as air movement” (Goodfellow-Baikie 41). There were regional variations, so that the “style of pocket and/or drawstring incorporated into the dickie denotes Cartwright style” (Goodfellow-Baikie 42). According to Clarice Blake Rudkowski, trappers from North West River “wore long scarves around their middles to keep out the cold drafts” (Goodfellow-Baikie 41), similar to the Innu sashes. Even today, decorative rick-rack, embroidery and other trims often mimic the painted or fur-pieced coats of the Innu and Inuit (Antane 5), and Métis have in recent years adopted the colours of the Labrador flag with an embroidered or appliquéd spruce twig to declare their affiliation to their own ethnic group. Although some people, particularly those on the coast, dyed their canvas parka covers with bark (Poole 33), white clothing was always used for seal and duck hunting in the spring (Paddon, *Green Woods* 93), and this became the norm for hunters and trappers of all backgrounds. White clothing was used for Moravian feast days and church services (Goodfellow-Baikie 41), with white treated boot bottoms, and it became the custom for hunters to be buried in white clothing (Baikie 20). Today, white hunting clothes are used by Innu at weddings and political rallies as well as burials. In the 1940s, “traditional hunting and traveling outerwear began to be replaced by Canadian and American army parkas and pants” (Goodfellow-Baikie 42) among hunters of all ethnic groups.

³¹ The traditional Inuit method of teaching tended to be fairly passive. A parent or grandparent would simply perform the usual tasks while being observed by a child, and answer any questions they might have. Eventually, the child would attempt to emulate the adult, providing an appropriate opportunity for correction. Paulus Maggo, in describing his first hunting trips, explained how he learned to pack the butchered animal parts into

the rib cage of the caribou to make as small a package as possible for transportation. “It’s not something you learned by yourself. You had to learn by watching the way it’s done and you would get better by doing it often after watching others” (88). This remark is echoed by Innu elder Kaniuekutat (John Poker) who said “We don’t learn from ourselves, we learn from our parents. Like hunting, trapping, anything we do today, has come from our ancestors” (Henriksen *I Dreamed* 94).

³² When A.P. Low was mapping the interior in 1894, he had with him four Innu, eight men from Rigolet and four from North West River, all to carry supplies and to support him and D.I.V. Eaton (Wilton 135). Gino Watkins, in 1928-29, mapped the Twin Falls area with Robert Michelin (Scott, *Cain* 116) and Douglas Best (Scott, *Cain* 121) but during his time in North West River he also “kept open house to the trappers and Indians and learnt from them a great deal about the country”(Scott, *Cain* 118). Louie Montague’s first salaried job was as an assistant geologist for the Provincial Dept. of Mines and Resources, “mapping the rock and looking for minerals.” He also worked at an engineering project for Churchill Falls at Sona Lake, having been hired because he was known to be a trapper and “they were looking for canoe men” (Montague, “Life” n.p.).

³³ Mina Hubbard’s 1905 expedition into the interior was successful because her local guide, Bert Blake, had trapped the Naskapi River as far as Seal Lake with his brother Donald (Hubbard 54). In 1925, Michelin and his half-brother John guided Varrick Frissell over 300 miles up the Grand River (Merrick 56), and in 1931 took Elliott Merrick along the same route. The Innu too acted as guides to adventurers and explorers. Herman and Wilhelmina Koehler were guided to the headwaters of the Natashquan by Michel Gregoire and Wilfred Jourdain in 1930 (Armitage 174).

³⁴ When Dr. Tony Paddon needed a dog team driver to take him to Goose Bay in 1947, Ken Webber, John Dyson, John Morris and other trappers drove him for 1,100 miles in the course of 17 weeks (W. A. Paddon, *Labrador Doctor* 116).

³⁵ Rev. William Peacock documents a trip from Nutak with a doctor and two Inuit drivers as a typical day in his life as a missionary. Without the drivers who knew the country from hunting and trapping, neither he nor the doctor would have gone anywhere (Peacock, *Reflections* 1).

³⁶ Harold Paddon worked at a timber survey in the 1930s (*Green Woods* 171) as did Ben Powell Sr. in the 1950s (Powell 149). Both men had already established themselves as trappers.

³⁷ In February of 1943, Jim Goudie found six men in a downed airplane near his trap line. He sheltered one injured man in his tilt, left them wood and equipment to survive on, and walked out to Goose Bay to get help for the rest. It took nine days and three dog teams from Mud Lake to get all the men out (Goudie, *Woman* 135-6).

³⁸ Ben Powell Sr. has written that if you wish to make a living at trapping, “the first thing you must learn is the whole watershed of the area where your trapline is to run” so as not

to get lost. (Powell 127). This simple, logical statement belies the enormous importance of the testimony of the Height-of-Land trappers when the dispute over the Labrador Boundary reached the Imperial Privy Council in 1927.

³⁹ When Alfred Dickie arrived from Nova Scotia and set up his Grand River Pulp and Lumber Company at Mud Lake, Quebec immediately challenged his Newfoundland cutting licence (Felsberg, “SOM Many Small Tings” 24). “Newfoundland and Dickie were unaware that in 1898 the Canadian Government had enacted a new law, without any negotiations with their political neighbours [which] attempted to move the Quebec boundary north from 52° (established in 1825) to the Grand River, bringing all Southern Labrador (except a very narrow Eastern coastline) within Canadian ownership” (Felsberg, “History” 65).

⁴⁰ Testimony was taken from “descendants of those pioneer fur animal hunters and seal catchers who married Eskimo or Indian women,” as well as those who were Newfoundlanders by birth and Labradorians by adoption (Chadwick 133).

⁴¹ While the definitions of “height of land” and “coast” were vital to establishing where the boundary was, it was the evidence of the trappers, who used this watershed and height of land, and who submitted themselves to effective jurisdiction and paid customs duties levied by successive Governments of Newfoundland since 1825, without any challenge from Canada (Chadwick 151), that tipped the balance for the Privy Council.

⁴² Today, a statue, some songs and stories in an archive, names on a map, are almost all that remain of the trapping life. Vivan Baikie, who died in January 2012, may have been one of the last men alive to spend his lifetime trapping full-time in Labrador. There are still a few men, including Louie Montague, Horace Goudie, Homan Campbell, Bernard Chaulk and Wilbur Montague, who did do full time trapping in their youth, but when these elderly men are gone, there will be little to mark their contribution to the settlement and development of our province.

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