



Collaboration for Cultural Revitalization: Researching the Songs and Stories of Early 20th-Century Woods Workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an account of the interrelated collaborations that emerged as part of an interdisciplinary research project designed to document and revitalize the occupational songs and stories of early 20th-century woods workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. In the context of a paucity of research related to these industries and occupations and their cultural legacies, we approached the songs and stories not only as cultural and musical texts but also as specific social histories and embedded literacy practices. Our purpose was to identify, primarily through archival research and textual analysis, the extent of this song and story tradition and what it revealed about those at its centre. We then determined ways to reframe and represent this tradition to contemporary audiences interested in the intersections of history, culture, and identity through story and song. The ten-year multi-faceted project unfolded organically through a series of university-community collaborations that spawned communities of practice in Newfoundland, Labrador, and Scotland. In this paper, we explore the nuances of these multi-tiered collaborations, the intersecting and diverging goals and needs that informed them, and the insights and benefits that accrued throughout their duration.

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INTRODUCTION

And may they work together with a spirit, grit, and will
And keep the logs a-rolling down to the paper mill
("The River Drivers," Thomas Synyard, ca. 1930)

Fellowship and collaboration were an inherent part of woods work. From cutting, hauling, and driving wood to building camps, striking for better wages and work conditions, and supporting one another during separation from family, teamwork and camaraderie were essential to work and camp life for early 20th-century woods workers¹ in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)—and in other regions of Canada and the United States, as well. This above excerpt from "The River Drivers" is but one example among many songs, recitations, poems, and firsthand narratives that describe this collaborative spirit and is a fitting opening to a discussion of our own collaborative work to recognize, preserve, and revitalize their cultural legacy.

NL, Canada's easternmost province, is the traditional homeland of several Indigenous peoples—the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq of the island portion of the province and the Innu and Inuit of Labrador. European settlement began slowly in the 1400s around migratory fisheries sponsored by Great Britain (now the United Kingdom), France, Portugal, and Spain in the cod-laden waters of the North Atlantic. Great Britain and France fought for ownership of the colony for over three centuries until France relinquished its last claim in 1904. Ancestors of French settlers remain, although the predominant settler musical influences are English, Irish, and Scottish.

The folk song tradition for which the province is well known worldwide arose from these influences, and unsurprisingly, stories of seafaring and fishing predominate within it. By the mid-1800s, with industrial diversification, commercial lumbering initiatives emerged that utilized the plentiful white pine and spruce, led largely by Scottish and Canadian entrepreneurs (NL did not become a province of Canada until 1949). In 1909, the world's largest integrated pulp and paper mill was opened at Grand Falls, in the interior of the Island. A second mill followed in the mid-1920s at Corner Brook. With the emergence of this new type of industry, new work- and lifeways emerged that were documented in story and song.

Published accounts of woods songs from various wood-producing regions of North America began to appear in the early 20th century (Gray, 1924; Rickaby, 1926), with others following (Doerflinger, 1951; Fowke, 1970; Manny & Wilson, 1968) as the heyday of pre-mechanized harvesting was passing and folklorists strove to document the songs that arose from that era. Nevertheless, unlike the traditional ballads and songs of the sea folklorists recorded in the early to mid-20th century (Greenleaf & Mansfield, 1933; Karpeles, 1970; Leach, 1965; Peacock, 1965), local songs of woods work were largely ignored. In the early 21st century, as the era of pulp and paper was

drawing to a close in NL—the mill at Grand Falls-Windsor closed in 2009—there was still no comprehensive account of a woods-song tradition that might have arisen from more than a century of lumbering and logging.

This paper describes the interrelated collaborations that were part of an interdisciplinary research project designed to provide a more comprehensive documentation of the songs and stories of early 20th-century woods workers in NL. In the context of a paucity of research related to these industries and occupations and their associated cultural texts, we approached the songs and stories not only as cultural and musical legacies but as specific social histories and embedded literacy practices as well. This approach allowed for recognition and validation of both the representational and musical skills of woods workers and their significance to labour history.

