

# **JAMES A. TEIT: HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CANADIAN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY**

WENDY C. WICKWIRE,  
Department of Social and  
Educational Studies,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, British Columbia,  
Canada, V6R 1J5.

## **ABSTRACT/RESUME**

James A. Teit is well-known for his many contributions to the ethnography of the British Columbia interior Indians published between 1896 and 1930. Few are aware, however, of his very extensive collections of music recordings from these same people. Now housed primarily in Ottawa, these cylinders are complemented by detailed notes providing rich background material to this valuable collection.

James A. Teit est bien connu pour ses nombreux articles publiés entre 1896 et 1930 sur l'ethnographie des autochtones de l'intérieur de la Colombie britannique. Mais très peu de gens connaissent, cependant, ses vastes collections de musique enregistrée de ces mêmes autochtones. Gardés maintenant principalement à Ottawa, ces cylindres sont parachevés par des notes détaillées qui fournissent du matériel magnifique de l'arrièreplan à cette collection de valeur.

The Indians have found in you their best friend, and your anthropological work, by reason of its accuracy and reliability, has given you a world-wide reputation which many of us would be proud to possess. Your visits to Ottawa have always been a great delight to Sapir and Barbeau, and to myself... There is no one whom we hold in more honor and respect.

Diamond Jenness, Letter to  
J.A. Teit, 6 April 1921

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Few individuals in the annals of Canadian anthropology have contributed more than James A. Teit. His ethnographies of the Thompson (Nlaka'pamux), Shuswap, Lillooet, and Okanagan Indians of British Columbia (Teit, 1900; 1906; 1909; 1930), and his monographs on Thompson ethnobotany (Steedman, 1930) and coiled basketry (Haeberlin, Teit and Roberts, 1928) are considered classics. Never part of the anthropological "establishment", however, Teit's name is still not well-known. Indeed, his full life-story has never been told.<sup>2</sup>

From 1897 until 1921, a year before his death, Teit recorded hundreds of Native songs on wax-cylinders. Much of this work was done while under contract with the Geological Survey of Canada and is today part of the permanent collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. These cylinders and their accompanying fieldnotes are little known, despite their great value as an archival resource.

It is the object of this paper to sketch the life-history of Teit showing how particular events and meetings led to his in-depth field research on songs. The paper provides a rough inventory of the Teit song-collection but does not give a content analysis of the field notes and the songs.

## Jimmy Tait: The Shetlander

James Alexander Tait was born on April 15th, 1864 in the small fishing port of Lerwick, on Mainland, the largest of the Shetland Islands north of Scotland. He was the eldest of twelve children (of whom eight lived beyond infancy) born to John Tait and Elizabeth Murray. As a general store proprietor on an island where the main source of livelihood was fishing and raising ponies and dwarf sheep, John Tait was considered well-off (Banks, 1970:40-41).

Little has been recorded about the childhood years of Jimmy Tait. Peter Jamieson, a Shetlander who, in the 1950's, conducted research on Tait, was told that he "was a quiet reserved boy...with great stores of physical and mental energies" (Jamieson, n.d.). He probably attended the Anderson Educational Institute (the only high

school in Lerwick), which, according to Jamieson, has always had an excellent record for turning out good scholars. He remained in school until the age of sixteen, which was several years longer than for most Shetlanders (Jamieson, n.d.). After leaving school, the young Jimmy worked in his father's shop. His son Sigurd believes that he also worked as a fisherman on the North Sea for a while (Banks, 1970:41).

Sometime during these latter years, a letter arrived at the Tait home from an uncle, John Murray, the contents of which would change the course of the young Jimmy's life. John Murray (Elizabeth Tait's brother) had left Scotland for Canada in 1854. By 1859 he had settled at Spence's Bridge on the Thompson River where he owned and operated a general store. Finding himself unmarried and without any heirs, John Murray wrote to his Shetland relatives asking if there were any children there interested in taking over the business. The idea appealed to Jimmy even though it required that he sign over his legal birthright to his brother (Banks, 1970:42-43). He loved his Shetland home, and, as a letter written later in his life reveals, he left because he saw no future there for himself: "I am still a strong lover of Shetland...but there is so little chance there for a man to do anything outside of two or three lines which of course are not suitable to us all" (Teit, 1903).

By the winter of 1883, at the age of nineteen, Teit was on board a ship bound for Canada. After at least one train stop in February of 1884 in Chicago to visit relatives, he finally arrived in March of 1884, at the tiny village of Spence's Bridge (Banks, 1970:43).

## **Jimmy Tait: The British Columbian**

There is little documentation on Tait's first years in Spence's Bridge. According to his daughter Inga Teit Perkin, the old Uncle John had given so much away by the time he died that he had little left to bequeath his young nephew. So Jimmy did not, as he had hoped, inherit a thriving family business (Banks, 1970:46). It seems, however, that he did work for his uncle for a while (Ibid.).

