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Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History

> Kinship, like Fire, is about life and living; it's not about something that is in itself so much as something we do—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully.
> —Daniel Heath Justice, "'Go Away, Water!' Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative"

> "The logs were cut / And the house was raised / By pioneer men / in the olden days"
> —James S. Tippet, *Old Log House*, qtd. in *Sodbusters*

In her editorial introduction to *Canadian Literature*'s "Indigenous Focus" special issue (2012), Margery Fee writes that "[g]iven that history lessons have tended to focus on Sir John A. Macdonald and the railway rather than Louis Riel and the buffalo, it's not surprising that many Canadians don't know much about Indigenous peoples in Canada" (6). Fee continues that Canadians, for the most part, have been "kept in the dark" (6). Recently a shift has occurred in Canada whereby greater attention has been paid to issues facing Indigenous peoples, ranging from the establishment and subsequent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to recognition of the Tsilhqot'in Nation's title to their ancestral homelands, and to wider social movements like Idle No More. Increasingly, there has been an acknowledgement of the need to affirm Indigenous voice within the discursive terrain of Canada's larger social-public spheres. Yet, however one feels about these incremental changes/movements, one baseline assertion Indigenous peoples continue to make is the need to pluralize this "Indigenous voice"—that is, to recognize the diversity and complexity of Indigenous voices in Canada.

While figures like Sir John A. Macdonald loom over Canadian history, it could also be argued that Louis Riel casts a large shadow over the multiple Indigenous histories in Canada. As more and more Canadians celebrate the various different provincial days dedicated to Louis Riel (Gaudry 66),

more obscure though no less important people are sometimes lost in the narrative of Canada's relation (or lack thereof) to Indigenous peoples. In response to these oversights and the tendency to address colonial elisions by incorporating well-known Indigenous people into the "great men of history" genre, I present here an abridged version of the history of my grandmother and great-grandparents. By putting selections of their life stories into conversation with a small-town archive, I seek to illuminate the everyday apparatuses of settler colonialism, and the sacrifices that Indigenous peoples have had to make in order to survive in spite of them. In the archives of settler nation-states like Canada, Indigenous peoples are often either absent, depicted as ciphers of the real individuals they are meant to represent, or presented as always already disappearing from the landscape. Yet the archives themselves also provide a means to trace how colonial "space is produced and productive," and thereby enable us potentially to "unbury the generative roots of spatial colonization and lay bare its concealed systems" (Goeman 171). This unearthing is one way Indigenous peoples can enact "resurgent histories" (A. Simpson 107) to contest our erasure, assert our presence, and call upon an Indigenous archive of memories, including those held by elders and by the land itself, beyond what settler histories allow.

Methodology

This article is concerned with unsettling and contesting the role of the small-town archive in the production of local knowledges, especially the ways in which these archives conflict with the narratives told by Indigenous elders in surrounding reserve communities. I use the methodologies I have learned in Indigenous studies to reread my grandmother's account of her displacement from the "Swan River Settlement" and from the township that would eventually come to be known as Kinuso, Alberta, in Treaty Eight territory. I present here what Dian Million has referred to as a "felt archive," which offers "a narrative that appeals as a history that can be *felt* as well as intellectualized" and takes "down the barriers between the personal and the political" (59, emphasis original). Million notes that a "felt analysis" honours the complexity of lived experience under colonial conditions (54). Elaborating on the barriers posed to felt analysis, Million writes: "felt scholarship continues to be segregated as a 'feminine' experience, as polemic, or at worst as not knowledge at all" (54). Important to note is the communal or collective aspect of these felt archives, as "[i]t is not just the individual that feels displacement, but also the community, who has lost a connection

and it is for this reason that we must unmap settler spaces and find new ways to (re)map our communities" (Goeman 178-79). Thus, felt analyses help individuals to theorize their own experiences, but they are also produced in conversation with our larger collective cultural contexts (Million 61).

Felt theory puts forth its own archives, which often contest those archives that are constructed according to colonial logics of history, settlement, and knowledge production. Given the conditions of their production, the decolonization of these latter archives may only ever be partial. Thus, this paper follows Indigenous feminists Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd in their suggestion "that rather than decolonise the archives, the application of a decolonial sensibility is necessary to attend to the complex relationships between archives and Indigenous peoples" (n. pag.). A decolonial sensibility, they add, must go "deeper than simply digitising content or hiring Indigenous archivists. It also requires us to question how Indigenous peoples can meaningfully access, and *hold accountable*, the institutions running the nation's archives" (n. pag., emphasis original).

