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The collaboration of James Mutch and Franz Boas, 1883-1922

Kenn Harper*

Résumé: La collaboration de James Mutch et Franz Boas, 1883-1922

James Mutch, baleinier et gérant du petit port baleinier écossais de Kekerten, situé dans le chenal de Cumberland, avait apporté son aide à Franz Boas lorsque celui-ci effectuait son étude de terrain de la culture inuit entre 1883 et 1884. Par la suite, les deux hommes entretenirent une abondante correspondance, qui dura plus de 30 ans. À la suggestion de Boas, Mutch rassembla trois collections de matériel ethnographique pour l'American Museum of Natural History, qui permirent à Boas de publier deux ouvrages majeurs sur la culture matérielle et intellectuelle des Inuit sans avoir à s'aventurer de nouveau dans le Nord. La contribution de Mutch à notre connaissance de la culture inuit n'a jamais été décrite et, donc, n'a jamais été reconnue.

Abstract: The collaboration of James Mutch and Franz Boas, 1883-1922

James Mutch, whaler and manager of the Scottish whaling station at Kekerten in Cumberland Sound, assisted Franz Boas in his field study of Inuit culture from 1883 to 1884. Subsequently, the two men carried out an extensive correspondence, lasting over thirty years. At Boas invitation, Mutch made three collections of ethnographic material for the American Museum of Natural History, which allowed Boas to publish two major works on Inuit material and intellectual culture without venturing north again. Mutch's contribution to our knowledge of Inuit culture has never been described and has therefore gone unrecognised.

Introduction

In 1883 Franz Boas left Germany for Cumberland Sound for a year among the Canadian Inuit, a year that would change him from an eager young geographer to a pioneer in the emerging field of anthropology. With him he carried a letter of introduction from Crawford Noble, owner of two Scottish whaling stations in Cumberland Sound, to James Mutch, manager of Noble's station at Kekerten. In an

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undated letter, sent to Noble for forwarding to Kekerten on his steamer, *Catherine*, Boas had apprised Mutch of his intention to winter with two companions in the house which the staff of the German Polar Station would be abandoning in Clearwater Fiord. He solicited Mutch's help in planning a trip to Nettilling Lake, then known as Lake Kennedy, asking him to "draw into the enclosed charts the best way to Kennedy Lake you know or can find out from the natives" and, should he require a Native boat, to "select crew and boat for me" (Boas n.d.a). Then, before leaving Germany, Boas wrote again to Noble, saying, "I am obliged once more to apply to you." One of his assistants had refused to accompany him to the Arctic and he felt that this meant he would be unable to base his work at Clearwater Fiord. He asked Noble's permission to unload his property at Kekerten and told him, "I think it unavoidable but to spend the few months from November to March with your men at Kikkerton" (Boas n.d.b). Even before leaving Germany, Boas was already becoming dependent on James Mutch. On 28 August 1883, Boas reached Kekerten and met Mutch. He showed him Noble's letter of introduction, and Mutch promised his co-operation. Although neither party knew it at the time, this marked the beginning of a lengthy and productive collaboration.

Boas was, in fact, establishing a pattern that he would follow through much of his long career in anthropology, that of developing a relationship with untutored men in the field, men who could assist him, collect for him, and provide him the raw material to interpret in popular and scientific journals, texts and lectures (*cf.* Cole 1985; Rohner 1969). James Mutch was one of those men. This article examines the relationship between the two men by focusing on their correspondence and the three collections Mutch made for the American Museum of Natural History, two of which contributed to major publications by Boas on the Inuit. The paper seeks to accord James Mutch the recognition he deserves as a field worker in Boas's ongoing Inuit research.

James Mutch, an Arctic whaler

James Shepherd Mutch was born near Peterhead, Scotland on 15 December 1847. Of his parentage we know nothing except that his father was a carter. Ironically, what little we know of his childhood comes from Boas, who recorded that Mutch had been a servant in the home of Crawford Noble. Boas noted, "He never went to school, but he acquired quite a bit of knowledge by himself, much more than a man who comes out of a German public school" (Cole 1983: 22).

