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The Northern Athabaskan Survey of Edward Sapir and James A. Teit

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Abstract. This article investigates the collaboration of Edward Sapir and James A. Teit in a project sponsored by the Geological Survey of Canada and focusing on the northern Athabaskans in the period from 1910, when Sapir first came to head the newly created Division of Anthropology, until the time of Teit's death in 1922. Despite the project's ambitious objectives, it progressed little further than the Tahltan of the Stikine River and their eastern Kaska neighbors. Although the reasons for this are complex, it is suggestive of an anthropology taking shape well beyond the strict dictates of the Boasian text tradition. For Sapir, this would see the development of a comparative hypothesis regarding a six-unit classification of North American Indian languages, while for Teit, it would lead to an advocacy on behalf of aboriginal peoples in pursuit of their land rights.

1. Introduction. The Boasian tradition occupies a prominent place within the development of North American anthropology (D. Cole 1999; Darnell 1992, 1998; Rohner 1969; Stocking 1968, 1974). It is a tradition that owes as much to the many students trained in its methods and the field collaborators who furnished its material, as it does to Franz Boas himself. Here one finds a number of individuals who were uniquely suited to the particular method of this tradition—what Darnell has described as the “text method of ethnographic presentation” (1992:42).¹ One such individual was James A. Teit (1864–1922),² a Scot from the Shetland Islands who came to Canada in March 1884 to work in his uncle's general store at Spences Bridge in the southern interior of British Columbia. There was a village of Thompson Indians nearby, and in time Teit became fully conversant in their language and familiar with their customs.³ On the occasion of their meeting in September 1894, Boas quickly “recognized in Teit an intelligent, well-read man, knowledgeable on Indians . . . [and] delegated him to investigate a virtually extinct Nicola Valley Athapaskan group, hoping that the man would become—as he did—an able colleague” (D. Cole 1999:169). Indeed, it was out of this partnership that there emerged Teit's major ethnographic works relating to the interior Salish of south central British Columbia (1909c), including the Thompson (1898, 1900, 1912b), the Lillooet (1906a, 1912a) and the Shuswap (1909b).

As Boas pursued his working relationship with James Teit, a young Columbia University student by the name of Edward Sapir, who was preparing for a career in Germanic philology, enrolled in an introductory anthropology course taught by Livingston Farrand, and an advanced anthropology course on American Indian languages with Boas. For Sapir, it would be an important turning

point. Between 1906 and 1910, in addition to course work as part of his graduate studies program, Sapir undertook four major field studies of American Indian languages: Wishram Chinook in 1905, Takelma in 1906, Yana in 1907, and Ute–Southern Paiute in 1909–10. The second of these formed the basis of his 1909 dissertation, *The Takelma Language of Southwestern Oregon* (Sapir 1922). With the completion of his formal studies, Sapir was ready for employment. That opportunity came when, in 1910, he accepted the position of chief ethnologist with the newly created Anthropological Division within the Geological Survey of Canada (Darnell 1990:41).

Sapir's plan for the Anthropological Division involved an intensive program of research aimed at filling major gaps in knowledge of each of the five Canadian aboriginal culture areas (Darnell 1990:49–55; see also 1976). Here the northern Athabaskans stood out as requiring most urgent ethnological attention because so little was known about them. With this in mind, and at the urging of Boas, Sapir approached James Teit regarding his ambitious new project. Sapir envisaged this work as involving two phases: first, a survey of Athabaskan groups with the aim of identifying "tribal boundaries"; and, second, a more detailed study of a selection of these groups. However, a number of factors would ultimately work to limit both the scope and the depth of Sapir's Athabaskan project.

This article is concerned with the planning and implementation of Sapir's northern Athabaskan survey, specifically as this involved James Teit. Sorting out how Teit should proceed with the survey entailed a lengthy correspondence between the two men, bringing to light other dimensions in their relationship. Both were established Boasian anthropologists by the time of the survey. Sapir had emerged from academic studies to become a full-time institutional anthropologist while Teit had emerged from his close involvement with Salish peoples to become a recognized field anthropologist.⁴ Despite the inherent strength of their association, the survey proved difficult to implement—in the end getting little further than the Athabaskan Tahltan and their eastern neighbors the Kaska.⁵ The reasons for this are complex, but are suggestive of an "anthropology" taking shape well beyond the strict dictates of the Boasian text tradition. For Sapir, this would see the development of a comparative hypothesis regarding a six-unit classification of North American Indian languages (Sapir 1921), while for Teit it would lead to an advocacy on behalf of aboriginal peoples in pursuit of their land rights.