Therefore, in keeping with the work of Fraser and Todd, I situate my grandmother's narrative against local history texts, specifically *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement* (1979), to locate the ways in which familial and colonial histories intersect and are embodied by community members of the Swan River First Nation. My account begins by detailing the life of my great-grandfather, August Sound, and how the policies of the Indian Act affected him and his succeeding relations profoundly. I plot the historical trajectories of my grandmother and great-grandfather to demonstrate how personal archives can illuminate the processes of settler colonialism in detailed and nuanced ways, and how these personal histories can contest the dominant narratives propagated by settler colonial imaginaries. This paper will prioritize the "narrative history" of my grandmother while weaving this oral and experiential knowledge with theoretical and historical texts. The words of my grandmother are taken from an interview I conducted with her in 2011, as well as from many subsequent conversations "at the kitchen table" (Brooks 234).[2] However, because not every conversation at the kitchen table is meant to be shared, I will outline briefly what this project will not do in relation to the archive.

While I am interested in the way that official archives consolidate claims over space in a macropolitical context, this paper will focus predominantly on the specific experience of my grandmother and that of the community from which she comes. Indeed, it is in the micropolitical, everyday realm

where "Indigenous peoples' resistance to colonialism . . . unfold[s] in daily acts of embodying and living Indigeneity, honoring longstanding relationships with the land and with one another" (Hunt and Holmes 157). And as Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes assert, "[w]hile large-scale actions such as rallies, protests, and blockades are frequently acknowledged as sites of resistance, the daily actions undertaken by individual Indigenous people, families, and communities often go unacknowledged but are no less vital to decolonial processes" (157-58). Further, I aim to *show* rather than *tell* of the various ways in which the archive prioritizes particular knowledges and ideas about space and belonging over others. When one writes about the archive, one necessarily and unavoidably creates an archive in the process (via endnotes, footnotes, bibliographies, works cited lists). It is with this in mind that I refer to Sara Ahmed's idea(l) of citational practices, of creating a body of knowledge that does not rest on the laurels of the oft-cited and oft-repeated cadre of theorists. As Ahmed writes, citational practice is a "rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies" (n. pag.). These citational practices form disciplines: "The reproduction of a discipline can be the reproduction of *these techniques of selection*, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part" (Ahmed n. pag., emphasis original). With that said, the archive with which I engage here will be comprised necessarily and intentionally by not only the voices of my ancestors, but also by the voices of historically marginalized peoples akin to, but not necessarily the same as, those same ancestors. And while Gayatri Spivak and others may be skeptical of treating "'concrete experience' as the final arbiter" (168), this project is very much interested in the experiential knowledge of my grandmother and great-grandparents as a viable response to the settler archive—indeed, as archives in and of themselves. As Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson have argued, "elders are professors" (qtd. in Ritskes n. pag.), and I contend that elders are also, in many cases, archives. However, part of my practice of disrupting traditional archives is to raise questions about the ethics of archiving. These questions are particularly pressing when the archive is a living person; the responsibilities here are relational, reciprocal, and informed by positionality and histories that exceed the individual person. Throughout this piece, I have made intentional choices to share particular elements of my family's story and not others, as a means of asserting intellectual sovereignty and honouring my relations.

Historical Context

My grandmother, Helen McRee (née Sound), was born July 13, 1937, at the Swan River Reserve in northern Alberta. Helen was an only child born to August and Louise Sound, who spent most of her early childhood on her family's farmlands located in Swan River. Recalling her earliest memories of her life growing up on the farm, Helen proclaims: "I remember we had horses. My dad put me on a horse and he would walk the horse and I would ride. We had dogs, a couple of dogs, but not too many horses. We had cattle too, and chickens. We used to pick eggs, my mom and I. She used to go milk the cows, and I would go with her" (McRee).[3] In addition to raising cattle, Helen also recounts her father and others "threshing," whereby they would "put bundles [of] wheat or barley into a machine . . . and make grain" (McRee). Describing her fondest memories of her life on the reserve/farm, Helen also recalls that every year "at treaty time" the family would "go riding on a wagon into town," and nearby, Helen would watch her father and mother dance at powwows (McRee). Treaty time, Helen clarifies, was when the members of the reserve/band received their annual allotment of five dollars from the government, and, in the case of her father August, a twenty-five dollar allotment. The Sound family (August, Louise, and their daughter) lived on the farm until Helen reached the age of six years old, at which time she was mandated to leave her home and attend a residential school. However, instead of allowing Helen to be taken away to a residential school, my great-grandfather August and my great-grandmother Louise opted to give up their treaty rights and those of their daughter, leaving the reserve and moving to Kinuso, Alberta—a town adjacent to Swan River First Nation.

