

Cover Page



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Introduction

The Question

My aim in this thesis is to answer the question “Was there an early Yukon First Nations art, and if so, what was it like?” A close secondary question follows: “If there was an early Yukon First Nation art style, what happened to that art and why did it vanish?” I will further be firm and persistent in arguing that the majority of present day First Nations art created in the Yukon is not traditional to the area. I hope it will become clear to the reader that the importance of this clarification (what is and what is not traditional Yukon First Nations art) for my people and our present day identity is crucial.

Personal Comments about the Research

I will make a few comments about my approach to this thesis, which can be summed up as a blend of the Euro-Western and Indigenous research methodology. They are equally valid for this thesis. The Indigenous approach has the following elements:

To start off, I am not an archaeologist or art historian. Although I have studied in the areas of culture and art history, my foremost contribution comes from being **an insider** to my culture. Some of the knowledge is bred in my bones, given to me by my birth as well as the environment while growing up. This is important in Indigenous research because of the mistrust First Nations people have developed for White researchers.

Shawn Wilson points out in *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* non-Indigenous researchers consistently research Indigenous people but with no benefits to those Indigenous peoples:

Many residents of Indigenous communities in North America and Australia believe that Indigenous people are among the most studied on earth (for example, see Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999). While this belief in itself may be debatable, it is based in the fact that indigenous people are accustomed to research being conducted in their communities. This research has neither been asked for, nor had any relevance for the communities being studied. People are accustomed to seeing researchers come into their communities, do whatever it is they do and leave, never to be heard from again. Because community members are for the most part excluded from the research process, they have become resentful to research in general. (Wilson 2008:15)

This resentment will already affect any research that is conducted because the people that the researcher is working with already have an opinion that may alter the results. The difference is that I work with people in my community who already know me, some since I was a child. In many of the Yukon communities I have relatives and they often know my mother and thus know who I am related to and where I fit in. As a result I am part of their world and they know I am not going away, never to be heard from again.

Communication that I have conducted with my people, mostly Elders, has not involved studying their behaviors and practices (I grew up with these) but **working with** them to gain a bigger understanding of Yukon First Nations art. This is why I think that Elders sometimes told me stories that were not previously recorded by White researchers; there was an inherent trust. It is with dismay that I reflect on the fact that some researchers have come to interview and live with Yukon First Nations people; once the research was “complete” and their degrees attained, the results were often not shared with the people who contributed to

the research. Saying that, I do owe my gratitude to some well respected White scholars, for without them I would have had a much more daunting task in finishing this dissertation.

Feeling and relationship with my people is more important than an often unobtainable objectivity. Although I strive for a certain amount of objectivity, I believe that it has its shortcomings and can negatively affect my relationship with my people. For example, I need to allow for different versions of a story or various descriptions of the meanings of objects when these are given by Elders. This does not pose a conflict of “truth” in our worldview. The concept of reliability and validity has at times made way for credibility and authenticity. Slow, unstructured time spent with members of my community is often more valuable than working in a time frame with clear goals in mind. There have been many situations where I had to let go of control of my goals when spending time with Elders. Elders sometimes tell me what I need to know and not what I am trying to find out. It has been important to have a relationship with the people I interview first.

A bigger comfort and skill level is present in my oral rendering of my knowledge versus writing it down. My culture was oral until recently and this seems to come more natural to me. I am more effective in front of a class than writing this paper! The western world has been writing for thousands of years and over time developed a writing paradigm that is understood in the western world. Yukon First Nations people have only slowly adopted writing just over a century ago. Writing became more widespread for Yukon First Nations people after World War Two. I have often been told that I write like I speak. I have had short stories published but only with First Nations presses because they understand First Nations writing and storytelling. Basically we may write our stories in circles where in many ways there is no beginning, nor end. These stories can be hooked up with other stories in any order as part of a bigger series of stories. We write as if we are addressing a group of people we have a relationship with and understand the context

It is because I am an artist that I began my research to find my own people’s art style. In my culture, there is little separation between art and science. I approach knowledge not only through the intellect, but also through my intuition and senses, which is strengthened by my work as an artist. Rather than simply researching and recording the art I have also been creating the images of my culture. Working with the early images and art forms of my people has given me a deeper understanding of the art than if I had just recorded these images.

I am not only focusing on the past physical remains of my culture, but am also examining the present art situation. I am a living member of this culture. I have my own experiences to draw from and more importantly I have been given the trust of my people who shared with me their knowledge and wisdom.

Even though the academic education system is my vehicle for presenting my research, the goal of recording and presenting my culture to my people is more important than satisfying the academic community. I am seeking a partnership that on the one hand preserves my culture in a form that makes it more welcoming for First Nations people and on the other satisfies the academic requirements. I work at explaining things with my own First Nations readers in mind. This is done by avoiding information that is not related to my culture, unless I feel it will help explain the item with more clarity. For the same reason I have avoided complex words in order to make the thesis easier to read.

The land is very important to my research. All knowledge has to connect to the land in order to make sense. This made me intuitively withhold from making comparative studies to other First Nations peoples. This land is vast and even tribes from neighboring territories outside the region of the western arctic have lesser relevance to my studies (excepting the Northwest Coast Tlingits with whom my people had close relations). It is the land that is our world, the landforms that can give us some of our histories and stories. It is the land that provides for us in the form of food and materials. Knowing the land is important

in relating to the animals who give us food, clothing, shelter and guidance. How things are done and understood in one region may have no relation in another.

I try not to make comparisons with the dominant culture views or even, as I mentioned earlier, with other Indigenous views outside my region of research. I have however the advantage of understanding both the Indigenous methods as well as the dominant western academic worldview. Here is a bit more from Shawn Wilson and his *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*:

Ray Barnhart and Oscar Kawagley in their writing talk about “complexity theory”. It explains what most Indigenous scholars go through. Complexity theory provides an emergent system that melds the “formal” and Indigenous knowledge systems. Applying this theory allows for better negotiation in defining Indigenous education systems. As I understand the theory, one of the great strengths that Indigenous scholars bring with them is the ability to see and work within both the Indigenous and dominant worldviews. This becomes of great importance when working with dominant system academics, who are usually not bicultural. Oftentimes then, ideas coming from a different worldview are outside their entire mindset and way of thinking. The ability to bridge this gap becomes important in order to ease the tensions it creates. (Wilson 2008:44)

As to the Euro-Western research paradigm methods, I have used the humanities and artistic approach. I have conducted my research using the following methods:

- Identification of research problem
- Literature review
- Specifying the purpose of research
- Determine specific research questions or hypotheses
- Data collection
- Analyzing and interpreting the data
- Reporting and evaluating research

This is a brief synopsis of the Indigenous research approach I took. Fortunately, in recent years there has been a long overdue acceptance in more academic circles of accepting the Indigenous voice in scholarship. This is in reaction to the failures of academic research of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. Most experts of First Nations and other Indigenous cultures are non-Indigenous! Almost all professors that are teaching Indians or Native American Studies are non-Native. In the Yukon many of the people who are deemed to be the authorities on Yukon First Nations culture and publicly present about Yukon First Nations Culture are White. The western academic system has also failed to prevent the appropriation of our culture. In *World Art Studies* van Damme begins to explore the idea of the acceptance of Indigenous art research and states:

Can the analytical apparatus of art scholarship be similarly enriched by concepts deriving from intellectual traditions outside the West (see also Coa, this volume)? There would seem to be no reason why this could not be the case. Given the underdetermined nature of many of the basic terms with which we presently approach the study of the visual arts, and try to communicate transculturally-fundamental terms such as “image,” “representation,” or “creativity,” “aesthetic experience,” and so on—there is indeed plenty of room for semantically more precise terms, as well as for terms filling semantic gaps (that we may not even be aware of until a suitably refined

concept is proposed). It should, however, be observed that any proposal for cross-cultural applicability of a term developed in a particular system of thought does not sit well with insistence on cultural contingency of concepts. Ideally, such proposals should be made by representatives of the tradition or culture concerned, in order to minimize the everpresent risk of accusations of appropriation. (van Damme & Zijlmans 2008: 49)

By being a member of the culture I am researching I am helping reduce the continued appropriation of knowledge and objects from my people. For my people my research and dissertation is valid without the deep academic scientific tailoring. What is more, the scientific academic approach, or better yet, the lack of interest of the scientific community that has been generally a failure in letting anybody know what the early art of Yukon First Nations people was like. This dissertation is the first effort in describing the art history of Yukon First Nations people.

The Start of a Personal Quest

I first developed an interest for Tutchone and Athapaskan art in 1982 when I learned that I was an Athapaskan Northern Tutchone Indian and not a Chilkat Tlingit Indian, as I had always thought. I was 23 years old at the time and had been creating Tlingit style works of art since the age of 14. The Tutchone make up one of the groups that are part of the Athapaskan people, whose traditional territory includes a large area of northwestern North America. See figure # 4 on page 28 for a map to the Yukon First Nations peoples. Athapaskans had a generally similar lifestyle and art.