We do know for certain that by 1887 and 1888, just three years after his arrival in British Columbia, he was already engaged in hunting and exploring expeditions into Carrier Indian country as far north as Stuart Lake (Teit, 1909:447).

The first official information on Tait appears in the Yale Register of Marriages on September 12th, 1892, where it is noted that James Alexander "Teit" was married to Susannah Lucy Antko in Spence's Bridge. Archdeacon Richard Small of Lytton performed the ceremony (Banks, 1970:45; Grønneberg, 1978:30).

Teit's bride was part of the Spence's Bridge Band, a division of the Nlaka'pamux tribe, which extends from Ashcroft, on the Thompson River, up through the Nicola Valley and along the Fraser River from Spuzzum to Lytton. Little has been written about Lucy Antko

other than that she died childless of pneumonia on March 2nd, 1899, less than seven years after her marriage to Teit (Banks, 1970:45).

It was upon his arrival in Canada that Teit changed the spelling of his name. The subject of genealogy fascinated him, so much so that in his early years he had traced his own family roots back to a Jan "Teit" of Norwegian descent, who had settled on the small Shetland island of Fetlar in the twelfth century (Jamieson, 1960:18).

He explained his reasons for the change of spelling in a letter to his Uncle Robert in New Zealand as follows:

It is the real old original and proper way of spelling the name and is thus spelled in the Icelandic and Norwegian sagas hundreds of years ago, and Scandinavian scholars all accepted and maintained that way as correct. As soon as I was satisfied in every way that it was right, I changed to the old way, and have now signed my name that way for the last twenty years (Teit, 1905).

He was always interested in the ties between Norway and the Shetlands. He and his brothers had made several trips to Norway prior to his emigration to Canada. On a return visit to see his family in 1902, he made a point of again visiting Norway. He corresponded in Norwegian with the Shetland poet, Haldane Burgess (Grönneberg, 1978:26). He also corresponded with the Norwegian philologist, Jacob Jakobsen (Teit, 1989). When he married in 1904 and had five children, he gave them each Scandinavian names.

### **Teit: The Anthropologist**

To most immigrants in the 1880's, British Columbia was a land of plenty. There was open arable country and new towns and cities in search of industry. That whole cultures were being besieged to make room for the newcomers was hardly visible to most.

The village of Spence's Bridge had been particularly hard hit. Once a main settlement of the Nlaka'pamux Indians, it had been battered by a series of events which had reduced it to a mere skeleton of its former self. Not only had it been situated on the path of the Gold Rush of 1858, but it had also been ravaged by smallpox during the huge epidemic of 1862. Still reeling from both of these, it then became the site of two major railroad construction projects — first the Canadian Pacific Railway line in the 1880's, and later the Canadian Northern Railway. Christian missionization had just begun, and residential schools were being established at Kamloops, on the Thompson River, some miles upstream, and at Lytton, just downstream.

Teit travelled and hunted with his Native neighbors and learned much about them and their problems. Through his marriage to Lucy Antko, he gained even deeper access to the culture of the Nlaka'pamux people. He understood their suffering in a way that most non-

Indians of his day did not, as one of his early observations reveals:

The belief that they are doomed to extinction seems to have a depressing effect on some of the Indians. At almost any gathering where chiefs of leading men speak, this sad, haunting belief is sure to be referred to (1900:178).

One of the few surviving letters from Teit's early life indicates that his quest to understand the ways of the interior Native peoples was already well underway by 1893. Having found "it very difficult to obtain any books or essays on the Indian tribes of this country by reliable authorities," Teit had written to Father A.G. Morice, a Roman Catholic priest and scholar who was well-known for his anthropological and linguistic writings on the Carrier Indians of central British Columbia (Teit, 1893). Morice had in return sent Teit an essay of his own on Carrier sociology and mythology. Teit was grateful for this gesture: "I cannot thank you too much for your favour. I have read it several times over with both profit and pleasure..." (Ibid).

Less than a year after this correspondence, Teit had a meeting with Franz Boas, which would set the course of his life for the next twenty-five years. The meeting was not planned. Boas was conducting research in physical anthropology, for which he required body measurements of Native people from various areas. As a total stranger, he often found people reluctant to participate in his study. By the time he got to Spence's Bridge, Boas was feeling discouraged by his slow progress. At this stage he was directed to Teit. As he described it in a letter home:

I left the train at Spence's Bridge, which is a little dump of three or four houses and a hotel right at the station...In the morning...I went to see a man, a Salvation Army warrior and big farmer, and is supposed to know the Indians very well. He sent me to another young man, who lives three miles up the mountain and who is married to an Indian...I finally found the house, where he lives with a number of Indians...The young man, James Teit, is a treasure! He knows a great deal about the tribes. I engaged him right away (Rohner, 1969:139).