According to the small-town archive *Sodbusters: A History of Kinuso and Swan River Settlement* written by Jean Quinn,[4] August Sound was born "on January 10, 1904 in the Kinuso area" of Alberta (60). Kinuso exists as a rural "village and the centre of the Swan River Valley," and its name is "of Cree origin meaning fish" (2). Initially, the Swan River Valley was known as "Wapisew Sepi," but upon the arrival of settlers was renamed to its English translation, "Swan River" (1). August Sound originally served as a headman for his community and then "was a councillor for the Swan River Band," eventually "bec[oming] its first chief in 1936" (61). A year after August became chief of Swan River, his daughter Helen, my grandmother, was born. Detailing August's responsibilities as chief, Quinn, head researcher and editor for the town archive, writes: "As a chief, it was August's duty to distribute food and clothing rations to the people. He organized the hand games and tea dances

for the first of July celebrations. He also held dances at the U.F.A. Hall" (61). August was chief of the Swan River First Nation until 1943, at which time he and Louise left the reserve and relinquished their treaty rights so their daughter would not have to experience the conditions August faced as a child at a nearby residential school—or, put more succinctly, my great-grandparents (in)voluntarily enfranchised themselves in order to preserve their kinship relations.[5]

When my grandmother describes the conditions that her father experienced at residential school, she recollects with palpable disdain that he "had a few stories, like nuns hit[ting] him over the head with a ruler or hit[ting] his hands—they were mean" (McRee). My grandmother calmly added that "children got abused," noting that the residential schools would "take your Cree away" (McRee). Relating the conditions of her family and the duress placed on her father, Helen explains:

> When I turned six [my dad] gave up his treaty rights because, in those years, the commission and the federal government would come and take your kids away as soon as you were six and put you in a mission. My dad did not want me to go to a mission because he was there when he was a kid, and he said it was not for him. He had to give up his rights and move into town. He had to give up his farm, because he could not live on the reserve. (McRee)

Up until August Sound enrolled Helen at the Kinuso public elementary school in 1943, Helen had only spoken Cree, but after her enrolment she "spoke mostly English at home . . . which is why [she] cannot speak Cree now" (McRee). August and Louise Sound predominantly spoke English at home to help facilitate Helen's learning of the language so she would be teased less at school, limiting her contact with the Cree language and, inadvertently and ironically, contributing to the language loss she still mourns.

Oral vs. Written Archives

My grandmother encouraged me to locate an edition of the archival text *Sodbusters* with the idea that it would elucidate further the history of my great-grandparents, and I could potentially corroborate her account with "written evidence." Although *Sodbusters* was commissioned by the community of Kinuso to represent the town and its surrounding populations accurately according to available archives, the many biases as well as absences within the text (whether intentional or not) are salient. Originally established to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Alberta in 1980, *Sodbusters* was produced by a committee featuring members from the area known as the

Swan River Settlement. The credits to *Sodbusters* list researchers, proofreaders, typists, photo editors, co-editors, and the primary editor, Jean Quinn. While the text was intended to celebrate the "accomplishments" of the Kinuso/Swan River Settlement area, it also functions as an archive that consolidates settler claims to the territory and history of the Swan River Valley.

There are many instances throughout the *Sodbusters* archive that naturalize colonization and settlement, including the paratext. In a note before the preface of the book, then MLA, and Minister of Utilities, Larry Shaben writes: "It is not at all surprising that many early Albertans settled in the beautiful Swan River Valley . . . The rich soil, so suitable to the growth of the healthy livestock industry, must have been a welcome sight to the early pioneers who struggled into the North" (n. pag.). Shaben continues,

> In today's era of modern conveniences and plenty, it is only proper that we reflect upon the hardships endured by the pioneers in building this land of ours. To the writers and the contributors to this volume, I extend congratulations for recognizing the outstanding achievements of those who helped pave the way for a better life for future generations. (n. pag.)