2. The northern Athabaskan survey and James A. Teit. It was relatively late in his career and as a seasoned ethnographer that Teit tackled the ethnography of the northern Athabaskans. The assignment came as a renewable yearly contract with the newly created Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada. The Anthropological Division was headed by Edward Sapir and it was under Sapir's guidance that the Division embarked on an ambitious program of research. In a letter, Sapir outlined the work he had in mind for Teit,

“a systematic mapping instituted of the Athabaskan tribes of Canada [and] . . . to work out the exact tribal boundaries in BC and [the] Yukon” (Sapir to Teit, 14 November 1911). Further, Teit was to assemble a “representative collection” of materials from each of these groups for the museum and to select “at least certain tribes, Tahltan for instance, . . . for complete ethnological study on the scale that you have adopted for your Thompson River [1898, 1900] or Shuswap Indian [1909b] monographs” (Sapir to Teit, 14 November 1911).⁶

The following year, Teit outlined his plan to begin the survey on 1 August 1912, expecting to stay “two months in the north before the last boat out at the end of October” (Teit to Sapir, 17 May 1912). In early July, though, Teit wrote to Sapir to explain that he would not be able to depart until 17 August due to the anticipated arrival of a “special commissioner from Ottawa” to coincide with the “big Indian meeting” at Spences Bridge on 29 July 1912 (Teit to Sapir, 7 July 1912). As a result, Teit did not arrive in the north until 25 August. Teit’s destination was Telegraph Creek, a small community of log and frame buildings located on a series of benches overlooking the Stikine River in northern British Columbia.

3. “Making a real start on the Athabaskan tribes of Canada”: the 1912 field season. On 2 September, Teit had a meeting with the Indians at which “they selected a man for me to work with.” Working with this principal informant along with “a number of the elderly men” whom Teit noted as “well posted on old matters, [with] . . . more unanimity among them, and less vagueness than is found in some other tribes,” he proceeded to find out what he could regarding “the tribal boundaries, names for tribes” before tackling “the social organization” (Teit to Sapir, 6 September 1912). The response was such that Teit observed that

on points where Dawson, Morice or Emmons disagree with information obtained by me, I am taking great pains to get hold of the true way, and have asked a number of informants. So far they all agree so I feel confident I am correct. They say these other men were only a short time here, and picked up their information casually and without taking any pains, so they say there is no wonder they have made a few mistakes (They had no paid men to give them information).⁷ Re. The tribal territory the information I get now is practically the same as I have repeatedly heard before when on hunting trips, and must be correct. [Teit to Sapir, 6 September 1912]

Near the end of September 1912, Teit wrote again to report on his progress at Telegraph Creek. To this point, Teit had been “working on the general Ethnology,” but expected “to start in on the mythology” the following week. Of note was the “puberty ceremonies especially regarding girls” that Teit reported as being “very full, and similar to those in the south (Thompson &c.)” (Teit to Sapir, 27 September 1912). Although he had “hardly touched” the language, he

had collected some sign language, as well as a number of botanical specimens, for which he also obtained names and uses. Finally, Teit recorded fifty-three songs, taking

mere translations of the words in the songs as far as possible to get at the sentiment conveyed, but the actual Indian words I have not taken down as they are garbled a good deal in adapting them to the singing & they would not do in most cases as samples of the language, also they are in many cases not fixed words belonging to the song, but put in at will according to the fancy of the singer. Besides the words of many songs are in Tlingit or other languages not very well pronounced or known in some cases. Little doubt there has been considerable inter borrowing of tunes here in the north, but still most pieces appear to me to be athapascan. [Teit to Sapir, 27 September 1912]

When Teit wrote next he was back at Spences Bridge. In his letter he reported leaving Cassier on 21 October 1912. With him, he brought out "25 to 30 ethnological specimens, . . . mostly small things, bags, tools." Although he did "no work on the language until the last week" of his stay, he did manage to obtain

19 foolscap pages of language covering most of the first two pages of Dr. Goddards notes. I found the language rather hard to transcribe, full of stops & pitches, and containing several sounds I was not accustomed to among the Salish of the south. [Teit to Sapir, 2 November 1912]

In other work, Teit obtained

abt 205 pages on general ethnology thus making our information considerably fuller than what was obtained by Emmons. His information so far as it goes compares very closely with mine. I got 105 pages or more of myths, all the stories are short excepting that of Big Raven. . . . Also I collected 61 songs nearly all of them good & I have about 20 or more pages of matter relative to these. A number of the songs belong to the Bear Lake branch of the Sekanais and appear to differ on the whole in the character of their music from those of the Tahltans. I took a few photographs for types of faces &c. [Teit to Sapir, 2 November 1912]

Teit then proposed discontinuing his work with the survey until early in the new year so that he could finish his work for Boas. As for "continuation of the Athapascan survey," Teit suggested that

it will probably be best for me to go up the Stikine with the opening of navigation early in May, make a trip with the first boat & pack trains going N.E. for fur to the head of the Liard. I would then meet the several bands of Indians of the upper Liard region assembled at Liard post, obtain comparative vocabularies & what was possible in a short stay, overtake the canoes on their return trip up stream. This would bring me back to Telegraph Creek about the 1st July. I could then continue the work on mythology & linguistics there until abt the 1st Aug. When I would leave for east traversing the in great measure unexplored country between the Stikine & Finlay waters on a line South of the Liard River.