Immediately Boas recognized in Teit a rich reservoir of knowledge and urged him to begin systematically writing it down. In a letter written one month after this meeting, it is clear that a formal collaboration had been agreed upon by the two men: "Mr. Teit...promised in his letter to send me a description of the tribes along the Thompson River" (Rohner, 1969:162).

Boas made a return visit to Spence's Bridge later that fall and after travelling and working with Teit, he wrote to his wife that:

My informant is a very nice man. He comes from the Shetland Islands and has bummed around here a lot in all kinds of capacities. He is very much interested in the Indians and is writing a report for me about this tribe which will be very good, I hope. He will also make a collection for me. His name is James Teit (Rohner 1969:196).

Teit's first publication was a three-page essay on a pictograph panel located in the Spence's Bridge area. Entitled, "A Rock Painting of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia", it was published in the *American Museum of Natural History Bulletin* #8, in 1896 (Teit, 1896). The main bulk of this initial work for Boas, however, was the publication in 1898 of a large collection of Nlaka'pamux stories. With an introduction by Boas, it was published as a *Memoir of the American Folk-Lore Society* (Teit, 1898).

The two men met again in Spence's Bridge in early June of 1897. This time, with funding from Dr. Morris K. Jessup, President of the American Museum of Natural History, the plan was for Boas and Teit to travel together across Chilcotin country as far as Bella Coola on the west coast by pack horse visiting Native villages along the way. Livingston Farrand, a psychologist and colleague at Columbia University, was also to accompany them on the trip. Teit's role was not only to act as a guide, but to assist Boas in his work of making plaster of paris casts of various body features, taking photographs and recording songs. This trip was probably an extremely valuable one for both men. For Teit it was an opportunity to see how the trained anthropologists of the day conducted their work. For Boas, it was an opportunity to travel through the bush with a skilled outdoorsman and also an opportunity to observe Teit's easy and effective manner of interaction with Native people.

### **Song-Collecting: 1897, Spence's Bridge**

Boas, Teit, Farrand, and Harlan Smith (the last was with the group only as far as Kamloops), spent a couple of days at Spence's Bridge prior to setting off on their trip. On June 6th, while Farrand and Smith were preparing plaster casts for shipping, Boas and Teit went to the village with Boas' Edison wax-cylinder machine and began recording songs. In this first session they recorded ten songs. It was a session which excited Boas, as one of his letters reveals:

While they sang they acted out all their old stories and ceremonies. An old woman sang the song into the phonograph which serves to "cleanse" women who had borne twins. She took bundles of fir branches and hit her shoulders and breasts with them while she danced. The song imitates the growl of the grizzly bear because they

believe that the children derive from the grizzly bear. An old man sang an old religious song to the sun, a prayer. The gestures were very expressive. He raised his hands up high and looked at the sun. Then he lowered them slowly, pressing them against his chest while he looked down again. The singing was a great deal of fun for the villagers. Some of the people were bashful, especially the women, who did not want to sing until all the men had left (Rohner, 1969:203-204).

Other recording sessions followed, because Teit and Boas together collected a total of forty-five cylinder recordings in June, 1897 at Spence's Bridge. Boas made notes of only the cylinder number, the tribal affiliation ("Thompson Indians"), the type of song ("Dancing song, lehal song, religious song" etc.), the place of recording ("Spence's Bridge"), and the recorder ("F. Boas")(Boas, 1897). By way of contrast, Teit made note of the Native names of the singers ("Kax-pitsa", "Antko", etc.), the Native names of the song-types ("s'tlae eski" — dance song, etc., and incidental material such as the flexibility of the words used in the songs)(Teit, n.d.). The key participants in this were four women, one of whom was Lucy Antko, Teit's own wife. Without her, one can only wonder how successful the recording session might have been, particularly given Boas' comment in his letter that the women were reluctant to sing in the presence of men. And yet Teit and Boas were both men, the latter, a *strange* man.

Boas sent the cylinders to Berlin to be transcribed by Eric von Hornbostel, a scholar of comparative musicology. As recording technology for use in anthropological field research was then less than a decade old, such a field collection was highly valued. In Berlin a small group of scholars with musicological, mathematical and psychological interests were eager to catalogue and analyze the newly recorded sounds sent to them from the far corners of the globe. Von Hornbostel worked on the Spence's Bridge collection and in 1906 published jointly with his colleague Otto Abraham an academic article, "Phonographierte Indianermelodien aus Britisch Columbia" describing the internal structure of the sounds and rhythms captured on the cylinders (Abraham and von Hornbostel, 1975). Only Boas' information was used in the article. Hence, no cultural contextual information was included in the analysis; nor were any of the singers' names mentioned. Only the English names of the song-types were given.

