

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE AND HARD TIMES OF AN INDIAN LAND CLAIMS RESEARCHER

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

It is important for historians and researchers to acquire knowledge and understanding of Native culture and history by non-Indians. The role of the university in Indian land claims research could be expanded through increased support of the teaching of Native history and Native Studies: the establishment of an Indian Land Claims Institute; the provision of grants and scholarships to encourage Native people to research and publish; and the communication of Native issues to governments.

Il est important que les historiens et les chercheurs connaissent et comprennent la culture et l'histoire autochtones décrites non par les indigènes. Le rôle de l'université dans les recherches sur les revendications de terres autochtones pourrait se développer à travers un soutien élargi pour l'enseignement de l'histoire et des études indigènes: l'établissement d'un Institut autochtone pour les revendications de terres; la provision de subsides et de bourses d'études pour encourager les autochtones à faire des recherches et des publications; et la présentation des problèmes autochtones au gouvernement.

Fifteen years ago Colonel C.P. Stacey, one of Canada's better known historians, published an article in *The Canadian Historical Review*, entitled, "The Life and Hard Times of an Official Historian" (Stacey, 1970). Stacey elaborated on this theme in his memoirs, *A Date with History*, published in 1983 (Stacey, 1983). In this article Stacey gives a clear view of some of the difficulties he experienced as an official historian, during and after the Second World War. Stacey's tribulations seem to be common experiences of professional historians in Canada who work for government. They reflect my experience as an Indian Land Claims Researcher for the Ontario Government for the past seven years. The work of a public historian, as an Indian Land Claims Researcher, can be frustrating and very difficult. It requires enormous patience and tolerance, but above all it is extremely challenging. It is dynamic and very different from teaching and researching in a university.¹

Although Native issues and Native Studies have a relatively high political stature today, professional historians and anthropologists who work in this subject area have a very low profile (English, 1983, Page, 1984). They are highly individualistic and politically sensitive and vulnerable. Moreover, to their own disadvantage, they are geographically remote from one another and are few in number. This situation may not be true of other Canadian historians or anthropologists. Given these circumstances, it is not startling to find that there are only a few historians in Canadian universities who can significantly contribute to the understanding of current Native issues much less to the highly focused and narrow "micro" research on Indian land claims. Of course, the few individuals who do contribute have a significant impact on research and policy development, by both the Indian Bands and other Indian organizations, and by governments in Canada. Researchers of Native ancestry, or those who work for Native people, do not have exactly the same profile, within the context of the politics of land claims and other Native issues. However, this paper does not address that theme, which deserves separate treatment.

Rather, the primary purpose of this paper is to illustrate the following:

1. the importance of knowing and understanding Native culture and history by non-Indians,
2. research on Native land claims and issues, its strategies and difficulties and their resolution.

Without losing their independence or their mandate or the academic "freedom" of their faculty members, Canadian universities have the potential to become more involved in these areas in order to provide the knowledge, and the persons, in order to help resolve them.

Colonel Stacey (1970) provides some insights into this subject. He uses the following headings in it, which can be applied to work of any public historian:

- Lightning strikes.
- Odd jobs and professional historians.

- Field work and co-operation.
- Recruiting staff and writing narratives.
- Planning and support for the history.
- Writing an honest history.
- The "too brutal bulldozers" - censorship and confidentiality.
- The politics of publication.
- A model of success.

Stacey emphasizes that his "primary task" was "to elicit and state the facts rather than to interpret them" without, however, omitting "commentary altogether" or "specific interpretative passages" (1970:45). This is the primary task and challenge of the public historian. The modern academic historian seems, from a biased and jaundiced perspective, to place more emphasis on analysis and interpretation (McNab, 1985). However, once the facts are known, analysis and interpretation of those facts are extremely important.

Lightning strikes

Keenly interested in Native people in Canada and having taught aspects of Native history since the fall of 1970, I did not become directly involved in Indian land claims until early in 1978 when I attended a local meeting of the Human Rights Association in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. At that time I was teaching Canadian History at the Regional College in Corner Brook for Memorial University of Newfoundland. There, I met representatives of the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and was introduced to their land claim which covers part of the Island of Newfoundland. While doing some volunteer work for the Federation on its claim, which was an offshoot of part of my doctoral dissertation, I gained some understanding, through discussions with the Micmac and their advisors, of the very different perspectives which they have of their history and culture. I also learned that some professional historians, from their particular approach to their discipline, may not be of much assistance to Native people. One must become interdisciplinary to a certain extent to be of assistance. However, the most significant thing, in the area of land claims research, is that Indian Band(s) are not "plugged into" the university and its facilities with its information, expertise and knowledge. Without these, any Indian Band(s) or organization, will have greater difficulty in developing a claim(s) to present to, and that will be acceptable to Government. Governments, on the other hand, can and do draw on these resources.² From this perspective alone, it is not surprising that so few modern land claims have been accepted for resolution by Government, much less 'settled' to the satisfaction of all of the parties involved.