My uncertainty about identity is an example of the cultural confusion that my Yukon First Nations generation grew up with. I grew up during a time when it was unappealing to be an Indian. I knew Indian kids that were adopted by White families that had darker skin than I had and yet they would tell me they were not Indian but White. While I thought it was very obvious they were Indian I also understood their reluctance. After all, Indians were thought of by Whites and Indians as the lowest class of people in the Yukon. But why did I think I was a Tlingit in the first place? One reason is that the Southern Tutchone, which my grandfather belonged to, had strong trade links with the Chilkat Tlingits in Klukwan, Alaska and marriage between the groups was important to maintain those trade relations. I can trace some of my family lineage to the Coastal Tlingits. Since the Coastal Tlingit traders often married interior Yukon Athapaskan women, and Athapaskans have a matrilineal tradition, the children of the Tlingit traders would follow the wife's moiety (clan) and tribe and therefore were considered Athapaskan. My mother is Northern Tutchone because her mother is Northern Tutchone; therefore, I am Northern Tutchone.

Another reason for the confusion is the strong visual culture of the coastal Tlingits. I use the term 'visual culture' to indicate the artistic visual aspects of a people's culture. In this I mean any decoration, image or symbol that is placed on any article of clothing, tool or implement of any sort for any reason by a group of people, as well as the use of those items in cultural activities such as dancing at a potlatch. These reasons may be to make the object fancy, as a form of identification or maybe as a representation of heraldry, heredity or spirituality. A group of people creates an identity through their imagery and becomes visually different to other groups of people.

Both Athapaskans and coastal Tlingits went through a cultural upheaval coming into the 20th century. After the Second World War, when the Athapaskans looked around for images of their culture, they would see nothing except beadwork and gravehouses. The coastal Tlingits, on the other hand, were still surrounded by their visual culture. They might

have lost a lot of their language, spiritualism and other culture factors, but they still had their longhouses, bentwood boxes, totem poles and other visually unique items. These items were powerful and represented a strong culture. If you were an Indian, then you might as well belong to the most well known and respected group, the Tlingits. This mentality still exists today, where many south-central Yukon First Nations people emphasise their Tlingit links. When I was growing up, the only 'Yukon' Indian art I saw was the Northwest Coast (NWC) Indian art style and even of those, there were only a couple of examples. The beadwork and the small animal carvings that the Athapaskans produced were considered craft rather than art.

When I started expressing an interest in doing an Indian style of art, my high school art teacher, Mr. Ted Harrison (who played a big role earlier in establishing NWC art as the Yukon Indian style and about whom I will discuss more in Chapter Nine-Trade Art & Current Period), directed me toward the NWC art style. This seemed right, because every other Yukon Indian artist was working in this style as well.

I was directed toward the Northwest Coast Indian art style because there was a total lack of early Yukon First Nations visual culture. When I thought about why there was such a lack of visual culture, especially since the Yukon was one of the last areas in North America to be explored and Yukon First Nations are among some of the last North American Natives to be assimilated into western culture, one would think that there were some visual remainders of that culture, but there were none. When I looked at the big picture I came up with a number of reasons for the lack of Yukon First Nations visual culture. One concerns the very nature of Yukon Athapaskans. There are a number of reasons why we shunned our culture and I will explain them below. Another factor was the lack of interest from the western culture's scholar and cultural community. I will provide explanations for that as well.

Yukon First Nations actions that lead to a lack of present day Visual Culture

One reason for the lack of Athapaskan visual images is the Yukon environment. Athapaskans lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle for survival and all the visual imagery was placed on the possessions they had with them. Those possessions had to be light and transportable, such as hide and small pieces of wood and bone. They were often small and had to be moved a lot. They also came in direct contact with the weather and thus deteriorated faster than the large permanent structures of the coastal Tlingits. Many of the items that illustrated Athapaskan artistic traditions could not stand the test of time and therefore could not be examined. Also, because of the smaller size, some items may have been easier to lose.

Another important reason for lack of cultural imagery was the very nature of Athapaskans: they had to be very adaptable to survive in the harsh Yukon environment. The Yukon is officially the coldest place in North America and the wildlife is sparse, requiring a bit over 100 square kilometers to support one person. When trade items began making their way into the Yukon interior in the 1800s, the Athapaskans began adopting those trade objects and discontinued the use of their own. Trapping a beaver and then trading the beaver for a set of clothing was a lot easier than hunting, skinning, tanning and sewing caribou or moose hide in order to have summer clothes. Around the turn of the twentieth century, when we were now almost living full time in houses and no longer on the land, we even stopped making the much superior winter hide clothing that was used for the cold winters. At the time of the first official exploration of the Yukon in 1883, much of the summer clothing used by the Athapaskan was already trade clothing. A reference to this was made by Dr. George Wilson, a member of the 1883 Lt. Schwatka expedition into the Yukon. He stated that well within Han territory, "whitemans clothing was "universally worn." (Schwatka 1900a:340 cited in Duncan, 1989, page 133). Further up the Yukon River whiteman's clothing was known and

used but not yet universally worn. Figure #1 shows a photograph of First Nations people trading at Lake Lebarge. This photograph is from a pamphlet entitled “Glimpses of Alaska: Klondike and Gold Fields” that was produced in 1897. The caption reads: “Trade scene with Stick Indians on Lake Lebarge, 1895”. This photograph was taken before the Klondike Gold Rush and before any real influx of white people in this area. It appears that almost all First Nations in the photograph are wearing western clothing. This is in the same year that Jack Dalton built Dalton Post which was about 150 kilometers away. There were only two white men at that trading post. It is obvious that western clothing started coming into the southern region from the coastal Tlingits through trade and from the Forty Mile trading posts in the Klondike region close to the future Dawson City before the arrival of Dalton and others. While there were almost no white men in the southern Yukon region in 1895 there was a fairly large white population in the Forty Mile area, up to 600 people around 1894. They were all looking for gold or supporting/supplying the prospectors in their quest.



TRADING SCENE WITH STICK INDIANS ON LAKE LEBARGE. The Sticks are the most stalwart of the Upper Yukon Indians. They claim to be "All same as Rustan Man". They are good hunters.

Figure #1, Lake Lebarge people (Southern Tutchone territory) trading in 1895 and already wearing western style clothing. PAM 1897-66C pg. 29, YA.

Along with the short lifespan of First Nations artifacts and decline of making traditional clothing and tools through trade, there were other causes that contributed to the scarcity of Yukon First Nations art. It was the traditional custom of burning items along with the cremated person. These items were needed by the deceased person on their journey into the spirit world. This could be extra clothing, button blankets, tools, hunting weapons, cooking items, etc. Robert McKennan in *The Upper Tanana Indians* writes in 1930:

In former times the Indians burned their dead, but this practice has long since given way to burial. I found only one man who ever witnessed a cremation, and he had seen in when but a small boy. As he recalled it, the body was dressed in elaborately decorated clothes including mittens and cap. The fire bag with its stones and tinder was hung from the belt, and the knife in its beaded sheath was suspended from the neck, but no other weapons appear to have been included. The corpse was then placed

on the pyre amidst the wailing of the relatives. When nothing remained but a few charred bones, two forked sticks were set up bearing a crosspiece between them, from which a few eagle feathers and beads were suspended immediately over the ashes. (McKenna 1959: 146)

As you can read from this account the person's most decorated clothing and his prized possessions, the firebag and his knife, were all cremated. These early practices would leave few examples of highly decorated artifacts to examine later.

A decade or two before Yukon First Nations encounter white people; Yukon First Nations people began burying people instead of cremating them. The reasons for the change are not clear and I discuss cremation and burial in Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch and Death in greater detail. Yukon First Nations then adopted the ritual of placing those important items in the grave houses that were placed over top of the graves. Sadly, since the completion of the building of the Alaska Highway in 1942, First Nations grave houses were robbed of these cultural items by United States soldiers and later by tourists. This is described in *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, which is Catharine McClellan's major ethnographic study of Southern Yukon First Nations:

After burial became the rule, guns, metal tools, snowshoes, toys, dishes and cooking pots for the dead person were either put in the grave house or hung over the fence. Nobody was supposed to touch these things or take them away (...) When the Alaska Highway was built, the soldiers carried off most of what had been hanging on the grave fences for many years, and this was very distressing to the Indian people. (McClellan 1987: 214)

In order to prevent this, we changed the ritual to burying the items in the casket with the deceased person. However, by the time my people adopted this new practice almost all cultural artifacts that had been placed in the gravehouses were stolen. It was only in the late 1970s through the efforts of the Yukon Indian Woman's Association that Yukon First Nations graveyards ceased being tourist attractions and laws were created to keep tourists out of the graveyards.