Mutch went young to the Arctic. In 1865, he sailed under Captain George Brown as third mate of the *Queen*, a whaler from Peterhead. The vessel whaled off Resolution Island in June before heading farther north and eventually wintering at Philpots Island, in reality a peninsula on the east coast of Devon Island. The following September, the vessel visited Cumberland Sound on its homeward voyage, spending some time at anchor at Naujaqtaalik (Niantilic or Niatilic of the whalers), then a centre of whaling in the sound.

In 1867 James Mutch returned to Cumberland Sound in the employ of Crawford Noble. He eventually took over the management of the station from Alexander (Sandy) Hall, who nonetheless remained at or subsequently returned to the station, for he was there on Boas's arrival. In 1884, writing after his return from the Arctic, Boas (1884: 247) noted that James Mutch had wintered 17 times in Cumberland Sound. The implication is that Mutch had spent 17 consecutive winters in the sound. Despite this impressive string of winterings, Mutch had been able to visit Scotland occasionally by travelling home in the spring on a ship which had wintered, and returning in the fall on that or another ship. Mutch's longest unbroken stint in the Arctic had, in fact, been seven years (Mutch 1908: 1). Although at least one other whaler, John Roach, had been in Cumberland Sound longer than Mutch, Mutch was unique in combining experience with an outgoing personality and an interest in the culture of the Inuit.

Boas and Mutch in Cumberland Sound

Kekerten was a fortunate choice of location for Boas. It was the largest settlement in Cumberland Sound, owing to the presence of two whaling stations, Noble's Scottish station and a competing American venture. Although Boas (1885) had discussed the history of whaling in Cumberland Sound in an earlier German publication, he downplayed the existence of the whalers there in his 1888 *The Central Eskimo*. He mentioned none by name, although he acknowledged their presence in a few references scattered throughout the text. He noted that the Kingnaitmiut, his designation for the Inuit on the north-eastern shores of Cumberland Sound, had for a long time "gathered on Qeqerten [Kekerten], as two whaling stations are established here, many natives being in the service of the whalers" (Boas 1888: 437). In fact, 25% of the Inuit of Cumberland Sound—82 of a total of 328—lived at the Kekerten station (*ibid.*: 426).

Boas, and his servant Wilhelm Weike, shared with Mutch a house erected at Kekerten in 1857 by the Scottish whaler, William Penny. Enlarged and modified since Penny's time, it was nonetheless cramped and permitted little privacy. One large room served as living and sleeping quarters; there were, in addition, some smaller storage and work rooms. In these crowded quarters Boas came to know his benefactor better. In his letter-diary to his fiancée, Marie Krackowizer, which in fact comprises a very personal and complete journal of his thoughts and activities during his year in the Arctic, Boas was to tell more of James Mutch. And so, on September 4, Boas wrote to Marie about the events immediately after his arrival: "After I showed Mr. Mutch, the director of the Scottish station, the letter from Mr. Noble, its owner, he was very kind and promised to be helpful in every way. My belongings were to be brought on land the next day. In the evening we visited all the topics (Eskimo tents) [...]" (Cole 1983: 20). Three weeks later, he wrote: "Mr. Mutch, who will remain alone at the station here is a nice helpful person [...]. He immediately promised to help me in every way and in the winter will take me with his sled and dogs to the sea, where an Eskimo he knows lives who will take me further [...]" (*ibid.*: 22).

By December 4, the formality of referring to his host as Mr. Mutch had been replaced by the intimacy implied in Jimmy Mutch (oddly, Mutch had never been given a descriptive Inuktitut name; Inuit knew him by a corruption of his English name, calling him “Jimmy Mutchee”). Boas wrote on that day:

He [Mutch] is in every way obliging towards me and helps me with his better knowledge of the Eskimo language wherever he can, so I am greatly indebted to him for increasing my knowledge in this regard. Also he has been lending me his dogs for excursions; in short I must be grateful to him in every way. He is a very devout man, who allows no work in his house on Sundays (Müller-Wille 1998: 147).