In July, 1978, I successfully applied for positions related to Indian Land Claims Research with the Ontario Government as well as with two Native organizations. After fulfilling my commitments to Memorial University, I joined the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) in January, 1979. Since 1979, I have attempted to keep my academic contacts and have continued

to teach at various Canadian universities (Wilfrid Laurier, Brandon and the University of Waterloo).

Odd Jobs and professional historians

In January 1979, except for one other researcher on contract, I was the Indian Band Claims Researcher for the Ontario Government responsible for, as it turned out, developing a small staff (initially two other researchers), in order to research Indian land claims. Prior to that time, very little historical research had been done by MNR on the broad range and number of land claims or other issues that had been identified as significant.³ In 1979, research was underway on only about five land claims; in 1985 there are about forty land claims as well as other similar issues. With 126 Indian Bands, and almost 200 Indian Reserves in Ontario alone, it is difficult to imagine the precise number of land claims which there may be. This research is a large undertaking, requiring a "team-approach" and it is unsuited to a piecemeal, individualistic approach often used by academic researchers. A small, skilled cohesive professional interdisciplinary research staff had to be developed. Presently the full-time professional research staff is six in number, not including seasonal staff or vacancies. As Colonel Stacey indicated, other than training staff, the biggest challenge is to keep them, and to give them *time* to do their research, by *not* giving them "odd jobs" to do. The research head must try to protect them from routine administrative tasks which can "waste" the time of the researchers.

Field Work and Co-operation

Most professional historians working in universities do not get an opportunity to do field work, such as anthropologists do. This may be changing. Historians' work is often done from books, and other secondary sources, with the major emphasis on archival research and on the written record. More recently they have also begun to use oral sources. In Canadian Native history, oral history is in its nascent stage. Working for government, which is perceived to be and often is antagonistic to Native views and objectives, there is virtually no opportunity to do field work or oral history with Native people. There are only glimpses. However, since Indian land claims most often have their basis in the oral tradition of an Indian Band, research on land claims perforce involves researching oral history. Meetings to discuss each land claim with the Indian Band(s) on Reserves reflect on and, become part of, the oral tradition of the Indian Band(s) with respect to the land claims and the treaty negotiations of which land claims are an integral part. Only in one instance, in 1980, was there a specific initiative taken by the Union of Ontario Indians to do this kind of work and it also involved Federal and Ontario representatives. Indian elders were interviewed about the negotiations that led to the Williams Treaty of 1923. The results of that endeavour are on tape in the offices of the Indian Commission of Ontario. They have not, to my knowledge, been used to assist in the resolution of any Indian land claim in Ontario. On another occasion, staff time was offered

to do field work with Indian elders. However, since there is mistrust and suspicion on both sides of the Indian land claims process, this offer was rejected.

In land claims research, Indian Bands often rely on the written record rather than oral history. Only on a very few occasions when oral history is done, is it shared with government representatives. Perhaps here is a potential mediating role for university-based researchers to assist Indian Bands in prepared oral tradition and history as part of land claims research. Oral history, when it is used in Indian land claims research, is very effective and it complements rather than contradicts the written record.

Recruiting Staff and Writing Narratives

Recruiting and training of staff has to be the most important part of developing research on Indian land claims. This part of the job is time-consuming yet challenging; the results of the research program will depend on the knowledge and the skills of each researcher. It is in this area that universities which teach Native history and anthropology have made a real contribution, primarily through their graduate students, to Indian land claims research in Ontario. Researchers in the Office of Indian Resource Policy in the Ministry of Natural Resources have come from many Ontario universities, most of which teach Native history only as a peripheral area. Thus, there are few qualified graduate students (perhaps only one or two per year) to meet the small but growing demands of this field. Often, students who have no special interest or training in Native matters have to be recruited. This makes the training period much longer and the researchers, having interests in other areas, are less likely to stay on for more than a few years. Here, the universities could do a better job (McNab, 1986). The primary kind of training which is needed in Indian land claims is simply learning to write narratives. The focus of Indian land claims research is on "micro" rather than "macro" subjects. The researcher has few, if any, guideposts, such as good published secondary sources. Much of the work involves collecting primary sources. Very few students, even those with a graduate degree, have been trained to do this kind of work. My impression is graduate students in anthropology, based on their field work, have a broader experience than history students and they do better work. University history departments seem to stress interpretation of historical facts, rather than training their students to discover and write about the facts. Narrative history is seen to be "old fashioned" and has, of course, long taken a "back seat" to analytical interpretative history in academia. Of course, once the historical narratives on Indian land claims are completed, interpretation and analysis are needed in developing policy on land claims.