Unsurprisingly, and in keeping with the rest of the text, Shaben omits the long histories of violence that subtend these histories of boosterish "settlement." Additionally, the pronoun "ours" reaffirms the sense of ownership and property extending from hearty pioneers to the current white settlers of the Kinuso township. Primary archivist Quinn echoes Shaben's rhetoric of "taming the North," writing in the preface: "This book is dedicated to the early enterprising pioneers and their families. Through their untiring efforts, united with community spirit and co-operation, they battled the elements with a minimum of essentials . . . We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the many people who have recorded and preserved our past, honoring our forefathers and pioneers" (n. pag.).

As Daniel Coleman has remarked, the imagery of rugged (predominantly male) Canadians braving the elements and settling the North has a long history in a variety of Canadian texts, from popular literature to everyday items such as brochures (24). At work in this rhetoric of the "rugged" pioneer are echoes of R. G. Haliburton's assertion that the men of the north are "a hardy, a healthy, a virtuous, a daring, and a dominant race" (103). Implicit in Haliburton's statement is the ascription of "men of the north" to a race that is predominantly white. Since the men of the north are not discouraged in the face of harsh temperatures, the pioneer's hard-fought struggle to remain on cold "deserted" land works to legitimize the dispossession of Indigenous

others. Nicholas Blomley notes "the importance of settler stories . . . as self-justifying accounts, told by a colonial people" (115). Although it may be easy to dismiss works like Haliburton's "The Men of the North and Their Place in History" as racist rhetoric, it is worth investigating how the language of *Sodbusters* echoes the narratives of settler dominance that such writers employ. *Sodbusters* repeatedly exalts "the years of great expansion" by settlers into the Swan River Valley, and the ambition of "white settlers in seeking virgin lands of gold and furs" (Quinn 80). The resulting mythic history naturalizes an ideal of Canada as yielding "an abundance of free land," whereupon the attributes of "hardness, strenuousness, endurance . . . so vital to dominance" could be developed and perpetuated into the future (Berger 18). When *Sodbusters* does provide minimal space for Indigenous peoples and histories, the information is often insufficient, inaccurate, or, at best, truncated. For example, while chapter 2 is written primarily on "Pioneers," it is preceded by the (oxymoronically named) prelude entitled "Early Native Pioneers with No Recorded History." This brief section comprises one page and includes nine names listed at the bottom, a brief reprieve before the eighty pages of (white) pioneer history that follow in the chapter.

Depicting Cree ceremonial habits and customs such as the "Tea Dance," *Sodbusters* reads:

> They will build a large bonfire and hang a pail of tea and water on to brew; this is kept on all night. To one side of the fire, two and sometimes three, or even four Indian men, will sit and play the drums. Anyone wishing to dance will form a circle around the fire and do a sort of side shuffle, all the while singing a kind of crooning song. It sounds like the wind blowing through the trees. [We] used to think there were no words to the singing, but there are "Cree" words especially for funerals when they bury their dead, and, at their marriages. (339)

The use of the pronoun "they" establishes a hierarchical settler-Indigenous dichotomy in the text that persists throughout the book. While the text purports to include the broader community of the Swan River First Nation and Kinuso settlement, the many Cree families are routinely referred to as "they" in the text, in a sense designating them as out of place and naturalizing the space as one of white settlement—a space hospitable to the mostly white "we" occupying the Kinuso township. In effect, *Sodbusters* takes on an almost ethnographic style when discussing Cree people: "When anyone gets tired of dancing, they slide out of the circle of dancers and drink tea from the 'cup of friendship' that others have used, and more dancers will join the circle. The very old people who are too old to dance will sit