In so doing, our purpose was to identify the extent of the woods-song and story tradition and what it might reveal about the experiences of those at its centre. We were mindful to balance attention to various regions of the province, as well as to search out lesser-heard voices, such as those of Indigenous peoples, Francophones, and women. We also wanted to determine ways to reframe and represent this tradition for contemporary audiences interested in the intersections of culture, identity, and labour history through story and song.

The ten-year multifaceted project that resulted unfolded organically through a series of university-community collaborations in NL and Scotland. In this paper, we explore the nuances of these multitiered collaborations, the intersecting and diverging goals and needs that informed them, and the insights and benefits that continue to accrue.

THE RESEARCHERS

We are affiliated with different units of the same university. Forsyth is an ethnomusicologist, and Kelly is an interdisciplinary scholar in the humanities and social sciences. Our combined expertise traverses music, folklore, history, literary arts, and education. We share an interest in how expressive culture more generally, and songs and stories in particular, provide insights into the politics of occupational culture and labour history. We approach cultural forms and texts for what they might reveal about identities and contexts, social struggle and agency, and lived experience.

As the only university in NL, Memorial University, our workplace, has a special obligation to the people of the province and a long history of public engagement and community collaboration. To honour this legacy, the university identifies public engagement as one of the areas that are key to fulfilling the institution's mission, along with teaching, learning, and research. The vision and goals are enshrined in its *Public Engagement*

Framework, along with the values that inform it—mutual respect; equity and diversity; integrity, transparency, and accountability; and excellence (Memorial University, 2012a). Within the framework, engagement “builds on outreach, knowledge transfer, and knowledge mobilization...is founded on mutual contributions and aims to generate mutual benefit, with all parties learning from each other [through] relationships built on trust and understanding” (Memorial University, 2012b, pp. 4–5).

Our shared research values dovetail well with the guiding framework of our University’s public engagement priorities and values, especially related to the framework’s goals of “mobilizing knowledge, expertise, and resources in support of the public good,” “building greater capacity for our external partners and collaborators through public engagement activities,” and facilitating and participating in informed public dialogue (Memorial University, 2012a).

WOODS SONGS IN EARLY FOLK SONG COLLECTIONS

Many folklorists have identified the isolated camps that were a key organizational site for early 20th-century woods work as crucial sites for the preservation and extension of folk song traditions (Ashton, 1985; Cazden, 1959; Fowke, 1970; Greenleaf & Mansfield, 1933).

Elizabeth Greenleaf, a teacher in northern Newfoundland in the 1920s, was the first to study and publish the songs of NL. Although she collected only a handful of woods songs, she acknowledged the significance of the camps that supported the new pulp and paper industry for song preservation and migration:

[The camps] attract men from every part of the island, and American and Canadian foremen have brought in the songs of their native lumber camps. The songs sung are legion, and men from one section of the island thus learn songs from all the other sections. (Greenleaf, 1933, p. xxxvi)

Most folklorists who studied songs of the camps included in their collections songs from the broader repertoire that included a wide range of content, not only woods-work related, as can be seen in, for example, Franz Rickaby’s collection from the USA North Central region, including Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota (Rickaby, 1926), Roland Gray’s songs from the Maine woods (Gray, 1924), and Louise Manny’s collection from the Miramichi region of New Brunswick, Canada (Manny & Wilson, 1968). In *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*, Fowke (1970) became the first folklorist to focus exclusively on songs that featured woods workers and woods work. She noted that woods songs account for the largest number of local folk song compositions in both New Brunswick and Ontario (Fowke, 2006).

Kenneth Peacock, who had documented hundreds of songs from Newfoundland in the mid-20th century, among them several woods songs, reinforced the importance of the locally composed songs. He wrote that “they often represent a revolution against the formal and stylized sentiments of the traditional ballad and love-lyric. Moreover, what they lack in beauty and poise, they often make up for in spontaneity, insight, and humour” (Peacock, 1965, p. 239).