I would expect to meet some bands of Indians such as the Nelson River Sekanais &c. & obtain information re. dialects & their distribution &c &c. & would hope to be out at Edmonton some time in Oct. & return home by rail. The following spring I might commence work on Atlin & Teslin districts of BC and continue down the Yukon &c. all summer & fall returning by the last boats to Coast & Vancouver.[Teit to Sapir, 2 November 1912]

Writing in reply, Sapir expressed delight with the work to date, commenting that “we have at last made a real start on the Athabascan tribes of Canada.” As to plans for the next season’s work, Sapir preferred to leave this to Teit as he “would know best when and how to get at the various bands of Indians.” Although Sapir recognized that further work was likely required on the Tahltan, he added, “it is well that you should try to reach as many Athabascan bands as possible in these first few years of field work, so that we may be enabled before very long to map out satisfactorily the general area.” To help in this endeavor, Sapir explained how he had made arrangements with Dr. J. A. Mason to work with the “Athabascan tribes of the Mackenzie Valley.” Finally, with respect to linguistic work, Sapir stated that he was “mainly desirous of having you [Teit] obtain enough lexical and other comparative material to afford a sound basis for classification of tribes and dialects, rather than to make thorough going linguistic studies for their own sake” (Sapir to Teit, 12 November 1912).

Teit replied at length on 4 December 1912, assuring Sapir that he intended to collect further information from the Tahltan, that he was aware of the need to reach as many bands of Athabaskans as possible, and that he intended to collect further lexical material. One problem, though, as Teit explained, “is the huge expanse of territory so thinly inhabited & the big distances between bands.” Further, the lack of “rapid transit & communication & the nomadic character of the inhabitants” made reaching bands a difficult task. With respect to the issue of specimen collection, Teit wrote,

I made no great effort to obtain specimens because I knew from the first the tribe as a whole were against the sale of old things to collectors, and several individuals stated they were sorry they had sold what they did to Liet. Emmons. There appears to be a growing tendency in some tribes in B.C. to preserve what they retain of old stuff, and pass it on to their children. Also to educate their children in old tribal traditions & lore. There is also a revival (probably a reaction from the too rapid adoption of the white man’s methods) of old dances, certain games, music & songs & costumes taking place in certain tribes of both Coast & Interior & this movement seems to be spreading. The tribes of the Interior most affected at present are the Kootney, Lillooet & Tahltan & Shuswap. I broke the ice re. specimens very gradually among the Tahltan, and what I got was offered to me voluntarily the last week or two I was there. Most of the things I got are bags & tools. only a few of them old. A few other old specimens were shown me & I figured them but they would not sell them. I may do better next year & possibly among the Kaskas & Sekanais purchase will be easier. [Teit to Sapir, 4 December 1912]

On 21 December 1912, Sapir wrote Teit regarding a number of matters, including Teit's proposed work with Boas, his plans for the forthcoming summer's fieldwork, and the nature of his ethnological inquiries. Teit replied on 29 December 1912. With respect to Sapir's concern regarding his ethnological inquiries, Teit attached a numbered list of "Test Ethnological Questions" that he had used in his work among the Salish tribes (reproduced here as figures 1 and 2).

DEPARTMENT OF MINES
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OTTAWA.

Test Ethnological Questions used among Salish Tribes

** of U.S.A. etc.*

(in Eth. survey of Tribes in Washington, Idaho, Montana etc.)

- Teit*
- 1 { Vocabulary of 600 to 800 words
Some inquiry re. pronouns & demonstratives (to find if any gender in them.)
 - 2 { Distribution of Tribes, Languages & dialects with boundaries & head-quarters of each. & preparing of maps showing same approximately.
Names of Tribes.
Migration traditions, former shifting & movements of Tribes, Flood traditions which on the Coast are ^{the} conflated with migrations, origin & traditions
Tribes with which had wars & results of same.
 - 3 { Types of basketry, woven & bark. Nature of ornamentation.
Shapes of baskets, ancient and modern. Materials used in basket-making, and in ornamentation. (chiefly to ascertain the distribution of coiled & bark basketry; the distribution and eastern boundary of imbrication, and the boundary line between the so called Klickitat, and Grass River shapes.)
 - 4 { kinds of woven blankets. (chiefly to find out the distribution of goat & rabbit- blankets)
 - 5 { Types of bags - chiefly woven bags, with materials used in manufacture & ornamentation. (Particularly to ascertain the distribution of the so called Nez Percé wallet.)
 - 6 { Women's caps - principally woven caps & materials used in manufacture & ornamentation (to learn distribution of so called Nez Percé Grass cap.)