Burial rituals also contributed to the scarcity of early Yukon button blankets through the ritual of intentionally tearing them at potlatches. I will be discussing potlatches later in this thesis but for now they are basically ritual celebrations conducted for various important events, including for the person who has passed away. An example is the ripping of button blankets in Fort Selkirk in 1914. This is remembered by Rachel Dawson in Cruikshank's *Reading Voices*:

They do a dance, wear button blankets. They wore hats with lots of ribbons on them. Women had long hair (...) They took those hats off and put them on Wolf people's heads. Then they cut the button blankets in half and give them to wolf people. Just Wolf people get them. They give away Hudson Bay blankets too-tear them in half and give them to Wolf women, Wolf men-they all that. (Cruikshank 1991: 72)

This ritual is one of the reasons that the early Northern Tutchone style button blankets have not been preserved. If the style was different to the early Southern Tutchone button blankets then that style is lost and they are no longer made. I will discuss button blankets along with other related garments in Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch & Death.

This brings me to yet another reason for the lack of early Yukon First Nations visual culture: the dominant western culture's museum and scholarly practices.

Western Society's forces that contributed to a lack of present day Yukon First Nations Visual Culture

I have used many of western society's publications for my research and they have proven to be invaluable but at times have shed a negative and incorrect light of Yukon First Nations people. I will be discussing this further in the section. The other source of my research is based on examining museum collections but there are also issues with the museums. The first issue I will discuss concerns museums that have Yukon First Nations artifacts in their collections. These museums, locally, nationally and internationally, that have collected and exhibited Yukon First Nations artifacts have very poor documentation. In some cases there was no record of time or place of the collected artifacts. Information about the creator and meaning of the artifact is almost always missing. This has made it difficult to identify some artifacts as Yukon First Nations. In the case of most Yukon museums, many of the artifacts were collected from that area and one can assume that most were local in origin. An exception is the Old Log Church Museum whose collection comes from the whole northern area where their missionaries served. Documentation is also often lacking in all the Yukon Museums. This is not an intentional ploy but simply the lack of efficient collecting practices.

The next issue is that most of the examples of Yukon First Nations artifacts in museums are in storage, and therefore not in the public eye. I understand that most museums do not have the room to display all their collections but I also think that First Nations displays are not a priority. An example of this is the MacBride Museum in Whitehorse. It has a very large collection of Yukon First Nations artifacts, but a majority of the artifacts are in storage. Unfortunately for First Nations people, there is only a small First Nations display. The museum's display of early Whitehorse, minerals, animals, gold rush/mining and NWMP/RCMP displays are the priorities. The MacBride Museum was built in 1967, with the prevailing government attitude: the history of the Yukon began with the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. The result is a greater emphasis on mining in the Yukon. Presently, the museum has chosen not to change the situation even when it has the resources to do so. Instead, they put their resources into the construction of more displays related to mining and white history of the Yukon.

While many museums are happy to allow students, researchers and First Nations people to examine their collections in storage there are some museums that are difficult to deal with. The access ranges from the very inviting to not having resources to accommodate researchers. I visited museums from Klukshu in the southern Yukon to St. Petersburg, Russia and almost all museums were welcoming. An example is from the time I was personally researching Tutchone art in 1992. I arrived unannounced at the door step of the Canadian Museum of Civilization and asked to see Tutchone artifacts. The staff invited me in and catered to all my needs. Another museum, while welcoming, had such bureaucracy in place that I had to inform the museum exactly what artifacts I wanted to examine before I arrived and than could only see those artifacts. A new request had to be placed in order to see more. There was no access to this museum's storage area which is often where the most interesting artifacts are hidden. There have also been a couple of museums that provided only the minimal information or seemed to barely tolerate my presence.

There is a general interest in present day Yukon First Nations art which is in the Northwest Coast Indian art style but an almost total disinterest in the traditional early Yukon First Nations art. There are many books about Northwest Coast Indian art, Inuit art, Alaskan art and so forth. Yet at the time of this writing in 2012 there is not a single book that focuses on the history of Yukon First Nations art. This lack of interest may have been fuelled by the early researchers of Yukon First Nations culture. These negative attitudes came from various

aspects of the white world: academic, spiritual, government and even artistic. The general opinion was that Yukon First Nations did not have an art tradition or if we did, it was somehow lacking. Going by “research” literature and popular writers, our art was often deemed crude and feeble. More than that, in the past our whole culture was at times described as crude and feeble! I was born in 1959 and experienced the tail end of some of these open attitudes toward myself and my people. We were lazy, stupid, dishonest, dirty and drunkards. Some of my experiences with this involve my time in school and later jobs. In fourth grade a student in my class stated that “Indians are not as smart as Whites!” The teacher, a modern-minded soul, decided to have a class debate. Half the class felt that Indians were less intelligent than white people and the other half felt that Indians could be just as intelligent as white people. Nobody thought that maybe Indians could be more intelligent than whites! There were times in school I was accused of cheating or stealing because I was the Indian in the class and could be easily blamed. Even later when I was serving in the Canadian Army and in Canada’s elite unit, the former Canadian Airborne Regiment, I was often told that I was “doing good for an Indian!” Things have improved greatly since then but I can only imagine how much harsher these attitudes were before my time! Here are some examples of what has been written about Yukon First Nations art and culture:

But our survey of the tribes in the Mackenzie and Yukon basins leaves us without any tangible picture. They lacked in outstanding features, devoid of those definite traits that reveal a distinct individuality. They lived precarious lives in harsh surroundings, and lacked the stamina and courage to rise above their environment and poverty. One day followed another in the dull monotony of pitching and breaking camp, always in search of game; and there were few ceremonies or dances to brighten their leisure hours. Perhaps they were the weaklings of their stock, as some writers believe, left behind in the north when their more enterprising kinsmen pushed southwest and south, to become the Sarcee of the plains, the allies of the Blackfoot, and the Carrier of other tribes in the interior of British Columbia. (E. Jenness 1966: 100-101)

This book, published in 1933 and republished in 1966, gives a bleak impression of Yukon First Nations. Eileen Jenness was the wife of well known ethnographer Diamond Jenness. It was with his notes that Eileen wrote *The Indian Tribes of Canada*. Because her book was smaller and an easier read it became more wide spread. I have come across some examples of Eileen Jenness’ books in stores but have only ever been able to find Diamond Jenness’ *Indians of Canada* in the Whitehorse Public Library. Understandably, the easy accessible books have a greater impact on the general public. Some of the more accurate publications done by museums and universities ended up with small book runs and were limited to a small circle of students, researchers and scholars. I started unofficial research in Yukon First Nations art as an interested artist in 1982 and I am still coming across publications by various universities and museums! These publications are not readily known or available. While there are positive and correct comments about Yukon First Nations in most of these scholarly publications they are amply balanced by negative and ignorant publications.

Next is a recent example that seems to repeat some of what E. Jenness wrote. They are a series of selected quotes from the former British Columbia Open University’s History 120 (now Thompson Rivers University); Canadian History to 1867. This is a distance Education course and the content is passed on to the student through a series of 16 audiotape cassettes. These cassette tapes were produced in 1999 and I took this course in 2001. On the cassette tapes they are talking about the Athapaskan people of the Yukon and Northwest Territories:

Some trading occurred but it hardly compared to what went on, on the coast. These northern tribes were more likely to steal each other's goods than to exchange them peacefully.

Women in the Kutchin tribe killed female infants to spare them the degeneration that was the woman's lot in life.

The dead weren't even buried, but left to rot in the open. This was very unusual. Among all other Canadian Natives, burial rites were very sacred ceremonies.

...the livelihood of the Athapaskan tribes depended on following the wandering moose and caribou so they weren't able to create villages and lived on the very margin of survival. However we have to be cautious with generalizations, if we look at the arctic neighbours of the Athapaskan tribes we see that environment doesn't explain everything. (Open University 1999: Tape two)

Another early description of Yukon First Nations occurred during the first official exploration of the south-central Yukon. This exploration was conducted by the United States Army in 1883. The exploration was led by Lt. Schwatka and he assessed the possible warlike nature of the interior Indians. Over the course of this thesis I will be showing some of Lt. Schwatka's comments about various groups of Yukon First Nations people he encountered. The first comment refers to the Tagish people where he learns that great herds of caribou cross at times. He is disappointed that they are not crossing when he is there and cannot kill some caribou for his group:

Unfortunately for our party neither of these crossings occurred at this time of year, although a dejected camp of two Tahk-heesh families not far away from ours (No. 10) had a very ancient reindeer ham hanging in front of their brush tent, which, however, we did not care to buy. (Schwatka 1885: 109)

And more on Schwatka's general opinion about the 'Stick' (Tagish) people:

The very few Indians living in this part of the country-the Sticks-subsist mostly on these animals and on mountain goats, with now and then a wandering moose, and more frequently a black bear. One would expect to find such followers of the chase the very hardiest of all Indians, in compliance with the rule that prevail in most countries, by which the hunter excels the fishermen, but this does not seem to be the case along this great river. Here, indeed, it appears that the further down the stream the Indian lives, and the more he subsists on fish, the harder, the more robust, the more self-asserting and impudent he becomes. (Schwatka 1885: 109-110)

And one more of Lt. Schwatka's many comments about Yukon First Nations people:

At Marsh a few miserable "Stick" Indians put in an appearance, but not a single thing could be obtained from them by our curiosity hunters.

