

# Labrador Life

Vol. 11 No. 4

Fall 2017

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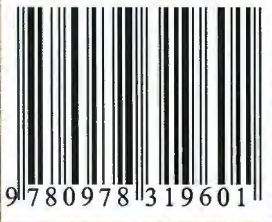
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Hopedale, from left to right: store (today's museum) mission house and church. (Hans Rollmann photo)

## Archival repatriation

Without access to Moravian written materials outside of Nunatsiavut a vital part of Labrador Inuit intellectual culture remains dormant

story by Mark Turner

There is a long-standing joke about Moravian missionaries' tendency to document their experiences in northern Labrador. Every time they got up to move from one room to another, they wrote it down. It is a joke that only borders on exaggeration. Anyone that has visited the library at the Moravian Mission Complex in Hopedale understands exactly where the border is. In a sunny, vaulted attic no larger than a liv-

ing room, thousands of documents are neatly packed into shelves that allow for a narrow, circular path through the library. So numerous are these documents that any given shelf may serve as home for up to four separate rows of materials. The volume of books, hymnals, dictionaries and magazines – to name a few types of materials – can allow a person to become lost in such a tiny space.

Together, these materials constitute one of the last, far-reaching chronicles of

the north coast that exists in the region. After the forced resettlement of Hebron in 1959, thousands of documents were removed from a number of Moravian communities to be arranged in St. John's, microfilmed in Ottawa, and ultimately housed in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. And after the catastrophic fire in Nain in 2004, materials not lost were relocated to secure archival facilities at the *Them Days Archives* in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The Hopedale collection endures, but there are other factors that restrict its use by Nunatsiavummiut.

First, there is the issue of language. The Moravian record provides evidence of a written culture historically dominated by Inuktitut and German. As settlers established themselves along the coast, English began to make inroads into this written culture.

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Sketch of Hopedale around 1800.

But it was not until the twentieth century that English began to dominate forms of church administrative writing, or, in the case of Inuktitut dictionaries, serve as the language for translation. There is also the issue of the materials themselves. We take it for granted that text – hard copy text – is easy to circulate. The recent history of publishing in Labrador suggests otherwise. In the age of electronic connectivity, there are new barriers to reading hard copy. For the Hopedale chronicle, the very things that defined these materials are now barriers.

Without access to these materials, a vital part of Labrador Inuit intellectual culture remains dormant. These are not simply the surviving records of a European presence describing their interactions with Labrador Inuit. Rather, they are the product of two cultures in sustained dialogue with each other. Authorship may be, for example, attributed to a missionary such as George Harp, but the dictionaries of Inuktitut he prepared, the first-aid and infant care manuals he compiled and even the collection of hymns he edited are derived

from a body of knowledge that is a product of centuries of exchange between Labrador Inuit and Moravian missionaries. When books and journals ceased being written and printed on the north coast, they also ceased being read. And when this line of transmission was interrupted, so too was a way of communicating and understanding life on the north coast.

Some of us working with the *Tradition & Transition Among the Labrador Inuit* Research Partnership between the Memorial University and the Nunatsiavut Government have been exploring ways to inject new life into this intellectual culture. Our goal has not been to return to the way things were, but to create a new home for this culture with the modern tools at our disposal. This year, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's "Knowledge Synthesis" program, we have taken the first steps towards creating such a home through a project called "Unlocking the Chronicle of an Inuit Community: Hopedale, Nunatsiavut". The goal: to

create a path towards repatriating Nunatsiavut's archives, beginning in Hopedale. The idea: that by digitizing and making these materials accessible through electronic means, we can give new life to a traditional way of communicating and understanding life on the north coast. The challenge: where and how to begin.

Fortunately, Memorial's Queen Elizabeth II Library was well positioned to assist. Some years ago, the library's Digital Archives Initiative began digitizing a journal well represented within the Hopedale library known by its short title, *Periodical Accounts*. Published between 1790 and 1961, the journal was the first widely disseminated English-language publication prepared by a branch of the British Moravian Church, called the Brethren's Society for the Furtherance of for Gospel Among the Heathen. Providing reports from Moravian missions around the world, content for the *Periodical Accounts* was often adapted from correspondence, reports and diaries generated by missionaries. Arranged by province and community, the *Periodical Accounts* provide fascinating portraits of life in Moravian communities and those on the north coast in particular.

