

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEOTHUK- SETTLER RELATIONS

The **Beothuk** are Indigenous to Newfoundland and have been presumed by colonial culture to be extinct since 1829. Their "extinction" has been challenged by Mi'kmaq oral histories, and, more recently, by genetic research.

1500s

Europeans engage in **mass fishing** without Beothuk consent

Beothuk sometimes take goods from temporary European fishing settlements, and gain a reputation as "**thieves**"

1700s

Permanent European settlements expand on **stolen Beothuk territory**, pushing them inland, and disrupting their food sources

White settlers regularly commit atrocities against the Beothuk, including **murder**

The government thinks this **reflects badly** on the settlers, who claim to be more civilized than Indigenous people, so they devise a **plan**

1819-1820

Demasduit, a Beothuk woman, is captured by the white fisher **John Peyton** and his men. In the process, they murder her husband, **Nonosbawsut**, and leave their baby to die

Demasduit dies of **Tuberculosis** while still in captivity

Her remains, along with Nonosbawsut's, are laid to rest in their **former home**, which is, by this time, **abandoned** by the Beothuk community

1825

Shanawdithit is removed from Peyton's house, without consent, by the explorer and amateur ethnographer **William Cormack**

He brings her to the **Boeothick Institute**, which he founded. There, she is treated as a living **museum exhibit**, examined as an object to be studied, and thus **dehumanized**

At the institute, Cormack uses Shanawdithit to make **drawings and maps** about her people and culture, which he annotates for his studies. On one map, she includes the **burial location** of Demasduit and Nonosbawsut

Cormack later **steals** the remains of Demasduit and Nonosbawsut for study, and sends them to a **museum in Scotland**, where they remained for nearly 170 years

2020

After years of campaigning by Mi'kmaq elder **Chief Mi'sel Joe**, the remains of **Demasduit** and **Nonosbawsut** are returned to Newfoundland. They remain in a **museum** and have yet to be laid properly to rest

The **Mi'kmaq** have always maintained that the **Beothuk are not extinct**. Most historians have failed to believe this, but now this is changing as scientists find **genetic continuity** between Beothuk and contemporary people...

Why do we need scientists and historians to validate Mi'kmaq oral history and Indigenous ways of knowing?

1497

John Cabot arrives on **Beothuk land**, a region now called Newfoundland and Labrador

He is searching for "**uninhabited land**" to **claim** for England

He returns to Europe with the news of abundant **cod** in the waters

1600s

Evidence of both **trade** and **hostility** from settlers and Beothuk

1769-1810

The **Governor of Newfoundland** issues various royal proclamations calling for "brotherly kindness" in response to the **ongoing murder of Beothuk** people

Settlers attempt to reconcile relations by **capturing Beothuk** in order to demonstrate their good intentions, and then hope to use captives as **ambassadors**

1823

Settlers capture **Shanawdithit** and two sick relatives, both of whom die shortly afterwards

She lives as a domestic **servant** in the **Peyton** household for two years, where she enjoys **walking in the woods** nearby and **drawing**

Beothuk communities seem to be **dwindling**, and settlers presume they are going extinct—they fail to connect this to **colonization**

Settlers falsely assume it is too late for the Beothuk and engage in a kind of "**palliative care**," which involves studying and recording Beothuk culture

1829

Shanawdithit dies of tuberculosis. She is believed by many in colonial culture to be the "**last of the Beothuk**," a claim **disputed** by Mi'kmaq oral tradition

1910

American anthropologist Frank Speck records **Santu Toney**, a self-proclaimed **Beothuk** woman, singing a Beothuk song

This challenges the **settler assumption** that the Beothuk are extinct, and supports **Mi'kmaq oral histories** involving Beothuk inter-marriage with Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous groups

Bibliography

Cariou, Warren. "Indigenous Rights and the Undoomed Indian." *European Romantic Review*, 27:3 (April 2016): 309-318.

Cecco, Leyland. "Canada: DNA discovery lends weight to First Nations ancestral story." *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/10/dna-canada-first-nations-ancestral-story> (10 May 2020).

Polack, Fiona. "Reading Shanawdithit's Drawings: Transcultural texts in the North American colonial world." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 14:3 (Winter 2013). Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cch.2013.0035.

Tuck, James A. "Beothuk." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/beothuk> (accessed 9 November 2020).