...A dirty group of children of assorted sizes completed the picture of one of the most dejected races of people on the face of the earth. (Schwatka 1885: 127-128)

See figure # 2 below of sketches done by Sgt. Gloster of "Stick" Indians at Marsh Lake to give you an idea of the people Lt. Schwatka was encountering.

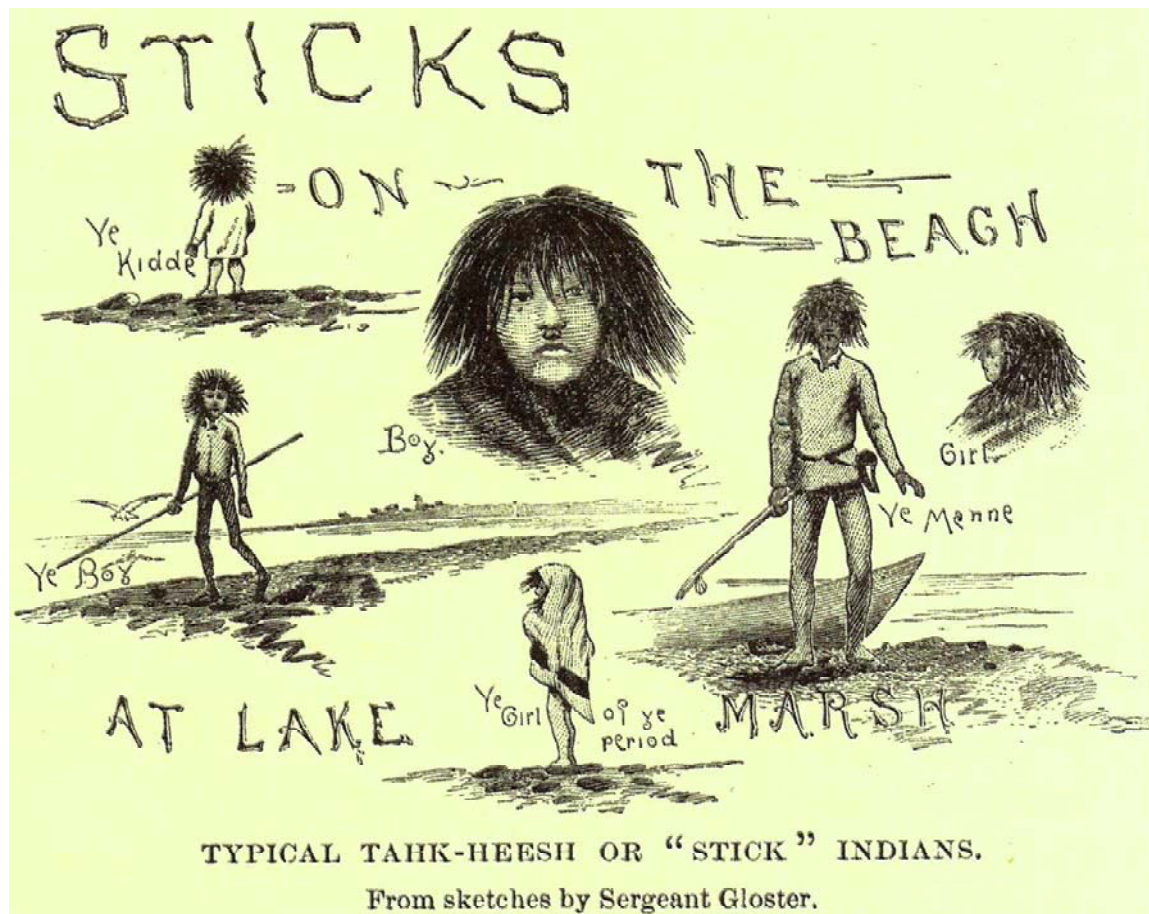


Figure # 2. Sticks on the beach by Sergeant Gloster, 1883. *Along Alaska's Great River*. Page 127.

Note that in the above image, the "Stick" Indians are not wearing the traditional hide clothing originally used, but what appears to be traded fabric clothing. There are at least two shirts and what appears to be a Hudson Bay Company blanket. The lack of trousers and other clothing may reflect a practice of not wearing much during the summer months. I would say that these people would still be using hide clothing during the winter months as the practice of making hide jackets carried on. There are a number of early southern Yukon hide jackets made in the early twentieth century in museums collections to support this idea.

In McClellan's *My Old People Say* she even includes a section titled "Hearsay Ethnography of Yukon Territory" on page three and "Early Accounts of the Southern Yukon Indians" on page four. She describes some of the early efforts to write about Yukon First Nations. When you read those sections you will see this early research is limited. Below are a couple of examples of McClellan's writings:

Ethnographers have shown little accord in naming and locating native groups in southern Yukon. (McClellan 2001: 3)

And:

But until the very end of the nineteenth century, Schwatka and Dawson, who have been mentioned with their geographic explorations, and the journalist Glave (who later died while on Stanley's last African expedition) provide us with the only firsthand data about the Indians above Fort Selkirk. The short accounts leave much to be desired,

although they are still basic. Schwatka and Dawson report rather briefly and impersonally on the Tagish and Inland Tlingit. (McClellan 2001: 4-5)

Other than what the Jenness wrote about Yukon First Nations people, there was very little written material available. The next easy accessible information was Catherine McClellan's *My Old People Say* published in 1975 which is overall a realistic portrait of the southern Yukon First Nations people.

Possibly, popular literature also played a role in disseminating negative ideas about Yukon Athapaskans. There are examples from the world famous writer Jack London. In his story *The Law of Life*, written in 1901, London tells the story of an old Yukon First Nations man from around the Dawson City area being left to the elements to die by his band as they pack up to move on to the next area. The idea of Yukon First Nations people leaving people to die or just leaving them in the open once they are dead is repeated later in Eileen Jenness' *The Indian tribes of Canada* which was published in 1933. Interestingly enough, Mrs. Jenness, as far as I could find, never visited the Yukon area. And in her acknowledgments she states:

The author wishes also to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of her husband, Diamond Jenness, from whose volume "The Indians of Canada" she has derived her material... (E. Jenness 1966: Acknowledgment page.)

So she wrote this book based on her husband, Diamond Jenness' research. As far as Mr. Jenness is concerned, to the best of my knowledge he never visited the Yukon either. He was a member of the Southern Party of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918 which was led by Dr. R.M. Anderson, to conduct the scientific research on the northern mainland. This research was limited to only 100 miles inland but he did not seem to come in contact with any Athapaskan people. Jenness' involvement ended in 1916 and therefore was not even part of the small group that traveled from the Mackenzie River to the Porcupine River and then on Fort Yukon and up the Yukon River to Dawson City in 1918. Was there any research done during the final leg of the exploration? It appears not. Diamond Jenness published his book *Indians of Canada* in 1932 and it only includes sections on the Tagish, Kutchin and Nahani people from the Yukon. He only writes about these three groups because he considered the Northern and Southern Tutchone, the Han and Tanana as part of the Kutchin. He has the Kaska and Goat people, which I believe are the Mountain Dene people, as part of the Nahani. While Jenness did good research with the British Columbia Athapaskans, it appears that he never did any field work with Yukon First Nations people. Instead he used what was already published to write his descriptions of the Yukon First Nations.

An example is when Jenness writes about the Chipewyan people based on Samuel Hearne's writing and states that "The aged and infirm of both sexes were abandoned by their companions and starved to death on the trail." And "They seldom covered their dead, but left them to be devoured by birds and animals. Families destroyed their property on the death of kinsmen, widows cut off their hair and went into mourning for a year, but otherwise widowers suffered no restrictions." (D. Jenness 1989: 386). It sounds quite bleak but how accurately did Jenness describe what he read and was Jenness even aware of the impact he was to have by presenting his version of the writing he was interpreting? I have read another interpretation of the same material from Edward Curtis and a different picture emerges; it is not as cold and blunt as in Jenness' description. While death was a fact of life in a harsh environment, there was caring and when left with no choice with a dying person. The situation was seen as sad but necessary. The people had to keep hunting so they themselves

did not starve and the person was reluctantly left behind with what food and supplies they could spare.