Figure 1. First page of Teit's list of ethnological questions used in his Salish work (Teit to Sapir, 29 December 1912) (with permission from the Canadian Museum of Civilisation).

- Continued*
- DEPARTMENT OF MINES
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
R. W. BROOK, DIRECTOR.
7. { vessels used for boiling in
 8. { Types of bows (to learn distribution of flatbow & other types)
 9. { Types of war clubs
 10. { Types of Canoes (particularly re. distribution of bark & dug out types)
 11. { Types of houses & lodges (summer & winter) (chiefly to learn distribution of the
Kekule-houses & Conical & long lodges) Dance & feast lodges & young people
lodges. Women's lodges. Hunting & fishing lodges, Bark & mat & skin lodges,
sweat-houses, forts &c
 12. { Types of Carriers or Cradles (to find distribution of board & bark types &c)
 13. { Travel pouches (to learn distribution)
 14. { Head flattening (to learn distribution)
 15. { Methods of burial
 16. { Types of mats (to find boundaries of Coast & Interior types)
 17. { Men's worn bark clothing (to learn distribution)
 18. { Woman's kilt or bodice (do)
 19. { Types of moccasins (chiefly to find out distribution of two & three kinds)
 20. { Quill work (to ascertain distribution)
 21. { Types of Fish spear heads
 22. { Introduction of the horse
 23. { Distribution of game animals (Buffalo, Antelope, goat, elk &c &c)

Continued

I was able to ~~make~~ cover a bigger field among the Salish proper, & among the Cœur d'Alene & Okanagon to gather ~~about~~ as much as Spindler did on the Nez Percé. but a good deal more could be gathered on these tribes if I expected to do this later. among the Yakima I read several inquiries re basketry Decm. 1912.

Figure 2. Second page of Teit's list of ethnological questions used in his Salish work (Teit to Sapir, 29 December 1912) (with permission from the Canadian Museum of Civilisation).

Most of these twenty-three questions concern aspects of material culture, e.g., No. 3 "Types of Basketry," No. 4 "Kinds of woven blankets," No. 10 "Types of canoes," etc. Writing in mid-January with reference to these questions, Sapir concluded that they are "on the whole, as capable of doing good service for an Athabascan survey, particularly on the side of material culture." Questions 1, 2, 3, and 14, Sapir suggested, "are of little or no interest for Athabascan research."⁸

Apart from these inquiries, however, Sapir suggested that "it would be highly advisable to get data also on various points of non-material culture." Sapir proceeded, then, to suggest various lines of inquiry under social organization, religious ideas, and more specifically, shamanism—the idea being to reveal pertinent information about "mental culture." Writing more particularly, then, in reference to Tahltan social organization, Sapir outlined a range of questions concerned with Tahltan ideas about locality, clanship, clan taboos, lines of descent, marriage, and inheritance rights. As Sapir concluded,

You will see from this rather long list of queries that I am particularly eager to have all the fundamental facts of Tahltan social organization laid bare, and, where possible, with plenty of evidence gathered from as many sources as possible. The very fact that the Tahltan evidently represent the case of an interior tribe which has become profoundly influenced in its social form by the Tlingit of the coast, makes it particularly necessary to understand exactly what aspects of the social organization are emphasized by the natives themselves. In other words, it is important to determine from internal evidence which features are primary and which secondary. For instance, the phratry may seem to be the most fundamental social unit, yet the clan or local group may turn out to be, after all, the more conservative Athabaskan unit proper. I am particularly eager to obtain clear evidence in regard to the point that you raise as to the clans being entirely non-totemic in character and yet distinctly exogamous and matrilineal.

Finally, Sapir expressed the hope that the "first installment" of a manuscript relating to the Tahltan might be forthcoming before the next field trip (Sapir to Teit, 16 January 1913).

In his reply, Teit wrote appreciatively about the suggested lines of inquiry offered by Sapir.