on the side lines around the fire also drinking 'tea' and smoking their pipes 'of peace' . . . As the years go by, one seldom hears the sound of the drums and the enchanting voices of the 'Indians' singing" (339). The forlorn tone of this passage highlights the imagined inevitability of the disappearance of Indigenous peoples—here an abstraction, but in real terms my community—while obfuscating the role of settler violence in provoking the supposed vanishing of these "enchanting voices" (339). Inexplicably, the section from which these passages are taken ends with the subheading "Joke" and is followed by what must have been, to the writer, a homey, well-worn lark. This does not, however, blunt its obvious racism or the fact that it undercuts the preceding expression of sadness at seeing Indigenous peoples disappear: "When the white men first put up telephone wires across the country, the Indians said, 'White man fool, cows go under fence'" (339). Aside from the prolonged engagement with "The Tea Dance," explicit references to Indigeneity in *Sodbusters* are few and far between, with one of the only other examples being the shockingly curt declaration, "In 1918, the flue [*sic*] epidemic took approximately half the Indian population" (Quinn 2), which is left unelaborated as the text moves on to other matters. The passivity of the sentence, which isolates influenza as the main cause of Indigenous material and social death, and which fails to register the role of settlement in bringing disease or the likely maldistribution of health resources, functions to naturalize Indigenous disappearance, a central yet unacknowledged theme throughout the text.

The account given of August Sound in *Sodbusters* states that he held the position of chief for "10 years," and thereafter "August quit Treaty in 1946" (Quinn 61). The colonial conditions surrounding August's relinquishment of "Treaty" are not mentioned at all, and he is described as simply "mov[ing] to Assineau, [a small town in Alberta], and work[ing] on the railroad" (Quinn 61). This account, however, exists in opposition to the oral account provided by my grandmother, wherein she dates August's (and Louise's) departure from the reserve to 1943, the year she would have been forced by law to attend residential school.[6] The text also provides no mention of the residential schools in the area and yet has an entire chapter devoted to the Kinuso public elementary, thereby ignoring a large population of peoples it purports to represent (Quinn 87).[7] Numerous members of the Swan River First Nation attended one of the nearby residential schools in northern Alberta, predominantly in Grouard, Joussard, or Lesser Slave Lake. The omission of residential schools serves the text's projection of a white washed

history of the Swan River and Kinuso settlements and Treaty 8 area more broadly. Although the text was funded in an attempt to provide evidence of the accomplishments of the families and businesses within the Kinuso area, the lack (or distortion) of Indigenous representation reproduces colonial narratives that naturalize settler presence and Indigenous erasure.

Furthermore, the mislabelled photographs throughout *Sodbusters* and the inaccurate attendant annotations make clear the instability of the written archive, while attesting to the value of oral histories provided by people like my grandmother. In one photograph, dated 1939, my grandmother is pictured next to a log cabin with her mother, Louise, and their dog Sport (Quinn 61). I showed this photograph to my grandmother and she verified the "log house" in the picture as the farmhouse in which she grew up. However, in another photograph of a young Indigenous girl standing next to an older, non-Indigenous man, my grandmother is identified alongside "Father Kinderwater"; this photograph is dated as 1938, which would make my grandmother one year old in the picture (Quinn 81), and yet the child in the picture is clearly much older than that. When I showed this to my grandmother, she stated that the person in the photograph resembles one of the girls with whom she grew up. In this instance, the ability of Indigenous bodies, especially girls' bodies, to be read as so similar as to be substitutable for one another is troubling, and mirrors broader issues of the replaceability of Indigenous bodies in colonial texts and environments. The inaccuracy of *Sodbusters* as Kinuso's primary archival text is displayed again in its representation of my great-grandfather, August. In one photograph, dated 1946, an Indigenous man identified as August is shown with a few horses. My great-grandfather, however, lost his farmlands in 1943 when he (in)voluntarily enfranchised, which suggests that the purported date of the picture is incorrect.

I am not arguing that the contributors and editors of *Sodbusters* intentionally "distorted" the history of my great-grandparents and grandmother, but rather that they did not treat this area of history (i.e., of the first chief of the Swan River First Nation) with the due diligence and respect that it deserves. Further, the presence of my great-grandmother Louise in the text is marginal, and she is only referenced in her proximity to August and her father.[8] More to the point, these mistakes are symptomatic of the way Canadian institutions treat Indigenous peoples and handle Indigenous histories and knowledges more broadly. The multiple inaccuracies in the written archival text highlight the importance of oral histories, not only

as alternatives to the inconsistencies in the narratives settlers often tell of themselves, but also as valuable historical texts that make claims to spaces of belonging that assert long-held notions of Indigenous community.