In an early edition from 1823, for instance, the missionary Benjamin Gottlieb Kohlmeister provides a detailed account of the introduction of European musical traditions to the north coast. From his correspondence we know that in Nain by 1821 Inuit were performing with violins, French horns, and singing hymns in multiple parts. Another edition, from 1903, describes the opening of the church at Uviluktôk and Chapel Servant Manasseh Pijogge's leadership in the construction and role as master of ceremonies in its opening. That account includes pictures of the *Sybil*, the boat that transported the missionaries from Hopedale to Uviluktôk for the opening and even a picture of the interior of the church itself. And in a 1905 edition, a description of the first journal published on the north coast in Inuktitut: *Aglaint illunainortut*. Written in English and directed towards a general readership,



the *Periodical Accounts* is one of the longest running and most easily accessible chronicles concerning Labrador Inuit after European contact.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the *Periodical Accounts* is the *Nachrichten aus der Brüder-Gemeine*, which translates into *News From the Brotherhood*. Also represented within the Hopedale library and the Queen Elizabeth II Library collections, this German language publication that ran from 1819 to 1894 was intended for a missionary readership. Other institutions have digitized parts of this journal, but a major stumbling block to making those digital copies accessible has been the script in which the *Nachrichten* is set. Unlike many of the scripts we use today, specialized software is required for computers to recognize Fraktur, a script used in German reading countries until 1941. Without this electronic recognition, anyone looking to use free software, such as Google Translate, would have to become familiar enough with both script and language to transcribe entire passages from the journal. Here, the rewards are well worth the effort. In addition to the general accounting of mission operations, the *Nachrichten* contain detailed demographic data for each of the Moravian communities on the north coast.

Two journals, both vital to the Hopedale library and to the chronicle of the north coast, made inaccessible by format and language. The first step to developing access was a straightforward one: digitizing and storing these materials in an accessible database. Both journals are now available online by way of Memorial's Digital Archives Initiative. And as of this November, they will be available at three locations within Hopedale: the Nunatsiavut Assembly Building, Amos Comenius Memorial School and the museum in the Hopedale Mission Complex. Local access is essential, and feedback from that local access is critical to a second step that is proving more and more complex.

In addition to taking on the task of digitizing these two journals, the Queen

Elizabeth II Library has also helped us to describe the contents of the *Periodical Accounts*. This is not description in a casual sense. Its librarians have combed the Labrador entries, making detailed lists of names and places, noting spelling variations in both, and even recording the pages upon which they appear. That data, in turn, has been compiled into expansive spreadsheets that will allow people to search the *Periodical Accounts* with even greater ease. If, for instance, we wanted to learn more about Manasseh Pijogge, we would find two additional references to him in the *Periodical Accounts*, one regarding his work at Uviluktôk and another regarding a speech he delivered and transcribed by Dr. Wilfred Grenfell.

In one way, this ability to search is unremarkable. And for anyone looking at either the *Periodical Accounts* or *Nachrichten* on the Digital Archives Initiative, this ability might be taken for granted. But it does not take much imagination to see the significance of this kind of searching once it is thought of in relation to the rest of the Moravian record. The *Nachrichten* may be in German, but the spelling of names and places is often consistent with current Inuktitut and English usage, making both easily recognizable. By recording what names and places appear on what pages, we can make navigating a German language publication manageable for non-German language speakers. The issue of translation remains, but the scope of what needs to be translated narrows. A simple database of names and places draws upon living knowledge that cuts through the barriers of language and format and provides a centre from which to build a new tradition of knowledge creation.

Such a database also stands to expand this tradition of knowledge creation to include other materials produced on and about the north coast. From the beginnings of still and moving imagery, cameras were trained on Labrador Inuit at home and abroad. Thousands of these images have been or are about to be digitized. And many of those have been rea-

sonably well described and are ready for repatriation. There are the records of the Hudson's Bay Company, which not only span tens of thousands of pages of administrative text concerning communities from Rigolet to Killinek, but also include still imagery and stories from their publication, *The Beaver*. There is also the output of the OKâlaKatiget Society, which since the reconstruction of its collection has amassed thousands of hours of audio and video.

It is here in the recent past that we see the next logical steps. Published by the Labrador Inuit Association from 1972 to 1985 and then by the OKâlaKatiget Society until the early 2000s, *kinatuinamot illengajuk* is a vital resource with which we can expand this tradition. Presented simultaneously in English and Inuktitut, *kinatuinamot illengajuk* is uncommon in that its entire contents exist in embedded translation, making it also an important resource for Inuktitut literacy. With assistance from *Tradition & Transition*, OKâlaKatiget Society staff are digitizing *kinatuinamot illengajuk*. Once that process is complete, the data it contains will expand the database significantly. In these three publications, over two hundred years of the north coast's history is represented, spanning European contact, Canadian Confederation and the establishment of self government.

The benefits of description are clear. The question that remains is one regarding access. We are eager to see the results of providing local access to these materials in Hopedale, but it is clear that there is larger, regional significance to these materials. Yet, it is also clear that simply dumping digitized materials into a central, online location is not the solution either. Hard copy print was central to the vitality of this intellectual culture. Google is not a replacement for this. As we continue the work of repatriating Nunatsiavut's archives, an answer to the question of access is slowly revealing itself. Like the missionaries recording their passage from room to room, it will take some time to see meaning in these movements. †