The subjects for further enquiry bring points to my mind which I quite see the importance of but many of them I would never have thought of had you not suggested them. This is why it would be good if I had time to arrange & write out my Tahltan material, and send to you before I went north. We could then discuss it, and you could make suggestions for further points to be enquired about and in this way the information could be made very complete. [Teit to Sapir, 21 January 1913]

Despite this careful planning, Teit was not able to head north during the summer of 1913. In fact, it was not until the summer of 1915 that Teit was able to continue his work on the Athabaskan survey. His late departure in July of that year meant that the opportunity of meeting aboriginal people at Liard post was lost. Consequently, Teit settled down and conducted his inquiries among the Kaska of McDames Creek, between Dease Lake and the Liard River immediately east of the Tahltan (Teit to Sapir "Summary Report," 22 November 1915).⁹

4. Settling in among the Kaska of McDames Creek: the 1915 field season.

Writing from Telegraph Creek in early September 1915, Teit noted that he had just returned from a trip among the Kaska. Here he had taken down "a vocabulary, collected a number of specimens, got over 60 pictures and about 50 songs." Further, he had "collected some general information on various points and wrote down all the stories [he] could get." Additionally, he "got as much information as [he] could regarding the names of neighboring tribes, and their boundaries and relationship of their dialects but the information re. the more distant tribes is rather vague." Although Teit realized that he needed to "penetrate further afield to the E & N," the timing of his visit proved to be a problem, as "the Indians had already scattered and left." As a result, he returned to Telegraph Creek with plans to resume his work among the Tahltan and in the hope of "Kaskas & Bear Lake Inds coming in here" (Teit to Sapir, 7 September 1915).

Although "a number of Bear Lake Inds." did eventually arrive, Teit viewed them as "all young men not particularly well posted and being intruders and living in the Kaska country." It was part of what Teit saw as a more general displacement of Indians resulting from a search by the North West Mounted Police for "some Indians of a certain tribe" with the consequence of "a general movement of bands . . . somewhat similar to the movements of tribes after the Custer defeat on the Plains but on a much smaller scale" (Teit to Sapir, 7 September 1915).

As to the stories collected among the Kaska, Teit noted that these appeared "to be more thoroughly athapascan than those of the Tahltan and are but little influenced by the Tlingit as far as I can judge." Further, "they also appear to have a slightly closer relationship to the Plateau & Cree stories than the Tahltan stories do" (Teit to Sapir, 7 September 1915).

Just prior to his departure, Teit wrote that although most of the Indian families had left for their trapping grounds, a few women remaining behind temporarily provided an opportunity to make "enquiries among them re. medicine &c." Teit also explained how he had bought "a good many specimens . . . about 150 pieces composed chiefly of tools, bags, utensils, clothing & ornaments." Additionally, he had "left a list with Dandy Jim my chief informant of the kinds of things I will buy next year" (Teit to Sapir, 13 October 1915).

In his report to the Division sent to Sapir on 22 November 1915, Teit outlined his progress during the 1915 season. Although he had hoped to "meet with the Indians who gather at Liard post," the timing of his visit meant they had already scattered. Consequently, Teit decided to "settle down to do work among the Kaska a branch of the Nahani living immediately east of the Tahltan." As a result, Teit was able to make "considerably clearer the distribution (number and position) of the various divisions of the Nahani . . . occupying the country between the Stikine and Mackenzie."

Although Teit wrote about his plans for continued ethnological work the following summer in expectation of being "entirely in Yukon breaking altogether

new ground" (Teit to Sapir, 13 October 1915), it was also clear that he was working at "writing out" the information collected to date. This began with the Tahltan and Kaska tales in the period immediately following the 1915 season, to eventually include his efforts at "writing up the Tahltan and Kaska as a whole in the same way as I treated the Thompson Indians" (Teit to Sapir, 20 March 1916). In the end, Teit never did return to northern British Columbia.

Teit was able to bring two impressive collections of tales to publication (1917a, 1919, 1921a, 1921b). Work on a much hoped-for monograph on the Tahltan, however, remained simply in progress. Eventually, Sapir negotiated a contract with Teit aimed at having him prepare a manuscript based on the Tahltan and Kaska materials that the Division would purchase in four parts (Sapir to Teit, 16 September 1919).¹⁰ Despite agreeing to this arrangement, other commitments continued to occupy Teit's time so that there was little progress on the manuscript. By the spring of 1921, Teit learned that he was gravely ill and expected to live for only another two or three months. In the end, all he could do was to ship his notes pertaining to the Tahltan and Kaska to the Division.¹¹

5. A broader context for understanding the survey. The correspondence between Sapir and Teit clearly revealed a well formulated plan with careful attention to its implementation. It also contained references to a broader set of circumstances that were taking shape well before the Survey and continued throughout the period of Sapir and Teit's association. One such circumstance, acknowledged by both men, involved Teit's continuing ethnological inquiries among southern interior Salish peoples. Apart from further field investigations, though, this also involved a continuing program of publishing (Teit 1912a, 1912b, 1913, 1914, 1916, 1917b, 1917c, 1917d, 1917e, 1917f, 1918, 1921c). At the same time, it required work for Boas as well as others. With Teit under a yearly contract with the Division, Sapir saw these arrangements as undermining the Division's own research program. When matters finally come to a head in early 1917, Teit responded:

For the reasons you state I would certainly refuse to engage in further work for outsiders (viz for Dr. Boas and Mr. Sargent¹²) except I was asked to do it by yourself as part of my regular work. . . . They thus understand that if I make the trip I will simply collect the additional information they want and turn it in without writing it out in connected form etc. I think that during the balance of the year I will without fail be able to complete the Tahltan paper for you and also do other work for you of several kinds. [Teit to Sapir, 20 March 1917]

The correspondence also revealed the unique role played by Boas in Teit's work. Thus, in responding to concerns raised by Sapir about his presentation of the Tahltan myths, Teit noted that "Dr. Boas has always put my M.S. in shape

for the printer in all the work I have done for him. Perhaps I could have done a good deal of this myself and saved him [the] trouble but it seems he preferred it this way" (Teit to Sapir, 27 February 1917).

Another circumstance related to aboriginal participation in Teit's research program. Here, one found two competing positions, one voiced by Natives "averse to having their measurements taken, and also averse to my taking their pictures" believing that "their bodies or souls or both may be injuriously affected." Alternatively, "others are suspicious the gov. or the whites have some ulterior motive" or "will laugh at them." For Teit,

If the Indian land (and game & fish) question was once settled in this country fairly for the Indians it would help to make anthropological work among the Indians of almost all part [*sic*] of B.C. much easier. At present some of them look upon the gov. as rather an enemy than a friend, and that the underlying motive of the gov. and leading whites and missionaries is to undermine and weaken the Indian tribes, destroy them underhandedly and take all their lands and possessions as they already have done to a great extent. For this reason some of them do not care to help out gov. work to any extent excepting in some cases where they have a good money reward. Even then some will not consent. [Teit to Sapir, 27 March 1917]

In this regard, perhaps the most important circumstance for Teit outside the Survey was his ongoing commitment to a loose association of interior tribes. As early as 1903, the interior tribes began to organize in response to the increased pressure from Euro-Canadian settlement and restrictions imposed on their hunting and fishing activities. In 1906, they were joined by the coastal Cowichan in sending a delegation of three chiefs to England. By 1909, the Interior tribes were asking Teit both to attend their meetings and to help them with their writing; he became the secretary and treasurer of their loose association. At the same time, a parallel organization known as the Indian Rights Association was created representing some twenty coastal tribes. With the alliance of the interior tribes, the Nishga, and certain coastal tribes, Teit served as secretary for the executive committee of this new organization, referred to as the "Allied Indian Tribes," and he was eventually appointed as their "special agent." As Teit explained, "I am not depending on this work for a living but am neglecting anthropological work which I could be doing. I am doing this to meet the desire of the chiefs that I help them in trying to bring about a fair settlement of this long outstanding trouble" (Teit to Sapir, 18 December 1913; also, Teit 1920).

The correspondence with Sapir made frequent reference to these commitments. Typically, annual meetings of the interior tribes took place at Teit's home in Spences Bridge. In fact, Teit's first field season of 1912 was delayed because of a "Big Indian meeting" (Teit to Sapir, 2 August 1912). Further, Teit was often asked to participate in delegations being sent to Ottawa—a representation that seemed to increase as the Allied tribes became more active in pressing their case.¹³ Even before Teit began his work with Sapir, the Tahltan

had already started to participate in this rights movement through the publication of a declaration asserting

that we have heard of the Indian Rights movement among the Indian tribes of the Coast, and of the southern interior of B.C. Also we have read the Declaration made by the chiefs of the southern interior tribes at Spences Bridge of the 16th July last, and we hereby declare our complete agreement with the demands of the same. . . . We claim the sovereign right to all the country of our tribe—this country of ours which we have held intact from the encroachments of other tribes, from time immemorial, at the cost of our own blood. We have done this because our lives depended on our country. To lose it meant we would lose our means of living, and therefore our lives. . . . We deny the B.C. government has any title or right of ownership in our country. We have never treated with them, nor given them any such title.

With respect to their proposed course of action,

We desire that all questions regarding our lands, hunting, fishing, etc., and every matter concerning our welfare, be settled by treaty between us and the Dominion and B.C. government.