"Small Gifts Of Wisdom": Agency, Voice, Refusal

The emerging recognition of the necessity of addressing the past and present of settler colonialism in Canada involves multiple complexities and contradictions. Because different kinds of conversations—"unsettling" conversations—must occur if any shift in the colonial relation is to take place, questions about "how" and "on whose terms" become extremely important (Eigenbrod 17). Before anything else, my grandmother's story is a gift that nurtures the health of our kinship relations, extending to our ancestors, our living relatives, and our relatives yet to come. As Leanne Simpson states, stories are "small gifts of wisdom, but they only have power if the ones that hear those stories, embody them and act" ("RBC Taylor" n. pag.). To be a good relation, one does not treat such gifts lightly.[9] Treating stories as gifts also means confronting the danger that our stories will be used against us, whether through whitewashed incorporation of representations of Indigenous peoples back into settler narratives, or through a re-enactment of dehumanization at the very moment that historical violence is revealed. These tendencies have led critics like Audra Simpson to advocate the need for Indigenous peoples to consciously engage in moments of "ethnographic refusal" (95), or what Saidiya Hartman has referred to as "narrative restraint" (14), when revisiting the archive with the intention of composing a counter-historical project. It is clear that efforts to share Indigenous stories with broader audiences come with both risk and possibility, and it is my ongoing responsibility to negotiate this challenge in a "good" way (L. Simpson 20).

Settlement, in the archive, is often presented as something that is always already coming into being, just as Indigenous peoples are often presented as always already disappearing. I have shared these particular excerpts of my grandmother's story first and foremost as a means to honour that story and to assert our family's presence and our ancestral and ongoing kinship ties to the land that is currently known as Swan River. In the process, her story offers an important interruption of the idea that settlement is complete, contesting the often taken-for-granted authority of the official archive. Beyond simply contesting the accuracy of dates and names, and pointing to the tactical absence of Indigenous peoples, this story leads

to larger questions about the social function of archives in settler states. Historical accounts often purport to document events as they unfold linearly through time and space. This tendency projects an inevitability, a history of the present that could not have been any other way, foreclosing a critical examination of colonialism as an active and ongoing project. As Fraser and Todd suggest, when "Indigenous people are present in historical records, they are often depicted as passive bystanders, rarely free agents in their own right and far removed from narratives that highlight agency or sophistication" (n. pag.). Indeed, in the narrative of the *Sodbusters* text, there is no place for a complex or nuanced account of my great-grandparents and the difficult choices they made in an effort to preserve kinship relations and protect their daughter from the harms of residential schooling. Yet, as my grandmother's story about her father and mother attests, they acted within the small space of possibility circumscribed by the colonial state.

Is my great-grandparents' choice an example of "agency" within a circumscribed grammar or language, an act akin to what Million describes as the movements made by our loved ones to avoid "those states that consumed them" (Million 76)? Or do we need a new vocabulary that can properly attend to lived Indigenous histories of resistance under colonization? How might my great-grandparents' decision to take extreme measures in the face of violent colonial conditions teach us something about the strength of Indigenous peoples' commitment to "keep the fire" of our kinship relations (Justice 2)? Any effort to find definitive answers to these questions will likely be met with frustration, yet even the ability to ask them opens up alternative readings of history that in turn create the possibility of alternative futures and decolonial horizons.

Cultivating Decolonial Sensibilities

By identifying the inaccuracies and elisions in the official archive of Kinuso history, I have sought in this paper to document what Dwayne Donald calls an Indigenous "pentimento," whereby "Indigenous history and memory begins to show through in the 'official' history of Canada" ("Edmonton" 23). This Indigenous history and memory has been presented as a "felt analysis," one that is routinely dismissed as too subjective for the empirical expectations of academia. Million elaborates:

> academia repetitively produces gatekeepers to [Indigenous women's] entry into important social discourses because we feel our histories as well as think them. How is it that our oral traditions and our literary and historical voices are

> suppressed? What are the arguments that have been used to reduce what we say to the margins of public and academic discourse in the United States and Canada? Our voices are still positioned in a particular way, definitely reminiscent of the past silences we know so well, contingent to our colonized position now. (54)

A felt analysis can be one way to depict what Hartman notes as "a history of the present [that] strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past" (4). As I have hoped to make apparent with my grandmother's story, our nows are always interrupted by the peoples and places that precede us. These disruptions lead to knowledges inflected by and produced through feeling and experience of an understanding that exceeds the parameters of the state-sanctioned stories that are continually told and retold to naturalize the settler nation-state.