I tend to favour Curtis' accounts over Jenness' because it gives a wider description from Hearne's notes. In other sections of *Indians of Canada*, Jenness make statements similar to the above but about other Athapaskan peoples. I am left with doubt about Jenness' writings but his books were a major source of reference concerning Yukon First Nations until fairly recently when people like McClellan and Cruikshank began their research and a different picture emerged. The original Hearne and Mackenzie publications are not easy accessible. I had to go to Yukon Archives in order to read, in an older style English, Hearne's publication. I am therefore left with other authors' interpretations of these earlier works

From the spiritual side, following are comments about the Gwich'in by the first Church of England's missionaries. They first went down the Porcupine River and into Fort Yukon starting in 1861. The text is taken from *The Northern Yukon: A History* by Kenneth Coates:

Some of the missionaries of the northern Yukon, for all their good intentions, held rather low opinions of their native charges, W.W. Kirby, on the occasion of his first visit to the area, referred to the Indians as "treacherous, savage and cruel." Bompas wrote, after visiting the area in 1873, that "These mountain Loucheux seem 'the lowest of all people' But I cannot help in hoping that they are a 'chosen race.' (Coates 1979: 54)

The lack of early accurate ethnographic work in the Yukon allowed for a lot of speculation and hear-say. London's *Law of Life* added to the idea that we were a ritual-less people. In London's story *The Wit of Porportuk*, written in 1906, we are portrayed as a lower status, dirty people. *The Wit of Porportuk* is about an Indian girl, El-soo, who is raised in the Holy Cross Mission along the Yukon River in Athapaskan territory around the Tanana River area. One day a man from her tribe arrives to tell her that her brother has died and she has to return to her camp to look after her old father who is the chief. This is what is written:

She is appalled. He is dirty. He was a caliban-like creature, primitively ugly, with a mop of hair never combed. (London 1988: 90)

A caliban-like person is a character in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and generally thought of as a wild man, beast-man or a deformed man. El-soo is now a woman of status because she was raised in the mission and London shows that she is above the other Indian women:

El-soo was a full-blooded Indian, yet she exceeded all the half-breed and quarter breed girls.

And further:

She was the one Indian woman who was the social equal to the several white women at Tana-naw Station. She was the one Indian woman to whom white men honourably made proposals of marriage. And she was the one Indian woman whom no white man ever insulted. (London 1988: 90)

As you can see, London places Athapaskans below white man's social status and it even seemed common place to insult Indian people.

If you read Lt. Schwatka's in *Along Alaska's Great River* you will see that he makes a number of comments about Canada's first peoples. He felt that the coastal Indians, as well as the Eskimos, were a superior race to the southern Yukon Indian. Interestingly, all these commentators did not consider that Yukon First Nations lived in the coldest and one of the harshest environments in North America. In this kind of environment, preservation of energy is very important. One does not spend time making things other than what is practically useful. The simplest things in this case work the best. They take the least energy and are easily replaced or remade. Further, the white man was imposing his own ideas about how one was to live. The winter clothing that Athapaskans used was superior to anything white people had and I would say still have. The winter clothing consisted of two caribou hides, the inside hide with the fur facing inside and the outside hide with the fur facing outside. Twice the fur meant twice the insulation that a caribou in the wild had. In Edward Curtis' *The North America Indian* he writes about Mackenzie who talks about the Chipewyan:

Says Mackenzie: "this dress is worn single or double, but always in the winter, with the hair within and without. Thus arrayed a Chepewyan will lay himself down on the ice in the middle of a lake, and repose in comfort; although he will sometimes find a difficulty in the morning to disencumber himself from the snow drifted on him during the night. (Curtis 1928: 49)

Imagine being able to do that today with our present clothing! Having a shelter that seemed inadequate really was not an issue to a person dressed in the manner stated above.

Maybe some of these academics, explorers and writers were comparing the required lifestyle of Yukon First Nations with the seemly noble, adventurous and romantic lifestyle of the Plains Indians or the more powerful, settled and wealthy Coastal Indians, with their great houses and totem poles. Even the Inuit were deemed resourceful because of living in what was considered a wasteland by the white people. Whatever compelled these men to judge Yukon Athapaskans in such patronizing and degrading manner, we did not fit the picture of the "romantic, noble savage".

I would like to add I did not go out looking for such a wide range of negative comments about Yukon First Nations people. I came across them when I was reading publications in my search of any form of Yukon First Nations art. After coming across so many negative statements I decided that these writings may have contributed to the overall attitude towards Yukon First Nations which in turn may have contributed to the lack of interest of Yukon First Nations art.

However, not all early explorers thought of Yukon First Nations as a backward people. It seems when the explorers needed the First Nations people they thought higher of them or maybe they were just more open minded. Take for example what the explorer E.J Glave has to say about the Southern Tutchone during his exploration of the southern Yukon in 1890:

"They are people of magnificent physique, tall, well-proportioned, and robust, with dark, tanned skin, black eyes, and hair...They are without exception the most peaceful people I have ever met in my life. They are never armed, and never an angry word is exchanged; they appear to be living on the best of terms together. They are lively and genial and full of fun; one does not see that sullen countenance and manner which is a peculiar characteristic of the other tribes." (Kirchhoff 2007: 40)

As the Tutchone were the first 'tribe' that Glave encountered in the Yukon, he must be referring to the various Tlingit groups as the 'other tribes'. Glave's tone about the southern Yukon First Nations people is in contrast to what others have written.

Another example is the Hudson Bay Company factor/explorer Robert Campbell. He had a very positive attitude toward the Yukon and northern British Columbia First Nations people he encountered during his time at the upper Stikine River, Fort Francis, Pelly Banks and Fort Selkirk between 1838 and 1852. While in the upper Stikine River area from 1838 onward until they left the area because of problems caused by the coastal Tlingit chief Shakes, it was the Tahltans that provided protection from the Tlingits. Campbell believes that had it not been for the power of a Tahltan Chieftainess the Tlingits would have killed his whole party. Later as Campbell established Fort Selkirk he was again dependent on interior First Nations protection. He writes about his first encounter in 1848:

The Indians explained to us the best they could who the strangers were (they were Chilcats) & advised us to hide our working tools & everything movable unless we wished to have them stolen by the strangers who were adepts at pilfering. They also gave us a ready hand to put everything out of sight, which was hardly done, when the Chilcats arrived, about 20 in number & a hard looking set, on several rafts on which they drifted down the Lewes from near its source. We soon found out their thieving propensities, which were in such marked contrast to the honesty of the native Indians. These poor people, though so destitute of everything that a knife was looked upon by them as an invaluable treasure, were so thoroughly straightforward, that even if they found an article that was lost or mislaid, they would bring it back. (Wilson 1970: 97)

Note that what Campbell states about the stealing is in sharp contrast to that was written by Eileen and Diamond Jenness and what is spoken on the British Columbia Open University's History 120: Canadian History to 1867 tapes.

Comments directed toward Yukon First Nations art also had a negative tone. In Walter Hamilton's *The Yukon Story* which was first published in 1964 and had a third edition in 1972, he states:

Efforts to get Indians to take up carving, even of miniature totem-poles, are now difficult. (W.R. Hamilton 1972: 189)

And back to Lt. Schwatka's comments about comparing the Tagish marmot snare sticks with Chilkat Tlingit marmot snare sticks:

Sometimes they employ a little of their large amount of leisure time they have on their hands in cutting these pegs into fanciful and totemic designs, although in this respect the Sticks, as in every thing else pertaining to the savage arts, are usually much inferior to the Chilkats in these displays, and the illustrations give on page 112 are characteristic rather of the latter tribe than the former. (Schwatka 1885: 112-113)

Below in figure # 3 is the illustration of the marmot snare sticks that Schwatka is referring to.

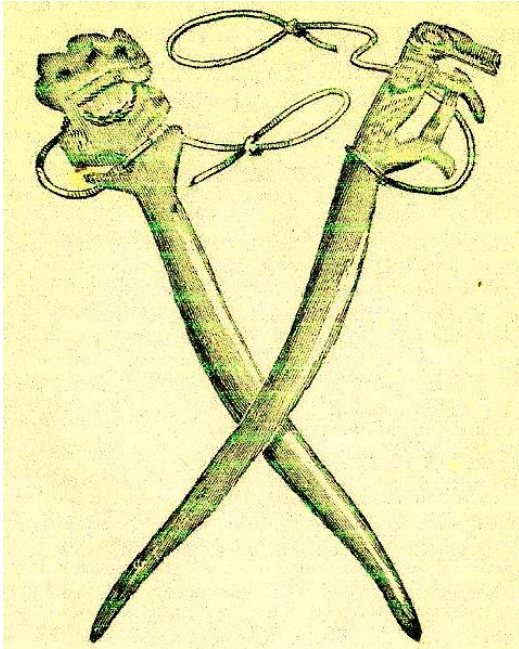


Figure # 3. Carved pins for fastening marmots snares. *Along Alaska's Great River*. Page 112

Douglas Leechman's (1890-1980) *Native Tribes of Canada*, which was first published in 1958, places the Yukon First Nations into the Northwest Territories area. In 1924 Leechman took a position in the Anthropology Division of the National Museum of Canada which lasted until 1955. He then became the director of the Glenbow Foundation and was thought of as Canada's First Conservation Scientist. Leechman wrote this book to target the younger reader. These writings plant the seeds into the young person's mind about the meagerness and lack of art of Northern Athapaskans. Here he describes the Mackenzie River Athapaskans in the section that is describing art for all Northern Athapaskans:

ART

The people of the Mackenzie River valley had developed only one form of art that was at all unusual. This was a kind of weaving in which they first made a simple strip of woven vegetable fibres or sinew and worked into it an intricate pattern of dyed porcupine quills. The weaving was so fine that it must have strained the woman's eyes in the poor light of their tents and there is so much work involved that few of them do it now. First the porcupines had to be killed, then the quills had to be pulled from the skin, washed and sorted into different lengths. Next the women would have to go out into the woods to collect dye plants, make the dyes, dye the quills, weave the base on which the work was to be done, and only then would they be able to begin the actual weaving of the pattern.