Signed at Telegraph Creek, B.C., this eighteenth day of October, Nineteen hundred and ten. [Adlam 1985:204]

Indeed, as R. M. Galois concludes, “these declarations seem to have provided the impetus for the emergence of the Interior Tribes as a rather loose coalition” (1992:13). Along related though separate lines, Teit represented the Tahltan and Kaska in the period 1909–10 in opposing efforts by the British Columbia government to introduce a registered trapline system (Honigman 1949:48, 153). Although the Tahltan and Kaska initiative was unsuccessful, it speaks to Teit’s engagement with both groups well in advance of the Survey. Finally, we might note Teit’s continuing efforts to push Sapir into a more activist role on behalf of aboriginal peoples. Thus, writing with reference to the potlatch,

I think it would be well if you took up the matter of the potlatch. I will write my piece about it any time. I do not think being gov. employee will matter. We are not mixing in politics or taking sides openly with any political party. The potlatch as [to] whether it should be or should not be is altogether a non-political question. [Teit to Sapir, 5 January 1914]

Finally, we might take note of Teit’s personal circumstances. Throughout his life he made a living through a variety of frontier occupations—packing and freighting, serving as a guide as well as a big-game outfitter, and eventually ranching. Certainly in his role as guide and outfitter, he employed many aboriginal workers who ultimately provided him with information necessary for his later work (D. Cole 1999:199).

6. Taking stock of the northern Athabaskan survey. Sapir had three principle goals for the survey: a systematic mapping of the Athabaskan tribes of

Canada in an effort to delineate their exact tribal boundaries in British Columbia and Yukon; assemblage of a representative collection of materials from each group; and, finally, the selection of certain groups for “complete ethnological study” (Sapir to Teit, 14 November 1911).

From the perspective of an institutional anthropologist, these goals were certainly reasonable, if not necessary, starting points. Implementing this strategy in the field, though, was more problematic. As Teit noted, “the huge expanse of territory so thinly inhabited & the big distances between bands” along with the lack of “rapid transit & communication & the nomadic character of the inhabitants” meant that “it will take considerable time & a good deal of expense to cover the ground especially west of the Rockies” (Teit to Sapir, 4 December 1912). Thus, as Teit discovered first hand during the 1915 field season, “I would have gone on the Liard this season but on the Dease met the boats just returning from there and they told me all the Indians had already scattered and left” (Teit to Sapir, 7 September 1915). From the perspective of the field, then, it was very much a matter of timing, if not outright luck.

One of the more interesting dimensions of their association arose around the focus of the research program—specifically, the questions to be posed. Here the questions that formed the basis of Teit’s Salish work came under close scrutiny. These were well-suited to the task of identifying and assembling representative collections of materials for museums. Sapir, however, preferred an emphasis on the nonmaterial or “mental” aspects of culture, including areas under social organization and belief (especially shamanism). With the Athabaskan groups, his specific intent was to determine the nature and extent of influence of coastal cultures—in this case, the Tlingit—on interior cultures such as the Tahltan, and particularly as this related to social organization. In short, Sapir asked what the significant social units were based on the internal evidence available from the Tahltan. Here, Sapir seemed to be reacting to the assertion that the social organization of interior groups was simply being borrowed from their coastal neighbors. The question was a comparative one aimed at determining how such influences are worked out on the ground—in this case, around Teit’s description of the Tahltan clan (Sapir to Teit, 16 January 1913).

On the face of it, from a field perspective, identifying social units such as clans, determining membership, and even mapping localities, if these applied, was relatively straightforward. More complicated, though, was sorting out relations between family lines, questions of marriage, rules of inheritance, questions of rank, the ritual role of clans, and perhaps their relationship to other units such as phratries—all matters of specific interest to Sapir. Although Teit “quite [saw] the importance of” these questions, he admitted that they would never have occurred to him (Teit to Sapir, 21 January 1913). More important was how Teit would integrate these lines of inquiry into his field investigations and eventually their answers into a monograph.

Related to this issue was the fact that Teit was collecting information against a backdrop of previous note-taking and ethnographic writing. Dawson (1888), Morice (1903, 1906–10, 1911), and, in particular, Emmons (1911, 1912) were contributors to this backdrop, as were the accounts of missionaries (Palgrave [n.d.], Thorman [1912]), explorers (Black [1955], McLeod [1834], Campbell [1871]), and prospectors and miners (Pike [1896]). All offered a commentary on aboriginal life of the day. Not only were some of these sources acknowledged by Teit, but they often served as a counterpoint to his own field investigations (Teit to Sapir, 6 September 1912). Additionally, published work on the Tsimshian and Tlingit provided Teit with important comparative material (Teit to Sapir, 12 September 1917).

Thus, in a context of disappearing aboriginal ways of life and emerging Native political awareness and assertiveness, the survey did achieve some measure of success. For Sapir, an institutional setting with its inherent policies and procedures—coupled, perhaps, with the need to show steady progress around the institution's mission of collecting and preserving—represented a constraint that stood in the way of any activist role. Here the institution seemed better served by the type of "text tradition" practiced by Boas, detached from contemporary entanglements. From the perspective of the field, though, Teit was profoundly aware of the changes taking place around him—perhaps even a purposeful contributor—and his willingness to assist his aboriginal interlocutors in their struggles to remedy their situation attested to an engagement well beyond the strict dictates of the Boasian text tradition. In his engagement as an advocate, Teit anticipated the stance of future researchers by a good half-century.