Project Planning and Support

Any planning and support for a research program on Indian land claims in Government, where the research is done "in-house", must be tailored to the organization and its support systems. Unless the research is "contracted out",

there is very little that universities can do in this area. If the research is "contracted out", (and this has been done by the Federal government with respect to land claims) universities can play a major supporting role. For example, they can provide researchers and facilities for the research. It is an arguable point, but for a government research program to be successful, control over the planning and the implementation of it must remain with Government. It is, after all, paying to meet its specific needs and those of its client groups and it is held accountable for that program. A university "middleman" could unintentionally create an unnecessary additional layer of bureaucracy which could frustrate the planning, the implementation, and the results.

If the research is done "in-house", it is unlikely that universities could make a substantial contribution to the planning and support of the project. Government has certain strategic research needs and it must set its priorities accordingly. Fundamentally, the objectives and the means of the research program are different in government, that is, more pragmatic and oriented to very specific goals. Although, to date, universities have not been directly involved in project planning and support of Indian land claims research in Ontario, as research proceeds and policy is developed, universities should become more involved.

Writing an Honest History

Since the focus of Indian land claims research is on writing historical narratives, the important part of writing an honest history is to ensure that the research is thorough and complete. In selecting the historical facts to be included in the narrative, the selection process must be complete and objective. In writing the narrative, each word and phrase must be weighed carefully to make sure there is no hint of subjectivity in it. An essential part of the Indian land claims process in Ontario is the willingness to share the historical documentation and also, when that is complete, to share the historical narratives that are based on the documentation. To be successful and to overcome the mistrust and suspicion of all of the parties involved in the process, all of the information must be shared and an honest attempt must be made to understand and interpret it. Here the Indian contribution can be very significant.

Universities can also make a real impact on this part of the process by the publication of research through the usual academic channels, such as books and articles. This published research can become part of the documentation process. Sometimes, it may be helpful for academic researchers to provide original contributions to the Indian Bands or government by giving voluntary or professional advice or doing specific tasks. However, there are inherent dangers in providing unpublished information, as it may be misunderstood, or at worst, misused. There is room in the Indian land claims process for academic professionals to provide outside advice (such as through fact-finding or mediation) to the parties directly involved when there is a disagreement on the interpretation of the historical facts. This "umpire" type function may become one of the most significant ways in which universities may have some impact on the land

claims process. It is imperative for the persons who are involved to remain honest and not to become advocates for the views of either party. Ultimately, academic historians and others will judge the merits of the research going into those Indian land claims which are in process now. For that reason alone, to understand this historical process fully, they should become more directly involved in it now.

The "too brutal" bulldozers - censorship and confidentiality

C.P. Stacey wrote about the effect, albeit minor but extremely frustrating, which politicians had on his work after it had been completed and before it was published. He recounted how part of one of his manuscripts was changed by a politician who decided that one of his purple passages on the Allied forces burying some of the German dead with bulldozers, although it was an historical fact and should have been recorded, was just "too brutal" to be in the history (Stacey, 1970:32-33). The various forms of censorship are common to all institutions (including universities) and must be dealt with primarily on an individual basis and on a personal level. University-based researchers can provide other perspectives to help the government researcher point to knowledge and specific information in the public domain which can help to pre-empt attempts at censorship. There is no need to censor something within government that is already in the public domain. Confidentiality is part of the government researcher's responsibility to his or her own political master and it must be respected as part of the democratic process. The academic researcher has different responsibilities in this area unless he or she works for the government or Indian organizations. Even then he or she may encounter similar kinds of restrictions. There is little or nothing the academic researcher can do for the Indian Land Claims Researcher in this area. However, it should be incumbent upon the latter to the best of his or her ability to try to make the Indian land claims process as open as possible.

The Politics of Publication

Colonel Stacey correctly observed that the "hardest times" for an official historian are to get the written research past the politicians and published. Literally, it took *years* before the official history of the Canadian army in the Second World War found its way out of the Minister's office and into publication. To anyone who has worked in government, this is not at all unusual; in fact it is commonplace. Yet, there is nothing at all the public historian can do. This has to be the most aggravating and frustrating part of the job. Colonel Stacey records that he got some help from academia which drew the Minister's attention to his situation, which set events in motion and led to the publication of various volumes of the official history (Stacey, 1970:31).