But the tedium of living for much of the winter in close quarters wore on Boas. In the spring he wrote to Marie, complaining about the difficulty of listening to “the conversations between Jimmy Mutch and his Eskimo wife,” describing it as “this vapid, often trivial chat [...]” (*ibid*: 191). Like many of the whalers who wintered, Mutch had a liaison with an Inuk woman and, in fact, had sired a daughter, Analukulu, whom Boas met. But Boas tried to put his benefactor in context, observing, “And yet Mutch is a relatively good man, to whom I must do justice in that during a sojourn of 17 years with very few interruptions, he has learned much in this country and is an open, honourable character, who moreover does not attempt to conceal his weaknesses” (*ibid*: 191).

In September and October, Boas travelled with the Inuit by boat, surveying and mapping, but the onset of freeze-up saw him back again at Kekerten. Inuit who had spent the summer hunting caribou had returned to winter at the station. Boas noted:

Now I began in earnest to make my ethnographical studies, and was greatly helped by Mr. Mutch [...]. Every night I spent with the natives who told me about the configuration of the land, about their travels, etc. They related the old stories handed over to them by their ancestors, sang the old songs after the old monotonous tunes, and I saw them playing the old games, with which they shorten the long, dark winter nights (Boas 1884: 253).

But Boas was hampered in his studies both by his lack of knowledge of Inuktitut and by his poor command of English. To compound the difficulty, the English spoken by James Mutch to other English-speakers was a Scottish dialect, difficult for an outsider. In December Boas confided to his letter-diary, “The English I am learning here is worse than atrocious. I’m afraid it is more Scottish than English” (Müller-Wille 1998: 147). Many of the Inuit, especially the men, spoke some English, having learned it from both Scottish and American whalers. Only a few weeks after his arrival, Boas wrote to his parents, saying, “Almost all the Eskimos understand English and I can manage very well with them” (*ibid*: 91). By the time he left Baffin Island, Boas’s command of English was still poor. In November of 1884, he was unable to read a paper before the Washington Anthropological Society, having the secretary read it for him instead. He was able to answer questions about it but had difficulty in following the ensuing discussion (Cole 1999: 86)

Not only did Boas speak English imperfectly, but he also had great difficulty in learning Inuktitut. On 23 December, while on a trip to Anarnitung, he wrote in his letter-diary, “Now the Eskimos are sitting around me here, telling each other old stories. What a pity that I cannot understand any of it [...]” (Müller-Wille 1998: 160). A week later he wrote, “Gradually I can make myself understood somewhat with the Eskimos. Their language is horribly difficult!” (*ibid.*: 163). One must wonder how much Inuktitut Boas did learn during his 10 months in the north. As late as 18 February he wrote to Marie, “Thus today I have simply listened to stories and collected words. My glossary is now expanding rapidly. But it was certainly about time that I began it” (*ibid.*: 183). Indeed, the inescapable conclusion is that most of the information that Boas learned about Inuit customs came from Inuit through their imperfect command of the English language, or through the unstinting assistance of James Mutch. On 6 May 1884, Boas bid farewell to Mutch and left Cumberland Sound for Davis Strait where he continued his research before leaving Baffin Island on a passing ship in August.

Boas’ major ethnographic work, *The Central Eskimo*, published in 1888, was the first detailed study of Canadian Inuit. The text makes no reference to Mutch and his assistance, but in a lengthy geographical article published four years earlier, Boas had generously acknowledged the whaler’s help. He wrote:

[...] it was only their [Mutch’s and Noble’s] kindness which enabled me to accomplish a great part of the work I did. [...] Mr. James Mutch [...] was a most welcome and willing help to me in my long and tedious conversations with the Esquimaux, until I was myself able to talk with them. It was with his dogs and sledges that I made a great number of my journeys; by his help I managed to get my skin clothing ready in time to start the winter travelling. In short, in every way I am indebted to the liberal aid of these gentlemen (Boas 1884: 247).