7. Conclusion. The Boasian ethnographic project, as Stocking suggests, was one of traditional humanistic scholarship: "to create for a preliterate people with no historical records a body of primary materials analogous to those by which European scholars studied the earlier phases of their own cultural history" (1992:62). That such a project should draw on informant memory of how life had been expressed in their own words often as dictated texts, and serve as an enduring legacy of documents "long after their 'authors' had died out or become completely acculturated," became the hallmark of the Boasian tradition (Stocking 1992:86).

Although his students shared the underlying assumptions of Boasian ethnography, their efforts, according to Stocking, would see a working out over time of various implications in Boas's own position (Stocking 1974:17). These developments, as well, would take place within an emerging institutional setting of academic departments. In this context, Edward Sapir would become associated with "a movement to reduce the fifty-five American Indian language stocks of the Powell 1891 classification by establishing genetic connections among them—which in Sapir's own case eventually led to the hypothesis of six 'superstocks'" (Stocking 1992:152; see also Darnell 1971).

For a field anthropologist like James Teit, though, these developments would have little impact. One reason for this was Teit's close association with the aboriginal people who helped him create these texts; another was his increasing role in the organizations pressing for recognition of aboriginal rights to land, fishing, and hunting,¹⁴ and, finally, his sudden death in 1922.

Notes

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1. The "text" was a direct transcription in the field by anthropologists of stories and other information about the culture as told by elders. These elders were paid, usually by the day, and the anthropologists, frequently working through a language interpreter, would take direct dictation. The objective was to find in orally transmitted material an understanding of history and psychology in local terms (Darnell 1992:42; S. Cole 1995:7).

2. Teit was born in Lerwick, Shetland Islands, Scotland in 1864, the eldest of twelve children. He attended school until 1880, when, at the age of sixteen, he started work in the family-owned general store in Lerwick, followed by a year as a bank clerk. At about this time, an uncle, John Murray, Teit's mother's brother, wrote the family inquiring if one of the boys would come to Spences Bridge in British Columbia to work in his general store. Taking his uncle up on the offer, James Teit arrived in Spences Bridge in March 1884.

3. As Douglas Cole notes, "within three years of his arrival he [Teit] was living with Lucy Antko, a Thompson woman, whom he officially married in 1892" (1999:199).

4. Sapir was twenty-six years of age at the time he accepted the position of Head of the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada, while Teit was twenty years older.

5. In fact, all that emerged was a chapter (Teit 1906b) and article (1909a) based on material collected during two hunting trips (fall of 1903 and again in 1905), and two collections of myths, for the Kaska (1917a) and the Tahltan (Teit 1919, 1921a, 1921b), respectively. The remaining material was left in note form.

6. The unpublished correspondence between Teit and Sapir quoted in this article is archived at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa (Sapir and Teit 1911–22).

7. In later correspondence to Sapir (13 April 1913), Teit noted that Boas paid the rate of thirty cents per full page (foolscap). It is likely that Teit paid a similar rate.

8. With reference to question 1, Sapir noted that "enquiries in regard to pronouns and demonstratives would not yield data on gender . . . as there is no difference in Athabascan between masculine and feminine." In the instance of question 2, Sapir observed that "flood traditions could hardly be expected to be of consequence." And, in the case of questions 3 and 14, Sapir noted that "imbrication in basketry would naturally not concern you much" and "head-flattening is probably of no consequence" (Sapir to Teit, 16 January 1913).

9. Teit's second season of work on the northern Athabaskans extended from his arrival on 19 July to about 13 October 1915.

10. The four sections are "Introduction and Material Culture"; "Social Organization and Customs relating to Birth, Puberty, Marriage, and Death"; "Religion"; and "Appendix on Kaska Indians."

11. These were subsequently published under the editorship of June Helm McNeish (Teit 1956).

12. Homer E. Sargent, Chicago-based businessman and sportsman later of Pasadena, California, financed Teit's investigation of the distribution of the Salishan tribes from 1900 to 1910. The two had met when Teit had served as a guide for Sargent during a hunting trip.

13. Teit's son Sigurd explains that "at this time very few, if any of the older Indians could write, or even speak the English language properly. Being friendly with the Indians he had often helped them, writing letters, attending or explaining to them about their legal affairs etc. It was only natural for them to come to him for help in this larger matter" (Sigurd Teit p.c. 1992).

14. Before our meeting in April 1992, Teit's son Sigurd noted, "While Teit may have been the only Anthropologist politically active for the Indians at that time, most of his Anthropological friends were in agreement with what he was trying to do" (p.c. 1992).

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