What I have offered is one history of a marginalized chief and, perhaps more importantly, an awareness of the often neglected traumas and turmoil engendered by residential schools and displacement. I am taken back to the resonant phrase uttered by my grandmother: they would "take my Cree away." In this story, there are multiple instances in which Indigenous people were at risk of having their Cree language taken away, including both through forced enrolment in residential schools where speaking Indigenous languages was forbidden and through the ironic loss of Cree through the attempt to adapt to and ultimately survive in the dominant (settler) culture. And we can identify a triple loss as the small-town settler archive proves unable (or unwilling) to tell the history that it purports to know and once again erases a family and a larger cultural history. If we consider the complexity of this one simple story, it is staggering to imagine just how many erasures are at work in other stories across Canada and Turtle Island more broadly.[10]

Importantly, Indigenous peoples' recounting of our own histories demonstrates "our ability to speak to ourselves, to inform ourselves and our generations, to counter and intervene in a constantly morphing colonial system" (Million 54). "To 'decolonize,'" Million continues, "means to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times" (54-55). Although my grandmother was fortunate enough to avoid attending residential school, the effects of the near-destruction of her and her parents' culture still manifest themselves in the lives of her children and grandchildren. As Jim Silver succinctly states, the "residential school experience is intergenerational and pervasive" (22). The stories of Helen's

children's and grandchildren's lives, however, are not my stories to share, and are instances when narrative restraint and processes of refusal are at their most necessary. And while I believe the narrative of my grandmother and great-grandparents is important to tell, it is also necessary to recognize that "[n]o situation is 'innocent' of a violence of form, if not content, in narrating a history or a present for ourselves" (A. Simpson 99). To return to Million, routinely "[w]omen and men who cho[o]se to speak their experience often revea[l] social distress that has been equated with individual pathology. The mainstream white society read[s] Native stories through thick pathology narratives" (Million 56). Eve Tuck points out that mainstream narratives of Indigenous peoples tend to be "damage-centred," framing Indigenous communities "as sites of disinvestment and dispossession . . . saturated in the fantasies of outsiders" (412). In response to this, the assertion of a "communal memory," Goeman notes, "[is] necessary to escape the trap of colonialism as 'tragic figures'" (186). In the telling of these narratives we must resist the narrativization that results in tragic figures, characterizations that paint a reductive view of history and obscure the historical resistances and present vibrancy of Indigenous communities. In this way, we are able to "begin shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity" (Tuck 422).

I used the term (in)voluntary enfranchisement above to characterize August and Louise's effort to preserve kinship relations through refusal of the formal mechanisms of colonial recognition that would have required Helen's enrolment in a residential school. This decision, no doubt a difficult one, was not made in abstraction, but rather as an act of Indigenous resistance and reaffirmation in the context of an impossible colonial imposition. Hoping to maintain ties to their daughter, August and Louise Sound gave up what little material wealth they had, contested the colonial authority of the state, and invested in the ongoing practice of Cree kinship relations, even though this meant leaving their territory and moving to the growing municipality of Kinuso and eventually Edmonton.

Thus, against a settler imaginary in which Indigenous peoples who move to the city sever all ties with their land, extended family, communities, and ultimately, their Indigeneity, August and Louise's mobility was actually a reaffirmation of their Cree relations and responsibilities. Indeed, Indigenous peoples' personal and familial migration has often been motivated by the desire to affirm sovereignty, agency, and traditional land relations. As Daniel Justice writes, "Kinship, like Fire, is about life and living; it's not

about something that is in itself so much as something we do—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully" (3). August and Louise sought to preserve this fire in the face of colonial efforts to extinguish it.

Coda: Canada #150

Difficult narratives prompt Hartman to ask: "What are the stories one tells in dark times? How can a narrative of defeat enable a place for the living or envision an alternative future?" (14). I have worked to transcribe the trajectory of my family's history as a means to honour my grandmother and our other relations. I consider it part of this work to counter the dominant narratives of state- and civic-sponsored archives and chart new ways forward by presenting alternative stories. As Jo-Ann Episkenew notes, "Everyday stories . . . have transformative powers, but they must first implicate the audience before transformation can occur" (15). It is not lost on me that the onus for unsettling colonial narratives is often placed on Indigenous peoples. It is far less common for settlers to offer an account of how they and their families actively engaged in and benefited from processes of displacement and settlement, or to consider their own place in the Indigenous stories they have heard. This results in an uneven distribution of labour in the process of transformation—intellectual, affective, and political.