This 1897 collection belongs to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, but is housed at the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University. Of the 40 cylinders received by them, only 24 are playable, the rest having been subject to damage over the years (Gillis, 1980).

The year 1900 saw the publication of Teit's first major ethnography, "The Thompson Indians of British Columbia", edited by Franz Boas and published by the American Museum of Natural History

(Teit, 1900). Boas included in it a chapter entitled "Art", in which there are several pages on music. The material for the latter was probably gathered at Spence's Bridge during that month of June, 1987.

### **Teit: The Political Activist**

In January of 1902, Teit made his first trip home to the Shetlands to visit his family. It had been almost twenty years since he had left. He spent about three months in the Shetlands, but he also travelled to Norway, Scotland and England.

In one letter written to the Shetland poet Haldane Burgess soon after his return to Spence's Bridge in 1902, there is mention of socialism. Teit writes, "Recently I have read many socialist books by American and German authors and now I understand better what socialism is and what good news it has for people" (Grønneberg, 1978:28). His comments made later in the same letter suggest that this new interest was sparked in the Shetlands:

Why don't Robertson, Pottinger and other socialists in Lerwick or Shetland form a club and go in for propagandist work? It would not cost much and could be run in the same way as in this country. It would be a factor for spreading the light, and they might eventually do more real benefit than the "brolin" of all the "upstanders" in Shetland. It is wonderful the progress socialism had made in America within the last 12 months or so (Grønneberg, 1978:29).

Immediately upon his return to British Columbia, Teit began to make contributions to a semi-weekly newspaper published in Vancouver, "The Canadian Socialist". By November 1902, he had become a member of the Socialist Party of British Columbia, soliciting new members as he travelled throughout the province. On this note, in the April 10th, 1903 issue of "The Western Socialist", it was reported that "Comrade Teit is a hustler" (Banks, 1970:54).

During this period there was a great deal of political unrest among the Native groups in southern British Columbia due to increased pressures by White settlers and too many restrictions placed on fishing and hunting. In 1903, according to Teit, some of the Interior tribes began to organize to deal with these issues. By 1906, these groups joined with the Cowichan people on the coast to send a delegation of three to England to discuss their concerns with King Edward VII. By 1909, as Teit explained it:

the Interior tribes insisted upon my attending their meetings and helping them with their writing. Thus I commenced to act as their secretary and treasurer (Teit, 1920a).



Teit was at the center of the controversy, often holding meetings to draft petitions at his own home in Spence's Bridge. Letters written in Teit's hand were sent to government representatives in Victoria and Ottawa. On August 4th and 5th, 1910, according to his own personal journal, Teit wrote the statement which was delivered by a delegation of Native Chiefs to Sir Wilfred Laurier, Premier of the Dominion of Canada on August 25th, 1910 upon his visit to Kamloops. Teit was not present in Kamloops on that day as he was guiding a hunting expedition in Telegraph Creek. Finally in January of 1912, a delegation of nine chiefs, representing the Thompson, Okanagan, Shuswap, and Lillooet peoples and calling themselves "The Indian Rights Association of British Columbia", travelled to Ottawa to air their concerns directly in the presence of the Honourable R. Borden, Premier of the Dominion of Canada and his Cabinet. Teit travelled with them as their interpreter.

### **More Song-Collection: Ottawa, 1912**

While in Ottawa, James Teit and the chiefs visited the museum and there came into contact with Marius Barbeau, newly employed as an anthropologist with the Geological Survey of Canada. Barbeau had just completed his first two field projects with the Survey, one in Quebec and another in Oklahoma. For both of these he had recorded Indian songs on a little Standard Edison phonograph. When the delegation of chiefs from British Columbia arrived at his doorstep in Ottawa, Barbeau was pleased to be able to record some of their songs (Barbeau, 1982).

In fact, the experience was such a memorable one to Barbeau that he included it in a CBC interview of 1965 on his own life-story:

While [in Ottawa the Chiefs] had plenty of leisure. I thought, "Why not collect songs with them, since they are here?" I had heard them sing some of their songs and I was enraptured over the quality. I collected, in the space of three weeks, something like sixty or seventy songs (Barbeau, 1982).

Barbeau did not undertake this work alone. Teit was always present and, in fact, without him, the recording session would probably not have occurred. Barbeau acknowledged the help of Teit in a magazine article on one of the songs in 1959:

James Teit was their guide...I used him as interpreter, and recorded on the phonograph and in phonetic writing about 60 songs, many of them the finest ever secured from North American Indians anywhere (Barbeau, 1959:12).

What survives of this collection is presently housed at the Canadian Center for Folk Culture Studies at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa. It contains twenty-six songs and two formal speeches (VI.M.1-28) as rendered by Chief John Tetlenitsa (Nlaka'pamux), of Spence's Bridge. Another nine songs (VI.M. 1-9) were contributed by Chief Ignace Jacob (Lillooet) of Mount Currie; and three (VI.N. 1-3) were sung by Chief Francois (Shuswap) of Little Shuswap Lake (Barbeau, 1912).