Some of their clothes, and tools too, were painted but there was very little art of any kind other than the porcupine-quill work. Today they use beads for decorating moccasins and gloves, largely for sale to white men living there or to tourists. (Leechman 1958: 222-223)

Even people with a generally positive outlook towards Yukon First Nations people felt our art to be generally inferior to the coast. In the following quote the writer even tries to make excuses for us:

The magnificent woodworking of the coast tribes makes the efforts of their interior neighbours appear rather slight. However, most interior woods are crooked grained and the timber is relatively small. Nor did the semi-nomadic existence of the interior people foster the kinds of massive construction which interested the coast people. In actual techniques, both peoples had much in common. (C. McClellan 2001: 253)

I have given you some academic and popular literature examples that give an overall negative and quite incorrect view of Yukon First Nations people. The idea of lack of traditional Yukon First Nations arts still survives to present day. Recently I was told by an archaeology student in Whitehorse that Yukon First Nations people did not have any figurative art. Based on the limited material about Yukon First Nations art it makes sense that he, and the institute that he studies at, would come to this conclusion.

There have been more recent books, such as McClellan's *My Old People Say* and *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, which are more accurate and realistic in the description of Yukon First Nations people. However, damage done by earlier writers and scholars has been quite evident.

Another reason for the lack of early Yukon First Nations artifacts was the poor efforts by the museum community in obtaining these artifacts. While early on under the leadership of the famous linguist Edward Sapir, an American who took the position as the director of the Anthropology Division of the Canadian Geological Survey of Canada, there were efforts to collect Athapaskan artifacts, the main focus of the collection was northern British Columbia and the Mackenzie River basin. The Anthropology Division of the Canadian Geological Survey of Canada was established in 1910. It later became the Museum of Man and in more recent years the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The result of Sapir's efforts was commissioning James Teit to collect Tahltan artifacts starting in 1912. There were also some Kaska artifacts collected during Teit's field work in northern British Columbia. At the same time artifacts were collected by Clement Lewis and Poole Field, who were living in the southern Yukon at that time. D.A. Cameron's collections from 1901 to 1908 went to the Royal Ontario Museum. While this was a good start, there were no serious collection efforts in the Yukon for almost half a century. Perhaps this is because Edward Sapir left the Anthropology Division and took a position at the University of Chicago in 1926 and the driving force was no longer there. After this long hiatus, the next serious collecting started with Catherine McClellan when she got funded by the National Museum in 1949. The result of this research is the excellent ethnographic survey of the southern Yukon: *My Old People Say*. Having said this, the work for *My Old People Say* started after World War Two, which I feel had the greatest impact in the assimilation of Yukon First Nations people and loss of our culture. There is furthermore the issue that after 1949 there was very little created in the traditional styles. World War two is the beginning of the cultural void that I call the Current Period.

With this inheritance of scant and poor early accurate research and lack of artifacts collected, one is left to ask: did Yukon First Nations people have any culture to speak of? Did we steal instead of trade? Did we leave our dead on the ground without any ceremonies? Were we the weaklings of our stock? Was our art far and few between and did we have any figurative art at all? Certainly, there was no art readily available to view and examine. There was nothing really to dispute the general opinion about the lack of our art.

This is the state of affairs I found myself in when I first began searching for clues about the Tutchone art style. I later expanded this search to include other Yukon Athapaskan peoples and the early Inland Tlingit styles. When my research became formal as part of my Masters of Art degree and my PhD in Indian American Studies, I first conducted a literature survey of the books written about Yukon First Nations. While there has never been a book

published that focused on the history of Yukon First Nations art, Kate Duncan's *Northern Athapaskan Art* was a good starting point. This book is a survey of all northern Athapaskan beadwork. I also used many ethnographic publications such as Catharine McClellan's *My Old People Say*, and *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*; Julie Cruikshank's *Life Lived like a Story & Reading Voices*; John Honigmann's *The Kaska Indians: An Ethnographic Reconstruction* and Robert A. McKennan's *The Upper Tanana Indians*. The bibliography at the end of this thesis refers to other publications that I consulted.

My next step was to visit the museums in North America and Europe to examine any possible Yukon First Nations artifacts in their collections. As the subarctic or Athapaskan collections were small, I felt I had to follow up every lead and visit any museum that could have artifacts from, or be related to, Yukon First Nations. This resulted in over forty museum visits in over fifteen countries. Some museums had large collections such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization where I examined over a hundred artifacts. Other museums I visited had only a couple to no artifacts. I estimate that I physically examined about 750 artifacts during these museum visits. While visiting museums and archives I viewed thousands of historical photographs in search of any early First Nations imagery. As there were no political borders before the coming of the white man I did not take these into account. I included all those groups of people whose traditional territory cross the present day Yukon borders as well as some of the neighbouring people, even though they are totally outside the present day Yukon borders. My research also included my notes from previous private research and personal communications with Elders. Although the Inland Tlingit are not part of the Athapaskan peoples, I have included them in this paper. They were living in the same environment as the Athapaskans and their early art style was in some cases almost identical to the Athapaskan styles. This thesis is the result of my search for early Tutchone, Athapaskan and Inland Tlingit art styles from the Yukon region and surrounding areas.

Notes on Collections and Collectors

Because of the isolation of the south-central Yukon there were no artifacts collected directly from this area until after the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. The artifacts from the south-central Yukon that were collected before the Klondike Gold Rush were collected indirectly from either the coastal Tlingits through their trading activities with the people of the south-central Yukon or from Fort Yukon in Alaska. Understandably, the artifacts collected from the Tlingits are sometimes mistakenly identified as Tlingit in origin. Artifacts from the northern Yukon were often collected by the Hudson Bay Company and the provenance for these artifacts is better. There was also a group of amateur and professional collectors that dealt in early Native American artifacts. One collector I came across about a dozen times while researching Athapaskan collections in both North America and Europe was a German collector/dealer named Arthur Speyer. In fact there were three Speyer's, father, son and grandson. The first of the three Arthur Speyer's was born in 1858 and passed away in 1923. The second, the first Speyer's son, was born in 1894 and passed away in 1958. The grandson was born in 1922. The Speyers collected many artifacts from other dealers, collectors, museums and even nobility from around the world. Some of these artifacts came from the North American subarctic region. Tracing the acquisition of these artifacts has not been easy. William C. Sturtevant describes his efforts in his paper titled *Documenting the Speyer Collection* which was published as part of *Studies in American Indian Art: A Memorial Tribute to Norman Feder* that was edited by Christian F. Feest. Museum personnel recorded the date and collector of each artifact (in this case Speyer) and the notes the collector contributed. While Speyer did add notes about the artifacts he sold to museums, these notes were not verified and this resulted in some curators questioning the accuracy of what Speyer

wrote. Some notes show where Speyer obtained the artifacts, but they tell nothing about the specifics of the artifact or the origin or who all owned the artifacts at various times. An example is a number of items of Athapaskan hide clothing that Speyer sold to museums which were obtained from the third Battalion, 69th Infantry from Harburg, Germany. There are two Harburgs in Germany and it seems that Speyer is referring to what is now the Hamburg-Harburg area. The 69th Regiment was stationed in Trier, which is in western Germany along the French border and not close to either Harburg. So besides not being clear about where the artifacts were obtained, it leaves no clue as to how early subarctic hide clothing that could be from the Yukon ended up in the German 69th Infantry Regiment.

In other cases an amateur collector would amass a collection and then pass away. Sometimes these collections were then donated to museums by the widow and at times came with little or no information about where and when the artifacts were collected. An example is the amateur collector E.E. Stockton who was a federal civil servant working in Dawson City between 1901 and 1906 and while there collected Han artifacts. When he passed away his widow donated materials to the Museum of Man (now Canadian Museum of Civilization) in 1944. This and other collections lack detailed documentation, especially when the collector lived in various areas in North America and collected from each area. The Anglican Old Log Church Museum in Whitehorse has many artifacts collected by its early missionaries, but lacked the records of where the artifacts were collected. Their collection ranges from all across the north of the Yukon, Alaska, Northwest Territories and the Inuit territory. An example of an Anglican Church collector is Bishop Isaac O. Stringer, who served all across the subarctic as well as the arctic beginning in 1892 and later was Bishop of the Yukon from 1905 until 1931. He collected a lot of artifacts but he rarely recorded where and when he collected them. Neither did he add any other notes as to the purpose or meaning of the artifacts. And again, his collection was later donated by his widow.