Most of the regions where logging and lumbering were key industries have a well-documented account of the songs associated with or that arose from the work—and many were compiled and edited in the early- to mid-20th century (Bethe, 1981; Doerflinger, 1951; Fowke, 1970; Gray, 1924; Manny & Wilson, 1968; Rickaby, 1926). NL, however, did not have such documentation of songs associated with these industries. It was several decades later, in the early 1980s, that John Ashton, a folklorist at Memorial University, focussed specifically on the woods-song tradition of the province. He determined that the “persuasions and activities” (Ashton, 1986, p. 216) of earlier folklorists did not lend themselves to valuing or even finding woods songs.

Ashton himself studied woods songs from the Straight Shore of Bonavista Bay on the island of Newfoundland. Ashton also encouraged students of folklore to document the woods songs of their own communities, noting that “it is in them that we can most clearly see the relationship between the song tradition itself and the occupational context by which it was conditioned” (Ashton, 1986, p. 224). Ashton did not attempt a comprehensive documentation of woods songs, nor did he publish his own findings widely.

With the exception of a well-known handful, the local woods songs of NL had never been published or otherwise made accessible to general audiences. The iconic “The Badger Drive” (Ashton, 1994) is the best-known locally composed song, in part because it was published in Gerald S. Doyle’s songbooks that were widely and freely distributed (Doyle, 1927). In part, as a result of its circulation, it has also been professionally recorded numerous times locally and internationally.

Most woods songs, however, were little known and scattered throughout collections at various provincial archives. Some were stored on archaic media formats; others were documented with lyrics only, along with a notation about the source song—the original melody to which a song is set. Others were published in newspapers or magazines and still others were hidden in private collections. The singers and composers who had direct experience of early woods work had, for the most part, passed. Our compilations, therefore, required a less direct approach than that of the early folklorists: reviewing previous research, combing archives, and consulting with family members of composers and singers.

The collections of songs, poems, and narratives about woods work in NL and elsewhere focus almost exclusively

on the contributions of male settler woods workers, to the relative neglect of other groups, including Indigenous peoples, women, and Francophones. A broad goal of our work has been, where possible, to acknowledge the contributions of these groups and to provide a more complete historical narrative of the lumbering and logging industries. While the forests had long been an integral part of the lives of the Indigenous peoples of what is now NL, providing both a spiritual and material connection to the land, this connection was disrupted and reshaped by settlers, missionaries, and commercial operators. Many Indigenous people on the Island and in Labrador adapted to these settler lifeways and became part of the new workforce that emerged to sustain woods industries. Some also volunteered to supply timber for the United Kingdom as members of overseas forestry units—the Newfoundland Forestry Companies (NFC) of the First World War and the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit (NOFU) of the Second World War. While they lived, worked, and developed friendships, Indigenous workers have documented their experiences of discrimination in local woods camps and mills and in overseas forestry units, an extension of the racism prevalent in the broader society of which they were a part (Hanrahan, 2013; Jeddore, 2015; Paul, 2000).

While logging and lumbering were primarily men's work, women were also involved in some ways. On the domestic front, women often tended the family woods supply. In Northern Labrador, families, including women and children, participated in wood collection and preparation. In company woods camps, women sometimes worked as cooks, clerks, and domestics. Families often visited camps and, in some family camps, lived with their husbands and bore and raised children there. Two women entrepreneurs—Katherine McLean Murphy and Zipporah Steele—owned and operated a mill at Glenwood, Newfoundland, during the mid-20th century. During the First and Second World Wars, with combat-eligible men away at war, women entered non-traditional jobs. In both wars, Newfoundland foresters in the UK worked side by side with the so-called “lumberjills” of the Women's Forestry Service of the First World War and the Women's Timber Corps of the Second World War (Scott, 2017; Vickers, 2011).

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The documentation of songs and stories has always relied on the cooperation of those whose voices and cultures were under scrutiny. Influenced by social justice and equity initiatives across various knowledge domains in the late 20th century, new research approaches and ethics emerged to address concerns about power imbalances between researchers and community participants. Researchers across various academic disciplines have demonstrated increased interest in more equitable approaches (Lassiter, 2019; Ostashewski,

2014; Ostashewski et al., 2020), including strategies that are participatory (Conrad & Sinner, 2015; Tan, 2019) and practice-based (Friberg et al., 2010; Wenger, 1998), with the goal of defining more clearly the processes that can enhance the fulfillment of shared community-university goals. There is now a growing literature on the methodologies, tools, strategies, and approaches used by researchers engaged in collaborative and praxis-based research (Averill, 2003; Diamond & El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, 2019; Dirksen, 2012; Harrison, Mackinlay & Pettan, 2010; Titon, 2015; Seeger, 2006; 2008).