Correspondence: The beginning

Franz Boas never returned to the Arctic. By 1888 his metamorphosis from geographer to ethnographer was complete and his purely geographic articles on the Arctic had ceased. But publications on the Inuit and their culture continued to appear. This is in part a result of a collaboration between Boas and some of the Arctic veterans with whom he maintained an extensive correspondence lasting well into the 20th century. He corresponded with explorers (Frederick Schwatka and Robert Bell), missionaries (Matthias Warmow and Edmund J. Peck), the Danish administrator and ethnographer, Hinrich Johannes Rink, but above all with whalers, among them George Comer and James Mutch (Ross 1984).

The correspondence between Mutch and Boas began in 1885 and continued sporadically until 1922. In November of 1885 Mutch was beginning a winter in Peterhead, and he wrote Boas from there, in response to a letter of Boas’s that has not survived. It was the first of Mutch’s letters to Boas and it was chatty, even gossipy. He told about the whaling, which had been poor; he had taken only two whales that year, along with 216 seals, four bears and seven walrus. The ice in the vicinity of Kekerten

had lasted well into August. Signa (Signah), who had travelled with Boas, was now working for the American whaler, John Roach. A number of Inuit had died, including some well-known to Boas. Many Inuit had asked about Wilhelm Weike, Boas's assistant. Weike had been popular among the Inuit women and Mutch makes reference to "his woman," Tuckavy (Mutch 1885: 4). In a later letter, he wrote, "I hope William is happy with his new wife. You had better tell him not to mention about Tookavy [Tuckavy] or she [...] might be jealous about him should he go out with you again" (Mutch 1886: 3).

In 1886, Boas suggested that Mutch continue collecting material for him on his trips to the Arctic. That year Mutch married and purchased property in Peterhead but probably went out to Cumberland Sound on Noble's supply vessel in the summers of 1886 and 1887. Before *The Central Eskimo* was published Boas added a three-page appendix of additional information "received from whalers who returned from Cumberland Sound in the autumn of 1887" (Boas 1888: 667).

The Cumberland Sound collection: 1897-1899

In 1897, the Boas-Mutch correspondence resumed when Mutch responded to an unrecorded letter from Boas, in which Boas asked him to make a collection for him if he was going to the Arctic again. Boas's earlier collection from Cumberland Sound, including items provided by James Mutch, was in Germany. Boas was now at the American Museum of Natural History and wanted to build an Inuit collection there. Without going to the field himself, he would need the assistance of whalers. In his nine-page, hand-written reply, Mutch told Boas that he would be leaving in July to spend two winters in Cumberland Sound. The letter was full of news about Inuit whom Boas had known and about the whaling business, which was by now in serious decline. Mutch assured Boas, "I will do any thing for you I possibly can [...]" (Mutch 1897a: 2). Boas responded two weeks later, offering Mutch \$250 to make a major collection for the museum:

I want to ask you if you will kindly make a collection of various things belonging to the Eskimo for our Museum here. We have nothing at all from Cumberland Sound except one kayak, and we should very much like to have a good collection illustrating the life of the Eskimo. In order to facilitate the making of a collection, I enclose in this letter a list of such specimens as we should like to have collected. The list has practically been taken from my book on the Eskimo of Cumberland Sound [...] (Boas 1897: 1).

In another letter, Boas asked Mutch for information on the position of the floe edge for all the years since 1884. Mutch responded, saying initially that he "may be able to get them from the Esquimaux," then, later in the same letter, he gave all the requested information, either from his memory or his notes (Mutch 1897b: 1). James Mutch left at the end of June for Cumberland Sound where he remained two years at Noble's Blacklead Island station, on the opposite shore of the sound to Kekerten. The following autumn Boas received "a small but interesting collection of legends from Cumberland

Sound” (Boas 1898: 1) and asked a student, Alfred Kroeber, to report informally on it at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Although details are lacking, this collection had probably been forwarded by Mutch via Peterhead.