Other than the catalogue number of the song, the type of song (dance song, doctoring song, etc.) and the name of the singer, no additional notes survive for this collection (Landry, 1978). Apparently the phonetic writing of the texts recorded by Barbeau and Teit and mentioned by the former in his 1959 article above, has been lost. If Barbeau is correct in his recollection of 1959 that he recorded 60 songs, then we can assume that in addition to notes, there may also be thirty odd songs missing from this collection.

### **Song-Recording in British Columbia: 1912**

By 1912, many of Teit's major works had been published: a further two ethnographies [one on the Lillooet (1906); one on the Shuswap (1909), edited by Franz Boas and published by the American Museum of Natural History, and a further two volumes of stories *Mythology of the Thompson Indians* (1912a) and *Traditions of the Lillooet Indians* (1912b)]. Not surprisingly, other institutions began to show an interest in his work. One of these was the Geological Survey of Canada. In 1911, Edward Sapir, in charge of the Anthropological Division there, had contacted his superior, R.W. Brock, about Teit. He felt that more study of the northern Athapaskan peoples of British Columbia was needed and that there was "no better man...for the position than Mr. James A. Teit of Spence's Bridge, B.C." (Sapir, 1911):

His well-known monograph on the Thompson River Indians, Shuswap, and Lillooet are considered by ethnologists as nothing short of models of their kind. Added to this, Mr. Teit has had many years practical experience as a woodsman, and is, moreover, on terms of intimacy and friendship with the Thompson River and other Indians of Southern British Columbia (Sapir, 1911).

Based on Sapir's recommendation, Teit was employed by the survey on a year-by-year contract basis.

The area around Stikine River and north of Telegraph Creek was already well-know to Teit. Since 1903 he had been guiding big-game hunters there in search of moose and big-horn sheep in the fall every year or so.

He made his first field trip for the Survey in the fall of 1912. On this 1912 trip, Teit sailed on the Princess Sophia up the Inside

Passage to Wrangell, Alaska. On board was a Dr. John Donovan who later wrote up the trip in a magazine article entitled, "Hunting Big Game In The Cassiar District of B.C." (Donovan, 1913). Donovan was impressed with Teit:

Our companion Teit's mission this trip is to take Edison records of Indian songs, collect specimens and write history of the Tahltan Indians, having already published histories of other tribes...From the Customs officers of two nations to the humblest Indian child, Teit's word is our passport, and his presence greeted. He not only knows all the Indian guides, but has trained many of them (1913:9). With this newly-acquired Edison phonograph Teit recorded thirty-eight songs [a combination of Sekani (VI.P. 1-13); and Tahltan songs (VI.H. 1-25)] at both Bear Lake and Telegraph Creek. Twelve singers performed for him, approximately half women and half men (Teit, 1912c).

### **Song-recording at home in Spence's Bridge**

It was back in his home community of Spence's Bridge among people he knew well, that Teit did his most thorough work on music. Here he could call upon friends to sing when the mood was right, and he could work slowly and carefully on song-texts with assistance from his Native friends whenever he needed.

In June of 1915, Teit mailed the results of his work in Spence's Bridge to Ottawa. Among the many cylinders in this shipment were twenty (VI.M. 29-48) which he noted were Nlaka'pamux songs recorded in Spence's Bridge in 1912. Accompanying the cylinders were pages of notes, painstakingly written in long-hand, complete with all the information Teit considered important including the Native name of the singer; a catalogue number referring to the singer's photograph (on file in Ottawa); the circumstances in which the singer learned or obtained the song; the song-text rendered in the Native language; a rough or word-by-word translation of the text; and any other incidental information, such as the age or the importance of the song, or the ceremonial context of the song. Of these Thompson songs, all but three were songs by Roipellst, a well-respected Native of Spence's Bridge. The rest were sung by Walter Ngaúten (Teit, 1915a).

Included in this same 1915 shipment was a mixture of songs contributed by one of his key Nlaka'pamux singers at Spence's Bridge, Paddy Ususelst, originally of the Lytton Band. Paddy, according to Teit's notes, had spent over fifty years among the northern Shuswap, Chilcotin, Carrier, Sekani and Cree. Through a number of marriages he had lived first among the northern Shuswap and then

among the Chilcotin. At the time Teit knew him, he was living with the Upper Thompson people. Throughout his travels he had learned many songs. Teit recorded some of them including a Cree war song (VI.A.1); a Sekani dance song (VI.P.14); four Carrier songs (VI.I.1-4); two Chilcotin songs (VI.J.1&2); a Bella Coola song (VI.D.1); three Stalo (Coast Salish) songs (VII.G.3-5); three Lillooet songs (VI.O.12-14); and three Shuswap songs (VI.N.4,5 & 8). An Okanagan woman, Therese Keimatko, sang one Shuswap song (VI.N.6); and Roipéllst of Spence's Bridge contributed another (VI.N.7). In 1915, the same Paddy Ususelst contributed one more song, a Shuswap song (VI.N.8). Kutenai Chief Paul David of the Tobacco Plains Band contributed one song (V.E.47) and the Nishga Nass River Chief Lincoln contributed a potlatch song (Teit 1915a).