Equity is an issue that is raised in both the content of the songs that we included—the lack of value for labour and the disregard of labourers evidenced by the conditions under which they lived and worked. In the processes we developed in different phases of the project, we sought to respect these stories and concerns by bringing them to public attention and through the processes we developed by which to do so. We engaged cross-sectoral partners in relationships based on similar principles of equity, respect, and reciprocity (Ostashewski et al., 2020). We were inspired by the work completed or in progress of community archives and grassroots cultural conservation groups in NL and in Scotland, many of whom became key collaborators in various projects. As such, our research design and process demonstrated a commitment to “shared authority” (Corbett & Miller, 2006; Frisch, 1990; High, 2009) and learning and an investment in building long-term friendships and mutually beneficial processes and outcomes.

Significantly, our strategies, relationships, and projects developed through approaches that were open and responsive to the needs and goals of our community partners, as well as aligned with our academic goals. What emerged were embryonic “communities of practice” (Hart & Wolff, 2006; Wenger, 1998) with shared goals of cultural preservation, revitalization, and accessibility. Through these collaborations, key characteristics of communities of practice emerged: a domain of interest was identified and intensified—the history and cultural legacy of woods workers in NL; community-building was enhanced through mutual support and shared resources; and community practice was extended through shared activities and projects (Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The following account of the organic character of these collaborations and nascent communities of practice demonstrates how and why research directions and knowledge mobilization were redefined to strengthen partnerships, respond to diverse needs across multiple knowledge sectors, and fulfill mutual objectives, even amidst a global health crisis.

EARLY PARTNERSHIPS

In 2012, against the backdrop of a waning woods industry and inspired by a community and family connection to

woods work, Kelly sought evidence of the cultural legacy of this sector, in particular, songs and stories of woods workers, to determine the vitality of this tradition and to investigate how, through it, workers had represented their own experiences and histories. She began at the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archives (MUNFLA), a rich cultural repository for collected and recorded material. There, she identified a wealth of locally composed woods songs and narratives by and about woods workers. Some had been recorded decades earlier by John Ashton and other university folklorists—Melvin Firestone, John Widdowson, and Gerald Thomas, for example—as well as student folklorists. Only a handful of these songs were readily found in the province's large musical repertoire.

In 2013, Kelly proposed an album of a sample of these songs for the Back on Track archival CD series produced by the Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMAp) at Memorial University. MMAp supports and initiates research on music and culture, especially as it relates to NL and its diverse communities. Back on Track was developed by Beverley Diamond during her tenure as Canada Research Chair in Ethnomusicology to promote community engagement, with the aim to recirculate archival recordings (such as the extensive audio collections housed at MUNFLA), as well as recordings in private collections and out-of-print commercial releases (Diamond & Tulk, 2019, p. 69). Each publication in the series contains richly illustrated social histories of song and spoken word presented in a format that exceeds the standards for documentation in traditional CD liner notes, making them valuable resources for researchers, students, and lay users. MMAp's mandate resonated with Kelly's vision for putting the little-known woods songs that she had identified back into circulation.

Kelly and Forsyth (then MMAp's project coordinator) worked closely with Diamond, audio engineer Spencer Crewe, and MUNFLA staff on various aspects of the production, including track selection. Unsurprisingly, given our scholarly interests, we listened differently to the audio recordings. Reflecting on the track selection process, Forsyth noted that Kelly might select a song more so for its social significance, while she (Forsyth) might select based on a distinct musical feature or style. The collective valuing of our different approaches and contributions led us to interesting discussions about what to prioritize and which voices to include, as well as towards a clearer picture of the project as a whole.