Bigger institutions like the Canadian Museum of Civilization often have more information but still can lack in the details about the creator or meaning of the item. For example, D. D. Cairnes collected many Yukon First Nations items for the National Museum of Canada, Ethnology Division (now Canadian Museum of Civilization). He purchased some of the items at the Taylor and Drury store in Whitehorse during the summer of 1911. The information he received was from the sales clerks. While he may have been told where the item came from and given other information such as its supposed use, he often did not record who made the item or the meaning of the imagery.

In the cases where I have visited a local Yukon museum I have assumed that the artifacts were of local origin. These museums collected artifacts from the local area. While there may be cases of some artifacts coming from other areas I believe this is rare. People would have donated to their local museum or historical society. For all Klukshu and Kluane Museum of Natural History (KMNH) artifacts, I have assumed the items to be Southern Tutchone, unless otherwise noted. All Dawson City Museum (DCM) artifacts I have assumed to be Han, unless otherwise noted. The MacBride Museum is a mixture of mostly Northern and Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Inland Tlingit artifacts, but other groups may be represented. The images I used from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) are mainly Han artifacts from the D.A. Cameron Collection who collected many artifacts from the Dawson City area.

One collection that has a clear Yukon origin is the Ice Patch Collection (IPC). These artifacts were found in 1997 in the southern Yukon mountains as the ice patches at the tops were melting because of global warming. Since 1997 hundreds of artifacts have been recovered from the melting ice patches. These artifacts were discovered in the southern Yukon and are owned by the three First Nations in the area; Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Kwanlin Dun First Nation and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. The artifacts are

stored at the Yukon Government's Heritage Branch and cared for by the archaeology staff. There are many partners involved in the research and care of these artifacts and they are collectively called the Ice Patch Research Group.

While further research is required in identifying many artifacts in museum collections, I think this thesis enhances the understanding of the art history of the Yukon and the surrounding region. It is my hope that this thesis will be useful to other researchers and interested people and will foster a better understanding of the Yukon's original art style.

Confusing Identifications

As will have become clear by now, there are no large nineteenth century collections of Yukon First Nations artifacts with good provenance; not enough information to be able to easily identify what artifacts came from which Yukon First Nation. This is further made difficult by another issue relating to research of the early art: confusing identifications. For instance, an artifact might be identified as coming from a certain group, but is questionable or clearly incorrect. Sometimes an item has been given an earlier, obscure identification and it is unclear from who it was collected. During my research I have come across a number of artifacts that have been identified as coming from groups I have never heard of before. In that case I had to ask the curator of the museum to show those groups on a map. Luckily, this would mostly give clarification.

The overall similarity of styles that the Athapaskan worked in has also resulted in confusions of identification. Hide Tunics, daggers, gopher skinning knives and bone arm bands are just some of the items that have a similar general pattern. For example, some hide tunics that may not be Gwich'in are identified as Kutchin (Gwich'in) because they have the same outline as the Gwich'in tunics. Gwich'in tunics seem to be one of the most common tunics in museum collections and therefore curators often identify similar tunics as Gwich'in. Tunic patterns are similar from Northern British Columbia, up into the interior of Alaska and across to the western part of the Northwest Territories. So identifying a tunic solely based on its outline could lead to errors. One has to look at the details in order to get a better sense of the origin of the tunic. See figure # 62D on page 91 for an example of a tunic that is identified as Kutchin based on the pattern. When I examine the details, especially the breastband style, it looks more southern Yukon than northern Yukon. This tunic was donated to the Pitt River Museum in Oxford in 1884. The location or date of collection is unknown. Later in Chapter Two I explain regional breastband styles, where my point about regional tunic styles will become clearer.

The misidentification of various artifacts can maybe be explained by the situation of scholars, curators and other people who are in positions that allow them to make identifications but who might have limited knowledge about specific subarctic cultures and artifacts. After all, the subarctic covers a vast area. When they do identify an artifact from a certain area it often goes unquestioned because of the lack of research material to compare for accuracy. Another issue is the lack of large subarctic collections in the various museums in North America and Europe. This might have resulted in a shortage of dedicated subarctic curators or professors. Only few people have been interested in exploring Yukon First Nation history and art, which has been dwarfed by the ubiquitous and popular imagery of the Northwest coast and the adventurous and exploding history of the Gold Rush.



Figure # 4, map of Yukon First Nations peoples. Yukon Native Language Centre.

Additional cultural group naming confusion came from such events as early explorer William Dall's visit to Fort Yukon in Alaska in 1867. While he was there, he identified a number of Native American/First Nations tribes:

Other tribes present for the trading Dall identified as "the *Natche Kutchin*, or Gens de Large, from north of the Porcupine River, the *Vunta Kutchin*, or Rat Indians, from farther up the Porcupine; the *Han Kutchin* (Wood people), or Gens de Bois, from the Yukon, above Fort Yukon, above Fort Yukon; and finally, the *Tutchone Kutchin* (crow people) or Gens de Foux, from still farther up the Yukon. (Wright 1976: 110)

Compared to the Yukon Native Languages map above, Dall's identifications are quite different from what is accepted today. You will notice that Dall lists all the groups as "Kutchin". This is incorrect and leads to confusion about the traditional territory that the Kutchin (Gwich'in) inhabit. Dall also identifies the Tutchone Kutchin as the Crow people. I suspect that he met the members of the Crow Clan of the group of the Northern Tutchone people who visited Fort Yukon. Traditionally, we did not identify ourselves with a tribe. We lived in bands in a certain area. We would say in what area we mostly lived and what clan we belonged to, for instance, Crow people from Fort Selkirk area. I am from the Whitehorse people and the Wolf clan. At other times various other people have been deemed to be from the Crow tribe. There are many items in collections that are listed from the Crow tribe from the South-central Yukon, mainly from the Tagish and Inland Tlingit people and, as we have seen, also the Tutchone. In reality they are members of the Crow moiety and thus can be from any of these groups. The confusion about Yukon First Nations people is furthered by those publications that identify almost all Yukon First Nations as simply Kutchin. For example, in Hamilton's *The Yukon Story* he states:

The Yukon Indian Agency estimated the Indian population of the Territory at about 1600 in 1954, roughly divided into two main tribes, the Tlingits, or Tlingits of the Coast and known near Lynn Canal as the Chilkoots or Chilkats, and the Dené or Athapascans of the Interior. The Dené people comprise two main groups, the Loucheux of the Peel and Porcupine Rivers, settled chiefly around Old Crow on the bend of the Porcupine, and the Kutchin or Wood Indians occupying the drainage basin of the upper Yukon River. (Hamilton 1972: 188)

Confusion was added with Lt. Schwatka's 1883 exploration throughout the Yukon. He identified the First Nations Tagish people he met at Marsh Lake as Tahk-heesh or "Stick" Indians. As he travelled down the Yukon River he further identified the Northern Tutchone people as Ayan Indians. And I have already mentioned that Jenness' lumped together the Northern and Southern Tutchone as well as the Han and Tanana people with the Kutchin people. He also identified the Kaska and the Goat (Mountain Dene) as the Nahani people.

These are but some examples of the many cases of misidentification as well as older, no longer used identifications of Yukon First Nations in publications. Some of these publications are recent. Hamilton's *The Yukon Story* was first published in 1964 and reprinted many times, with a third edition in 1972. Hamilton identifies the Loucheux as a different group from the Kutchin when in fact they are terms used for the same people, the present day self-identified Gwich'in. Hamilton also states there are two main tribes and this makes me question what happened to the other Yukon First Nations groups. One of the publications that list most but not all other past identifications of Yukon First Nations is *The Romance of Canadian History, Canada III: The Uncharted Nations*. In that volume, starting on page 81, *The Northern Athapascans*, is a list of each Athapaskan group and a list of names they were also called.

In the course of my research I have come across many different labels of the Native American people of northwestern North America and, although confusing, feel that all these identifiers have to be maintained. Changing names would only add to the confusion and would make the work of future researchers more difficult. I have therefore used the original identification of the group and put in brackets the current identification. Even today some terms can create confusion. In Canada the aboriginal people are made up of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. When I use the term 'First Nations people', I am referring to Canadian Native Americans. When I use the term "a First Nation" or "that First Nation", I am referring to the 'band' or government of that group of people. In the United States the two groups of aboriginal peoples are the Native Americans and the Eskimo-Aleut. When a present day group uses its own self identification, I use that name. For example, the Gwich'in or Gwitch'in people have in the past been identified as Kutchin, Loucheux and Tukudh. So when the artifact is identified as Kutchin, I will write it as Kutchin (Gwich'in) for the first time in the section about that artifact. After that I will continue to refer to it as it was originally identified. In those cases when an artifact is identified from a First Nation group that obviously did not make it, such as an Athapaskan artifact that was traded to the Tlingits and then identified as Tlingit, I will comment on each one in a case by case situation.