### **Another Northern Fieldtrip: 1915**

In August, 1915, Teit travelled to Northern British Columbia again to Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek. By the time he headed for home in October, he had recorded thirty-seven Tahltan songs (VI.M. 25-50 & 78-86) sung by fifteen singers (primarily women); four Carrier songs (VI.I.5-8); twenty Sekani songs (VI.P.15-35) contributed by about ten singers; and one Dogrib song (VI.C.10) (Teit 1915b).

Although the notes which accompany this 1915 collection are not as comprehensive as the notes on the Spence's Bridge Thompson songs, nevertheless they are filled with as many details as Teit could obtain.

He included at the end of the accompanying notes some of the problems he encountered. For example, he broke his tuning whistle early in the trip and hence could not use it to introduce each recording (this was standard practice on a machine without speed control). He also ran out of blanks and was unable to record as many songs as he would have liked. He claimed there were at least thirty or forty more songs he could easily have recorded if he had had the cylinders on hand. However, overall, Teit was pleased with his results:

On the whole I was lucky this trip as very few records (blanks or fulls) got broken. The horse packing especially is hard on records. Unfortunately I lost part of the horn of the phonograph early in the trip and had to rig up horns as best I could at different places for taking the songs. When I got to Vancouver lately I bought a recording horn for the machine and had the latter cleaned thoroughly and overhauled. All is now in good working order (Teit, 1915b).

## Ottawa: Politics and Songs, 1916

In May, 1916, Teit returned to Ottawa again to act as interpreter for a delegation of chiefs airing their concerns. While there, as he had done in 1912, Chief Tetlenitsa, a well-respected chief in the Spence's Bridge area and long-time friend of Teit, recorded six songs (VI.M.49-54), for which Teit provided detailed hand-written notes (Teit, 1916).

## Spence's Bridge: 1916-21

In August and December, 1918, Teit mailed two more shipments of cylinder recordings and notes to Ottawa. These contained a large number of Spence's Bridge Thompson songs (VI.M.139-202), twenty-two Okanagan songs contributed by Spence's Bridge people (mainly an elderly man, RatEmEn, and KwikweiteskEt of the Okanagan Lake Band, and Therese Keimatko, originally of Douglas Lake) (VI.L.1-22), three Carrier songs (again sung at Spence's Bridge (VI.I.9-11), and a further three Shuswap songs (VI.N.9-11) by Chief Tetlenitsa and another named Njo. Tcakep contributed a further two Lower Lillooet dance songs (VI.O. 15-16) which he had learned at a hop-picking camp. Chief Paul David of the Tobacco Plains Band of the Kutenai contributed a Carrier dance song (VI.I.11) which had been adopted by the Spence's Bridge people forty years earlier (Teit, 1918).

Teit mailed his final shipment of songs to Ottawa in August of 1921. It contained one Kutenai song (VI.K.3) sung by Chief Paul David; four Okanagan songs (VI.L.23-26) sung mainly by Aex KwikweiteskEt and Therese Keimatko; and two tunes played on the whistle (VI.L.27-28). One of the latter two cylinders (VI.L.27) featured a tune played by Therese on the jews' harp. A further sixteen Nlaka'pamux songs were included in the shipment (VI.M.203-219). These were by singers who had contributed earlier including Rachel Kóintko, Sinsintko, Paddy Ususellst, Roipellst, Yiopatko, and Tcakep, to name a few (Teit, 1921a).

## Musical Instruments

During his years on contract with the Geological Survey, Teit collected hundreds of artifacts. Among these were some musical instruments including two painted hand drums (II.C.226); and a birch bark rattle (II.C.225). These today are part of the collection of the Canadian Ethnology Service of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa.<sup>3</sup>

More musical instruments may be among the large collections Teit made for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, British Columbia.