In addition, we considered audience and listening experiences. Due to the condition of some of the recordings, the importance of a track to the story we wanted to tell was sometimes overshadowed by its sound quality. Here, we relied on Crewe's expertise in archival audio restoration to enhance the listening experience. The resulting 27-track CD and booklet set, *Mentioned in Song: Song Traditions of the Loggers of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Kelly, 2014), is the first recorded collection

of woods songs of NL. It includes 23 archival recordings and four new arrangements representing a wide range of woods work, song contexts, regions, and cultural groups.

Significantly, the project yielded mutual benefits for all the partners, including new interdisciplinary relationships and shared complementary expertise. There were also benefits for the MUNFLA and MMAp. In the course of digitizing and restoring the archival audio tracks identified by Kelly, MMAp digitized important collections housed at MUNFLA, which are now included in the university's Digital Archive Initiative, thus broadening the reach of the MUNFLA. Finally, MMAp benefited through the publication of Kelly's thorough research that yielded a highly visible addition to the Back on Track series.

THE MUSIC OF OUR BURNISHED AXES

The research for *Mentioned in Song* revealed a larger archival store of material than anticipated or that the CD/booklet format could accommodate. It also received a much larger-than-anticipated cultural uptake, gaining province-wide media coverage and selling in large quantities. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (GovNL) selected it for its Cultural Connections curriculum program, which placed a copy in all provincial school libraries. Many local organizations invited us to share our research, which we did using a well-received multimedia presentation format designed for general audiences and featuring archival photos, song clips, and live performances by local musicians and actors. It was also positively reviewed in key academic journals (Miller, 2016; Tulk, 2015).

This enthusiastic reception underscored a need and an appetite for further cultural preservation and revitalization projects. *The Music of Our Burnished Axes* (hereafter, *Burnished Axes*), a book-length compilation of songs and tunes, poems, recitations, oral histories, and first-person narratives, fit the bill for an audience thirsty for primary material related to 20th-century woods work and the sociocultural context out of which it came (Kelly & Forsyth, 2018a). It also provided a long-overdue published compilation of woods songs from NL to accompany existing North American compilations and to serve as a reference source for local community organizations.

Burnished Axes, however, was intended to do more than these earlier studies of woods songs. Like them, it was meant to document what many considered a moribund tradition. But we also strove to reignite cultural interest in this tradition, to highlight its relevance as a primary source of early labour history, to identify diverse voices within the tradition, and to find new performers and audiences for the compositions—that is, to reposition this cultural legacy as a *living* legacy.

Burnished Axes featured a variety of compositions—historical, commemorative, and new—sourced from a wide range of cultural organizations, including community,

university, and corporate archives, as well as from private family collections and composers themselves. Publications by woods companies, as well as other local publications, also held material. Some people who had worked or were still working in the industry composed new pieces specifically for the book. For example, a man involved in reviving the traditional NL recitation composed one about community wood gathering. The book also included a history of the industries, an account of woods camp culture, a musical analysis of the tradition, and musical transcriptions of songs. Recognizing the centrality of language to cultural preservation, a comprehensive glossary of early woods work—a occupation lexicon specific to NL—was also included.

We had not intended *Burnished Axes* to be a print account only. We were buoyed by the local and academic reception of the book (MacKinnon, 2019; Sullivan, 2018) and its selection for the GovNL Cultural Connections school curriculum program under which *Mentioned in Song* had also been chosen. Thus began a collaboration with NL-based musicians to reinterpret for contemporary audiences some of the little-known songs that had never been recorded or the recordings of which were too fragile for restoration. This CD complement to the book—*The Music of Our Burnished Axes: New Recordings of Woods Songs and Recitations from Newfoundland and Labrador*—placed into wider circulation 21 tracks that represented various geographic regions and cultural as well as musical influences.

Burnished Axes (the book and the CD) brought together many people who shared a passion for the history and culture of early woods workers—archivists, community councillors, families, artists, musicians, and researchers. Our conversations tightened the connective tissue that made the projects possible and deepened the vitality of our emergent communities of practice. It also underscored the need for some specialized stories—pullouts from the broader accounts of woods work, for example, the overseas wartime foresters and Labrador woods workers—presented in formats compatible with community needs around knowledge mobilization.