My research with the Ontario Government began in 1979. None of the research reports on Indian land claims have to date been published, although approval has been given for a research series, usually of article length (20-40

typed pages) research reports. There is a political perception, as Colonel Stacey indicates, that the publication of research is high profile and is a "lightning rod" on any issue when it is published. That has not been my experience. The research reports are more likely to get buried in government files as ephemera or forgotten. Academic researchers have been, and will continue to be supportive of government research and publication efforts. It is difficult to see how university teachers could be of more assistance.⁴

A Model of Success

Despite "hard times", Colonel Stacey "triumphed" over soldiers, bureaucrats and politicians. Apparently, he had much more difficulty with certain university history professors (Stacey, 1985:250-251). During his twenty odd years as "official historian", he was able to compile historical documentation and research, and provide useful historical narratives at the time during which the events were occurring. Later, to his credit, a multi-volume official history of the Canadian army in World War II, which has been praised as a model for future scholarship, was published. It is interesting to note that, while his career began and ended in the university, his major accomplishments were in the public sphere as an official historian. This is not to diminish the lustre of his contributions (after 1960), to our understanding of that political enigma, Mackenzie King, or of Canadian external affairs. The model of success which he developed as a public historian is based on his understanding of the "hard times" which he experienced and overcame. However, while Colonel Stacey was assisted (fortuitously) by the universities in some instances, there is a recognition in his work, particularly his memoirs, that the "official" or public historian lives and works in a very different world, that is, one which is largely in the present rather than in the past. His or her academic counterpart does not share the same objectives or experience the "hard times" or the tangible benefits of being a public historian. From my experience of six years in university and then more than six years in government, nothing can replace the feeling of being actively involved in the historical process. Government institutions are different from universities. They each have their own culture(s) and have different objectives (Stacey, 1983:245-248). They produce different results, yet in the Indian land claims process, should complement, and reinforce one another.

It is difficult to reach any hard and fast conclusions about the role of universities in Indian land claims research. Each Indian Band and land claim is different and has its own history and culture. In order to avoid making "hard times" even harder, an Indian Land Claims Researcher must be aware of and enormously sensitive to these differences. Moreover, it is too easy to overleap oneself and feel that an issue or problem can be readily resolved, particularly at any one time by one person, if at all. Working in the area of "micro" history, the researcher must recognize the larger context of the research and the meaning of it for Native people and governments (Stacey, 1983:267).

There seem to be a number of significant areas where the ties between universities and the participants in Indian land claims could be strengthened:

1. Increased support for teaching in the areas related to Native history and Native Studies, which will provide a larger and higher quality pool of research talent from which to draw upon in the area of Indian land claims and related issues. There is a particularly great need for persons who have successfully completed post-graduate work in Native history and Native Studies in the Ontario context.⁵
2. An Ontario university, which is strong in Native Studies, may wish to establish an Indian Land Claims Research Institute. It would provide expertise in examining oral and written sources and in assisting with the resolution of land claims. Providing more published research will increase the understanding of Native culture and history. It can provide "independent experts" in certain areas to act, as required, as fact-finders, mediators, or negotiators.
3. Universities can encourage, through grants and scholarships, Native people and their organizations to develop areas of interest of primary concern to Native people and to government, to do research and to publish on these matters. One recent example is the support of the University of Windsor for the environmental research which is currently being done by the Walpole Island Indian Band.⁶ Native people and government should develop a better general understanding of one another and their cultures and their histories.
4. In contrast to other areas in Canada, Ontario has made little progress on some important research matters such as the history of Indian lands since the middle of the eighteenth century, the history of Indian Treaties, and the fulfillment of the Treaty promises by Government. The twin themes of Native collaboration and resistance in Ontario have received scant attention.
5. By establishing strategic areas of concern, universities could indicate to governments that issues facing Native people today are of greater significance than that which is usually attributed to them by government. However, it could also be argued that, as universities are even less concerned than governments about Native issues, this is an unrealistic and vain hope.
6. There should be an increase in communication and a sharing of research and research staff among universities, Native organizations and governments through conferences, faculty-government research, exchanger, and secondments in order to help each understand their differences. "Independent"- and government-sponsored research projects could be developed.

Above are just some ideas. For its part, government(s) could contribute

staff and money to universities. At this time, the needs of both government and universities on Native matters are great; the resources are few. While respecting fundamental differences, much can and should be done to strengthen the ties between them.

NOTES

The opinions expressed in this article are entirely those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources or the Government of Ontario.

1. David T. McNab, "Putting out Fires and Other Things", Paper presented at a workshop on the teaching of Native History in Canada, Canadian Historical Association, Annual Meeting, June 1983, Native History Study Group, Newsletter Three, Winter 1985.
2. I taught courses in Canadian Native history and attempted to build up the Native history collection in the Regional College's library.
3. The University of Waterloo, for example, is the only university that has a graduate M.A. program in public history. The author of this paper has taught an M.A. course in "Applied Social History" in that program.
4. One example is the Office of Indian Resource Policy's Editorial Advisory Board with respect to the office's proposed Historical Research Report Series.
5. Trent University received approval to establish a Master of Arts Program in Native Studies in September, 1986.
6. See the paper by M.J. Hedley, "Community Based Research: The Dilemma of Contract," elsewhere in this issue.

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