In particular, Indigenous peoples are often expected to perform for settler audiences a rehearsal of their own traumas in ways that can be comfortably consumed and incorporated into existing Canadian national myths. When Indigenous stories are not packaged in this way, settlers often respond defensively or dismissively, unable to grapple with the destabilization of those myths, and unable to conceptualize what might be crafted in their place. My primary intention with this piece is not for my family history to "correct" an existing archive, but rather to sketch the porous boundaries where family histories and colonial narratives converge, to demonstrate the limitations of existing settler archives, and to point to the immensity—but also the importance—of the challenge of "rereading, reframing, and reimagining" relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Donald, "Forts" 5). Such work cannot be reduced to a protocol for reading settler archives or a scholarly practice for engaging Indigenous narratives, but rather requires a sustained and situated ethical and political commitment to "uproot settler maps that drive our everyday materialities and realities" (Goeman 170).
To return to the editorial introduction to *Canadian Literature*'s "Indigenous Focus" special issue, Fee quotes Thomas King's well-known phrase about the

necessity and circulation of stories: "Take it. [The story is] yours. Do with it what you will. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (qtd. in Fee 10). And while I must adamantly refuse that anyone come to call the specific story of my grandmother and great-grandparents their own, it is necessary to recognize how this one story is emblematic of the larger narrative of Canada, a narrative wherein settlers become great "pioneers," and Indigenous people ghosts.

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NOTES

1 Nikîkîwân translates to "I went home" in Cree.
2 According to Lisa Brooks, the kitchen table is a space where "ideas are exchanged" and "where all the stories are made" (231). For more on the metaphor of the kitchen table see Brooks' afterword to *American Indian Literary Nationalism* titled "At the Gathering Place." See also David Gaertner's book review in *Canadian Literature* entitled "Reconciliation at the Kitchen Table."
3 The responses provided by Helen McRee have not been altered in any way, and were edited neither for content nor grammatical issues (except in cases where it would help make her narrative less ambiguous).
4 Like many archives, *Sodbusters* itself is an archive as well as a narrative produced through multiple different archives. The important point is that *Sodbusters* presents itself as a "history" comprised of, and consolidated by, predominantly settler archival materials.
5 Daniel Justice describes kinship as a "web of . . . rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually-affecting relationships" (6). Kinship emphasizes relationships to land as living relations (i.e., not property), to whom responsibilities are maintained even as colonialism tries to sever them. I would like to thank Tasha Hubbard for helping me to think of my great-grandparents' actions in these terms (i.e., [in]voluntary enfranchisement).
6 This assertion is buoyed by the fact that my great-grandfather's name also vanishes from Treaty Annuity Paylists at this time.
7 This is not to say that there were no "critiques" in the *Sodbusters* archive. In a long section, "submitted by" Cheryl Sheldon and Ruby Sound entitled "The Cree," a more or less conventional description of Cree cultural practices is provided (Quinn 2). Yet, in brief moments, Sheldon and Sound provide sentences that clash with the overarching narrative of the Swan River Settlement. After describing the "traditional" lifestyle(s) and practices of the Cree, Sheldon and Sound end the description as follows: "Today the children of the hunting Cree have two lives to live. Their home is oriented to hunting, trapping and fishing while they go to school in a white urban center. It is hard for them to continue the two and it has caused many problems for them. This is heightened by the fact that many attend boarding schools." This mention of "boarding schools" is the only direct reference to

residential schools in the entire text, despite the *Sodbusters* book having an entire chapter on "Schools" (Quinn 87). Further, Sheldon and Sound, after describing the Treaty (Eight) processes of the area, proceed to write that "[s]ince the Treaty was signed, the hunting and fishing rights have been curtailed by the government. Also the government is trying to do away with the other rights and promises that were set out in the Treaty" (Quinn 8).

8 The absence of my great-grandmother Louise throughout the text is worthy of a paper in and of itself, given its gendered, political, and historical implications.

9 And there are certain protocols around when, where, and with whom one may share such stories. These protocols far exceed the requirements imposed by university ethics committees, or disciplinary practice.

10 I am reminded here of a similar story provided by Rachel Flowers in her article "Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage," wherein she writes: "My mother grew up in the city after my grandmother took her kids off the reserve and hid them from being taken to residential schools" (46). The examples of these seemingly ordinary acts of resistance to oppressing colonial conditions are potentially limitless.

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