OVERSEAS CONNECTIONS

While both *Mentioned in Song* and *Burnished Axes* included some songs, stories, and photos of overseas foresters of the First World War and the Second World War, we recognized the need for further attention to their cultural legacies. Both units had served in the UK, mostly in Scotland. Little has been documented of their lives there and the transnational cultural ripples created by war and migration.

In early 2015, we gifted a copy of *Mentioned in Song* to the Ballater Historic Forestry Project Association (BHFPFA) in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, whose NOFU conservation work was known to us. In 2017, we approached the Dunkeld Community Archive in Perthshire, the main site

of the NFC work. Our intent was to gauge the interest of both organizations in collaborating on a project to enhance public knowledge about these wartime units.

The BHFPFA was founded in 2005 to document the story of the NOFU foresters who built the Glenmuick logging camp near Ballater in 1940, the site of which the organization had purchased from the Forestry Commission of Scotland. Among their many conservation activities are site-based storyboards, a walking trail, and a documentary film, with future plans for a model camp and interpretation centre. Their projects are intended both as a remembrance project and an economic initiative for the community. As BHFPFA Chair Ian Cameron described,

This tangible link between Ballater in Scotland and Newfoundland is central to our future funding and, in addition...as one of the key links to foster cross-Atlantic ties and our all important tourism. From Easter til October, there is hardly a week but we have folk from Canada...appearing here wishing to see where their fathers, grandfathers, uncles and second cousins had lived whilst serving in the NOFU at Ballater. As time goes on the links grow longer as the connection with the NOFU goes through many generations; and it is no longer the simple story of Newfoundland boy meets Scottish girl and they leave for a new life together in Newfoundland after the Second World War. But it never fails to amaze me how the story of that meeting of their often great-grandparents has been so revered to the extent that it almost becomes a pilgrimage to see this magic place called Ballater. (I. Cameron, personal communication, April 29, 2016)

The musical traditions and home context of the NOFU have emerged as significant elements of the BHFPFA work. For the DVD, *A Bygone Era*, the group researched a favourite local song of the foresters, Art Scammell's "The Squid Jiggin' Ground." Our research on the musical repertoire of the Newfoundland woods workers, including their own woods-song compositions, added to the BHFPFA's cultural knowledge of their wartime guests and the place of music in their lives.

The woods-song tradition connected our interests with those of the BHFPFA and the Dunkeld Archives, resulting in a collaboration to produce a traveling exhibit for touring in both NL and Scotland. It was kick-started with a public presentation of our research in 2017 in Ballater with our Dunkeld collaborators in attendance. Notably, it was also an occasion to showcase the compelling interpretations of NL woods songs by Scottish performers Paul Anderson and Shona Donaldson. From there, we worked together to fulfill several common objectives, including sharing our respective resources, developing shared mobilization and engagement activities, and gaining insights about each forestry unit from home and overseas perspectives.

The BHFPA contributed their firsthand knowledge about the NOFU and participated in our onsite presentations. Their efforts in video production intersected with our own interests and became an area for mutual learning and collaboration. Their resources and insights informed the content of the traveling exhibit. We contributed complementary resources and led the development of public programming intended to increase public knowledge and enhance the profile of BHFPA. We also supported their successful application for charitable trust status, a longstanding goal of the organization. The Dunkeld Archives donated rare photos and stories of the NFC and filled in knowledge gaps related to its work sites and activities.

Our international collaboration with the BHFPA and Dunkeld Archives resulted in the multimedia exhibit titled “Songs and Stories of the Forgotten Service” that recalls the experiences, contributions, and legacies of the NFC and the NOFU (Kelly & Forsyth, 2018b). Comprised of six eight-foot “pop-up” panels and an interactive iPad kiosk, the exhibit explores key themes: establishment of the wartime units; recruitment, enlistment, training, and travel; wartime forestry work; entertainment and cross-cultural relationships (including marriages); and demobilization and postwar reintegration, including forester immigration to the UK and immigration of “war brides” and children to Newfoundland. The panels feature archival photographs, maps, newspaper accounts, letters and poems, and profiles of unit members. The interactive kiosk enables users to explore archival and new recordings of songs, recitations, and stories, including a photo slideshow and documentary video.