## Problems: Too Much Collecting and Too Few Publications

While on contract with the Geological Survey from 1912 to 1919, Teit was also completing work for Franz Boas. His efforts to fulfill obligations for two parties simultaneously were not without problems. The work for Boas had resulted in a steady stream of publications [*Mythology of the Thompson Indians* (1912a); *Traditions of the Lillooet Indians of British Columbia* (1912b); *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes* (1917)]. In addition to these, work was in progress on studies of the basketry and ethnobotany of the Nlaka'pamux and ethnographies of the Okanagan, the Coeur D'Alene and the Flathead Indians of southern British Columbia, Washington State, Idaho and Montana. Teit's work for the Geological Survey, on the other hand, had resulted in a huge artifact collection, but very few publications. In letter after letter to Sapir, Teit made apologies for the delays in his research for the Survey. Clearly, between trips to Okanagan country, the demands on his time by big-game hunters, and his work at home in Spence's Bridge, there was little time for much else. By 1917 Edward Sapir was not happy with Teit's publication record and he shared these concerns directly with Teit:

I myself, to be perfectly frank, feel strongly that Dr. Boas' insistence on you doing this basketry work for him is rather un-politic for reasons which I have defined both to him and to you. I do not see why Dr. Haeberlin or someone else could not take this up later on, and why people seem to think it necessary to have you intermittently taken off of your regular Government work...It may prove embarrassingly difficult to explain why we should continue you from year to year when so little material ready for publication is being submitted by you (Sapir, 1917).

Finally, by 1919, due to financial constraints, Teit's yearly contracts with the Geological Survey were terminated. Clearly, Teit had other pressing matters on his mind anyway. Throughout this year and 1920, he was almost fully occupied with Native politics (Teit, 1920b).

## An Early Death

By December, 1920 Teit began to develop serious health problems. In 1921, he travelled to Vancouver in search of medical advice. A friend from New Zealand who paid him a visit while he was there "was amazed at the sight. All around the hotel...on the pavement were Indians sitting crouched with their backs against the building patiently waiting for news of their best friend. Jimmy was dying of cancer" (Jamieson, 1960:20).

In March, 1921, Teit wrote to Sapir that:

I am sorry to say the doctors have pronounced my case as cancer in a lower bowel where it is very difficult to operate. They have given me up, and I am under a sentence of death. They give me only two or three months to live. This is pretty hard lines and I feel still quite in my prime ...However, the decree has gone forth, my time is very limited and I have to accept my fate (Teit, 1921b).

Despite this, Teit continued working on behalf of the Allied Tribes of British Columbia.

More than a year late, however, Jimmy Teit died at the age of fifty-eight on October 30th, 1922. It was a heavy loss for all who had known and worked with him. In his letter of condolence to Teit's wife, Franz Boas wrote: "Your husband was one of those rare men whom it is hard to learn to miss. I am glad to have had him as a friend. I feel my life the richer for it" (Boas, 1922).

## **A Rich and Unique Collection**

North American Indian research flourished under the direction of Franz Boas. His students covered most areas of the North American continent. Their names are well-known: Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Frank Speck, Leslie Spier, Clark Wissler, and Edward Sapir are just a few. They were "salvage ethnographers" whose main objective it was to piece together the past. Fact-gathering on a grand scale was their primary objective, in order to discover relationships between cultures and to better grasp the nature of culture change and development (Wickwire, 1985:196).

Song-collection was but a small part of what they were all expected to do. Boas himself collected and transcribed songs on his first field trip among the Central Eskimo and later collected many Northwest Coast songs. Frank Speck collected songs about which ethnomusicologist Norma McLeod noted "it is a source of wonder to me to read the early works of Speck and to find in them all the wealth of detail a modern ethnomusicologist could desire (along with some aspects we have since forgotten to consider!)" (Wickwire, 1985:196).

The same could be said of James Teit. His song-collection is huge and his hand-written accompanying notes are filled with detail. Nothing was collected or written in haste. Teit, particularly when working at his home at Spence's Bridge, always took the time to cover a large range of questions concerning the singer and the song.

He recorded all types of songs (lullabies, bear songs, individual power songs, doctoring songs, mourning songs, travelling songs, love songs, bird imitations, comic songs, dance songs, stick-game songs, sweathouse songs). The names of singers were noted along with an accompanying photograph catalogue number. The circumstances surrounding the singers' acquisition of the song (for instance, in the case of a personal power song or a doctoring song,

how, and from what nature source, the individual acquired the song) were described where available.

Of certain songs, such as the lullaby, the bear song sung to twins, the bear song sung to hunters, the mourning song, a certain sweat-house song, and stick-game songs, Teit noted that these were ancient songs, perhaps as old as the tribe. Wherever there were texts, in the case of the Thompson songs, Teit provided line-by-line translations of the words. Special effects such as whistling or hissing in songs were described.

More than half of the singers in Teit's collection were women. At a time when most of the collectors were male and collecting only mens' songs while concluding that the key musicians in Native communities were the men, Teit's data were new. Here was a case of women performing equally, or more so, in the musical culture. As well as performing their own body of songs, they performed many of the mens' songs in the collection. Through his marriage to one of the Nlaka'pamux women, Teit had access to the world of women that most anthropologists of the day did not. During the singing of one of the songs two singers broke into laughter during the recording session. There was a relaxed atmosphere during these recording sessions. At least one elder recalls these sessions today. Rosie Joe from 14-Mile, near Spence's Bridge remembers her aunt going to Teit's home whenever she had spare time to contribute to his work.