Below is a brief table of Yukon First Nations peoples in and the various names that have been used to identify us. This is not a complete list but shows the most common names used. I have not included many of the groups neighbouring the Yukon in the below list but will write about them as I get to them in this dissertation. I will list the Yukon Athapaskan groups in the same order as shown in figure # 4 and after add some groups not included in the map.

Gwich'in (also Gwitch'in):	Kutchin, Loucheux, Gens de Large, Rat Indians, Tukudh, Takudh.
Hän:	Han Kutchin, Hankootchin, Wood people, Gens de Bois, A-yan, Ayonais.
Upper Tanana:	Tanana, Nabesna, Tannin-Kootchin, Tanna-Kutchin, Gens de Buttes.
Northern Tutchone:	Tutchone, Tutchone-Kutchin. Crow people, Gens de Foux, Gens de Bois, Wood Indians, Mountain Indians, Caribou Indians, Nehaunnes, A-yan, Ai-yan, and Gunana by the coastal Tlingits.
Southern Tutchone:	Tutchone, Stick Indians, Tinne and Gunana by the coastal Tlingits.
Kaska:	Goat, Nahane, Nahani, Nahanni, Tichotina.
Tagish:	Stick Indians, Tag Indians, Tahk-heesh, Tahkeesh, Tagisch, and Gunana by the coastal Tlingits.
Tahltan:	Thalhthan, Toltan, Tičaxhanoté-n, Taku People, Nahane, and Gunana by the coastal Tlingits.
Inland Tlingit:	Taku People, Takutine, Tāh'ko-tin'neh, Nahane, and Gunana by the coastal Tlingits.
Mountain Dene:	Mountain Indians, Nahani, Goat, Shi-ta-dene, Gens des Montagnes.

Note that some of the groups of people fell under one identifying name:

Northern Tutchone, Kaska, Tahltan and Mountain Dene were all at one time identified as Nahane. The coastal Tlingit called everybody in the interior Gunana. The point is that early identification of Yukon and surrounding peoples overlapped and was rather haphazard.

What is Yukon First Nations 'Art'?

There is no direct translation for the word 'art' or 'artist' in Yukon First Nations languages. The word 'art' in the western meaning did not exist in our culture. Yet artistic creativity existed. What forms did this artistic creativity take? In Southern Tutchone the word used for art is pronounced as Kris-eea. That word means "fix things" and also the "person who fixes things". So the word is used for art and artist. In Northern Tutchone the word Hutsi means to make something and Dän Hutsi is a person who makes something. So how is the modern reader to understand this? When a person is making a tool, clothing, or other item, they are 'making' or 'fixing' it. The item is not complete until all parts are finished and that often includes the decoration or art. Therefore, when we look at Yukon First Nations art, we have to look at the context in which it was produced. Most of the time, the aesthetic part ("making it fancy") was integrated in the practical object, most likely executed towards the end. The artist, or fixer, was a handy-(wo)man and decorator in one, the two aspects together making up the art. Even objects made by shamans had their practical aspects, as possibly were little talisman figures for the hunter or warrior. Early Yukon First Nations art remained with the person as a tool or other functional object. This object was often also pleasing to look at and sometimes had varied depths of meaning. This meaning depended on the object itself, the owner and the rituals it was used for. In figure # 5 you will see a drum with a complex stick figure as well as a series of other designs such as the zigzag lines.



Figure # 5. Tutchone hand games drum collected at Ross River in 1913. VI-Q-39, CMC.

This image should not be seen as the image complete in and of itself, but as part of a bigger picture. The image has its own story, it says something. Unfortunately, the story of the image is now lost forever. But we can carefully speculate. For example, this image is on a drum that creates a rhythm. Since this drum has a strand of sinew across the top (it originally had two strands), it was made for hand games (also called stick gambling). The drum was played using a quick double-beat to create the rhythm during the games. So that image is part of a competitive event that would involve the whole community. Traditionally, objects had “power”, especially items that were used during community events like the hand games. In this case, the drum should be seen as a participant in the games! A good illustration of a drum being part of the event is with Upper Tanana Elder Walter Northway. He is an Upper Tanana Native American and was born in the 1870s. In June 1971 Northway was helping celebrate a 5 day potlatch in Northway and this is what happened when he was asked to sign the guestbook:

On the last day of the potlatch someone passed around a guest book for everyone to sign. When the book came to Chief Northway, he held up his painted drum. “This is my sign,” he declared. “When you see this drum, you know I am here. I don’t need to write my name.” (Alaska Native Language Center 1987: Page ix)

So the drum was but one aspect of the bigger event or “cultural scene”. The process of the making of the drum, gathering the material, the rhythm, the song, the story, the dance, the food, all were more literally the “visual culture in progress”. This is actually less removed than you might think from traditional Western art, where the artist had to be involved in the process of making the paints and preparing the panels and where the religious knowledge and ritual depicted in the art work was intimately lived by the artist and community alike.

To come back to the drum; the animal, in this case a caribou, was hunted and that animal gave itself to the hunter. The hide was tanned and the use of that hide had to be decided. Once the ideal piece of hide was selected it went to the drum maker (most likely the

hunter and the fixer/maker) who then had to gather the wood for the frame and construct the drum. He had to decide on an image to put on the drum and then had to gather the pigment to make the paint. In this case red ochre, the preferred paint used by Yukon Athapaskans. The artist would have had to travel to a red ochre pit and gather the ochre. He gave his thanks and left an offering at that pit. In the recent past tobacco was left. The ochre now had to be ground and then burnt. After this the powder was stored in a bag used for that specific purpose. See figure # 6 for an example of an ochre bag. This bag was collected by Clement Lewis at Teslin Lake and arrived at the National Museum of Canada, Ethnology Division (now Canadian Museum of Civilization) in December 1912. Coming from Teslin Lake would most likely make this bag an Inland Tlingit creation. The bag has geometric style beadwork on it which was at times used by the Inland Tlingits.

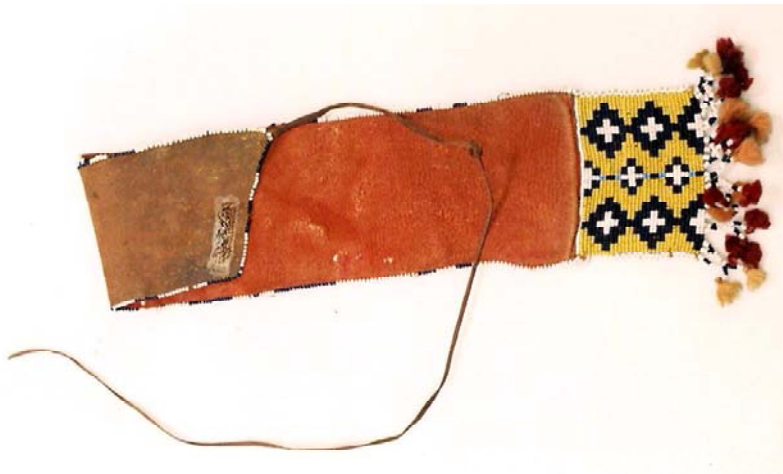


Figure # 6. Athapaskan ochre bag , VI-J-30, CMC.

The powder was mixed with a binding substance such as animal oil. Once the artist decided on the image, he would create it in his own style and thus the image would often only be understood by himself and maybe even those people around him. After the image was completed and used, it would have a meaning for the artist. The people around him most likely also learned its meaning, especially when they took part in those stick gambling games and events where that drum was played. The people beyond his band may not have understood what the image was about, but would have realized that it was important.

In the above case I have only been describing a stick gambling drum. A shaman's drum or a potlatch drum would be viewed in a different context. For example a potlatch drum played to sing a good-bye song for the deceased person would be a sad event while a shaman's drum used in a healing ritual would have been a hopeful event.

Athapaskans always created different images. The viewer may not have understood what the image was about unless the artist chose to explain it. Maybe the image had a deep personal or spiritual meaning, not privy to others. This is why today, when I show Elders photographs of various images, they most often say they do not know what the image means and will not venture a guess.

Concerning the art of my people, many images have lost their meaning and have nothing written about them. This makes research challenging. For example, in the case of the Tutchone drum discussed above, not a single Elder offered an explanation as to its meaning as they were not present when it was made or used. Neither did they know the maker. In my culture it is not proper to just guess. In doing my research and writing this paper, I have no choice but to divert from my people's habit of only speaking about what they know for sure.

When I am not sure about certain imagery, I will make suggestions to possible meaning or I link the image to what I believe is a related story or event.

Now that I have dealt with some issues surrounding my research I will move on to my findings. With the use of local Elder's knowledge, historical photographs, previously published material and my own analysis of artefacts I have worked at giving the big picture of Yukon First Nations art which is what follows next.