The exhibit has toured extensively in NL, often by invitation, at community centres, public libraries, and postsecondary institutions. When the planned exhibit tour in Scotland was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic, we consulted with our partners to find alternative forms of sharing the work with people in their communities. Together, we decided to install copies of the exhibit at three community organizations in Scotland—the University of the Highlands and Islands in Inverness, Dunkeld Archives, and Ballater—where local historians and archivists now travel the exhibit as part of their ongoing educational programming.

THEM DAYS MAGAZINE AND ARCHIVES

Labrador, the mainland portion of the province, is a culturally and historically distinct entity. It has a population of under 30,000 on a land mass of almost 295,000 square kilometres. It includes the homelands of two Indigenous peoples: the Innu Nation and the Inuit of Nunatsiavut.

The not-for-profit organization, Them Days Magazine and Archives, founded in the early 1970s and located in

Happy Valley-Goose Bay, is a key repository of Labrador material. Its mission is to document and preserve the histories and cultures of Labrador in the voices of Labradorians and those with strong connections to it. The Archives house collections that include audio and video files, diaries, letters, photographs, maps, and reference materials. The quarterly magazine, *Them Days*, includes oral histories, archival photos, and other materials. As a beloved award-winning “cultural monolith” (Hallett, 2019, p. 175), its impact is significant.

In 2016, Kelly spent time at the Them Days Archives as part of research for *Burnished Axes*. Editor Aimee Chaulk was interested in our research, as woods work is a factor in the history of many Labrador communities. As well, larger commercial woods operations had initiated early industrial development of Labrador. Chaulk invited Kelly to partner on a themed issue on Labrador woods works.

Published in June 2022, the issue was edited by Kelly and included new essays by Kelly, Forsyth, and Labradorians with direct experience of various facets of woods work. It featured several previously unpublished oral histories, archival photos from collections at Them Days and other archives, including Memorial University, as well as several locally composed songs, with musical transcriptions by Forsyth. Overall, the issue provided the *Them Days* readership with its first concerted account of songs and stories of woods work and how forestry industries had shaped the history and culture of Labrador.

The issue was produced with the assistance of Labrador-based doctoral student Morgon Mills, who has extensive work and research experience at the School of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Studies at the Labrador Campus of Memorial University and had edited a prior issue of *Them Days*. Given University restrictions imposed during the pandemic, research travel was not permitted. The hire of an on-site graduate student researcher provided tangible support to Them Days and allowed the production of the issue to proceed without delay, with partner meetings held virtually. The issue was published in spring 2021.

In spring 2022, Them Days announced a project to produce its entire backlist as audiobooks (Rashid, 2024). Editor Aimee Chaulk invited Kelly to participate in this digital migration project. We saw this as an opportunity to support Them Days and to participate meaningfully in this knowledge mobilization using another format. We then solicited the support of MMaP and offered to produce a digital file of the woods songs issue using our combined resources. Along with increasing access through recordings of essays, poems, and oral histories performed by culturally appropriate readers, the audiobook format enables the inclusion of full song tracks, thereby providing an engagement experience unavailable through transcriptions alone.

This partnership demonstrates the deepened mutuality that developed as a community of practice continues to emerge around Labrador woods culture. It includes

Labrador musicians and performers who participated in this and previous projects to build and mobilize this knowledge.

A DIGITAL LEGACY PROJECT

Our current project is being developed with another of our partners, the Grand Falls-Windsor Heritage Society (GFWHS), as a large-scale, interactive, fully accessible, educational, and bilingual (French/English) website, *Axes for the Allies* about the songs and stories of wartime foresters (Kelly & Forsyth, in development). Grand Falls-Windsor, the site of the province's first pulp and paper mill, was home to many foresters who served in both overseas units. The GFWHS's mandate includes the tangible and intangible cultural heritage related to the region's history. Their volunteers fielded questions and contributed numerous historical photographs to earlier projects. We had gifted the GFWHS a copy of our travelling exhibit to support their programming. The website collaboration, funded by Digital Museums Canada (Government of Canada), extends the scope of this earlier project.