Similarly, as a long-time member of the community of Spence's Bridge, and as a skilled big-game hunter, he had earned the respect of the Native men in the area. The variety of songs he collected indicates that both sexes were willing to contribute even their religious songs. Inga Teit Perkin recalled her father's method of working:

Father was completely relaxed with the Indians. He had a very big office—two desks and an old Edison Gramophone with cylinders. The Indians came in and sang to him. He recorded their songs and conversations...The Indians stayed all day and the place would be blue with smoke. Father chewed on a pipe stem and was soft-spoken and quiet (Banks, 1970:96).

## Conclusion

Clearly the work of James Alexander Teit deserves wider recognition. This paper covers only his contributions to music, just one small segment of what he did.

Songs are close to the heart and soul of Native North American cultures. Access to such sensitive material requires special understanding and special relationships. That Teit was able to record the musical material that he did, particularly among the women, indicates that he achieved this among the Native people with whom he worked. A columnist for the *Daily Province* summed it up well in his



## obituary of Teit:

Professor Boas could not, in fifty years of study as a research student, have gained directly from the Indians as much as he obtained in two or three summers with Mr. Teit. You cannot by searching find out what the Indians know. They would not if they could and could if they would reveal themselves to a superior stranger asking them questions. What they knew, but did not realize that they knew, could only be gathered by a comrade, who was never in a hurry, who did not make much fuss, but took it all in as a matter of course and showed no sign of literacy or scientific intention (Lucien, 1922).

## NOTES

1. Mr. Sigurd Teit, son of James Teit, provided many of the materials used in preparation of this paper. He also offered thoughtful editorial suggestions. His assistance is greatly appreciated.
2. Several short biographical sketches have been written over the years (Jamieson, 1960; Howes and Lean, 1979; Wickwire, 1979; Bunyan, 1981). One slightly longer account appeared in an M.A. thesis of 1970 (Banks, 1970).
3. These are part of the permanent collection of the Canadian Ethnology Service, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa. An in-depth search for more musical instruments would likely yield more among the Teit collections at the American Museum of Natural History, New York; the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; and the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, British Columbia.

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James Alexander Teit (15 April 1864 – 30 October 1922) was an anthropologist, photographer and guide who worked with Franz Boas to study Interior Salish First Nations peoples in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He led expeditions throughout British Columbia and made many contributions towards native ethnology. He also worked with Edward Sapir of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1911. Robbins, James and Beverley Diamond. "Ethnomusicology". The Canadian Encyclopedia, 15 December 2013, Historica Canada. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ethnomusicology-emc>. Accessed 31 December 2020. Copy. Thanks for contributing to The Canadian Encyclopedia. Close. Ethnomusicology. His thinking extensively influenced the course of North American anthropology and ethnomusicology. 'Chinook songs' anticipates many concerns of recent ethnomusicology: urban settings, Christian missionary influence on secular music, acculturation, and the problem of 'writing culture'. James A. Teit: his contribution to Canadian ethnomusicology. Wendy C Wickwire. RESUME James A. Teit is well-known for his many contributions to the ethnography of the British Columbia interior Indians published between 1896 and 1930. Few are aware, however, of his very extensive collections of music recordings from these same people. Now housed primarily in Ottawa, these cylinders are complemented by detailed notes providing rich background material to this valuable [Show full abstract] collection. James A. Teit est bien connu pour ses nombreux articles publiés entre 1896 et 1930 sur l'ap Folk Music, Traditional Music, Ethnomusicology: Canadian Perspectives, Past and Present features the proceedings of the society's Fiftieth Annual Conference that took place 3–5 November 2006 in Ottawa at Carleton University and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. This volume is intended as a contribution to published literature on ethnomusicological and folklore research in Canada, creating a new resource of historical, contemporary, and scholarly relevance that will appeal to academics and music enthusiasts alike. Folk Music, Traditional Music, Ethnomusicology is an excellent resource for anyone interested in the current state of ethnomusicological scholarship in Canada, and a good starting point for those interested in particular theoretical issues. James A. Teit: His Contribution to Canadian Ethnomusicology, The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, Volume 8, Number 2, 1988, pages 183–204. [Will 1999] Udo Will. La baguette magique de l'ethnomusicologie: Repenser la notation et l'analyse de la musique «The Magic Wand of Ethnomusicology: Re-thinking the Notation and Analysis of Music», Cahiers de Musiques Traditionnelles, Volume 12, Geog, Genève, in French, 1999, pages 9–34.