Built with overlapping audiences in mind (e.g., lay historians, school educators and students, museum curators, and community archivists), the project aims to provide a broader cultural picture of the work and lives of the foresters, expanding the dominant narrative of service through a focus on their songs and stories, and their cultural impact in the UK and NL. The multimedia materials capture the cultural diversity of these units and shed light on this aspect of wartime social history that continues to resonate locally and internationally.

Although the traveling exhibit will continue to be shared over the coming years, with existing bookings into 2025, the practical challenges remain of sharing this research through a physical exhibit with the communities *most closely* connected to the people and stories at its centre. These practical considerations are amplified by the significant distances between places within our province and the UK. We thus see the website as a legacy project—one that is more accessible can be shared easily and widely, and features many more stories than could be accommodated in the physical exhibit. Meanwhile, one of our partners, The Trail of the Caribou Research Group, a local organization dedicated to wartime remembrance, has expressed interest in custodianship of the exhibit for use in their broad-based educational programming.

The scope and length of the website project, which is scheduled to launch in 2025, has built further networks of collaboration between the researchers, families, community consultants, performers and writers, curriculum developers and teachers, sound engineers, web designers, graphic artists, and others. It has also helped to formalize and deepen several of our previous partnerships, including with the GFWHS, Dunkeld Archives, and the BHFA. For the GFWHS, the home organization

for this project, it extends their online presence and technological capacity as they pursue their goal of becoming a world-class interpretation centre.

LESSONS LEARNED: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION AND A PANDEMIC

At the peak of momentum in our community collaborations, the Covid-19 pandemic turned the world upside down. While the creative economy was among the hardest hit by the crisis and its aftermath, community-based research and knowledge mobilization, and presumptions of mobility and physical closeness that underpin such work, were significantly curtailed. Our exhibit bookings in Newfoundland for 2020 and 2021, as well as our scheduled 2020 exhibit tour and public programming in partnership with the University of Aberdeen, the University of Highlands and Islands (Inverness), and several Scottish archives, museums, and conservation organizations were all cancelled.

Yet, as Fischlin, Risk, and Stewart describe, despite these upheavals, the pandemic also presented previously unimagined pathways for connection, improvisation, and collaboration (2021). In response to the disruptions, we, too, had to reimagine how collaborative knowledge mobilization could look. Through consultation with our partners about our shared challenges and needs, we reframed our approach to knowledge mobilization. This process further de-centered our role as researchers in the mobilization of knowledge. As a result, it created a wider ripple effect and greater impact than we had previously anticipated. The record and book collections that started it all have become an intricate accompaniment to these local and international programming efforts—as will the completed website—thereby realizing the goal of revitalization in ways beyond any early imaginings while reflecting and carrying forward that spirit of fellowship and collaboration that was a hallmark of the early woods workers at its centre.

Our journey through this multifaceted, decade-long series of projects has been immensely rewarding, marked by collaboration with diverse partners committed to fostering a deeper understanding of aspects of the province's lesser-known cultural history. The emergent nature of our initiatives has allowed us to build on previous efforts while continuously adapting to the evolving needs of our partners. By actively listening to the priorities of our community collaborators, we discovered innovative ways for university researchers to leverage our resources in support of their vital, grassroots work. Until now, throughout these collaborations, we had stepped away from the academic core currency of the referred journal article to produce, instead, through various partnerships, multi-media formats more conducive to local community education needs and projects. Ultimately, our efforts to mobilize research, expertise, and local knowledge have not only contributed

to existing programming initiatives but have also helped strengthen the capacity of local organizations, paving the way for sustainable cultural engagement in the future.

NOTE

- ¹ We use the inclusive term woods workers to recognize the wide range of workers involved in different facets of the woods industries (e.g., harvesting, peeling, driving, milling). They include foresters, lumberjacks, lumberers, drivers, and loggers.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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