Mutch returned home in November 1899 and wrote a week later to Boas, informing him that he had things for the museum and asking for shipping instructions. He also made a suggestion, repeated in subsequent letters, that the two men should meet “as I could give you very much information, *i.e.* in comparison to since I saw you in Cumberland Gulf, about the manners and customs of the Eskimos” (Mutch 1899a: 1-2). Mutch was a self-taught man. One senses that he wrote with difficulty. A personal meeting would have enabled him to simply pour out his accumulated knowledge of Inuit culture orally as his anthropologist friend recorded it. Unfortunately the meeting that Mutch proposed never happened. At the end of November Mutch wrote again to Boas, describing the collection he was sending, which included “[...] a number of things you will have a chance to see, likely for the first time from the Gulf [...]” (Mutch 1899b: 1). The attached “List of Specimens,” 10 pages long, is categorised under the captions “Hunting and Fishing,” “Manufactures,” “Transportation and Travelling,” “Habitations and Dress,” “Games,” and “Religious Ideas,” no doubt categories assigned by Boas in his request. The list ends with “Carvings and drawings” and “Maps of the country from King’s Cape to Padli, by the natives.” Mutch added, “During the winter I may take time enough to tell you about Sidna [sic: Sedna] as it differs from your account in book and some other things. Customs, Fashions, &c.” (Mutch 1899b: 2). Boas was excited by the suggestion. On 22 December he wrote asking Mutch to record his knowledge, especially about Sedna:

I think the best way might be for you to go through my book and jot down whatever additional information or whatever corrections you may have. I should be very glad if you will send the same to me, to bring the same into literary form, and to have them published under your name. I beg to ask you most earnestly to try to take the time for doing this work the present winter. It is a matter that is of the greatest interest to everybody who studies the customs of different people, and it would be wrong if you did not bring your knowledge before the reading public (Boas 1899: 1-2).

Mutch’s collection of approximately 600 specimens reached Boas at the end of January. Boas wrote within a week, describing the collections as “exceedingly interesting” (Boas 1900a: 1), imploring Mutch again to commit to paper his knowledge of the Inuit, and reiterating his offer to publish it in Mutch’s name. The following day, Boas informed the museum’s president, Morris Jesup, that the collection was “a very valuable one” which “enhances the value of our Eskimo collections very much indeed” (Boas 1900b: 1). But there was more. Mutch had neglected to include the stories that he had recorded with the collection of material artifacts. At the end of the month he wrote to Boas, telling him that “[t]here are a few things I intend to send on to you which were neglected to be put off with the collection. Those Notes and Stories, I will send on for you to see” (Mutch 1900a: 1). In perhaps Mutch’s most important comment in this entire exchange of letters is this remark:

You will find many religious ideas in them. To me the whole of these stories forms their religion [...]. I tried, in every case, to give the story as told, to assist the one, whoever[r] that one might be, to get the right sense of it. I could have put in parts in some cases, having heard the same stories from others, or read them, but I had a wish to have a collection by myself (Mutch 1900a: 2).

The “Notes and Stories” that Mutch had collected were written by hand in English in six Victory Scribbling Books, and totalled 860 pages. With them he sent drawings of people and dwellings, two sheets of hand-coloured drawings, string figures, and eight maps. Of the eight maps, seven survive; all are drawn by Inuit, and each has geographic features numbered and the numbers matched separately to a list of place names. Each map is drawn on folded sheets of paper measuring 9" x 15", joined by tape. The eighth map is missing from the collection at the American Museum of Natural History. It is assumed to be the largest as the key to it lists 108 place names. It was drawn by an Inuk named Nookewa [Nukiruaq?], known to the whalers as Tom (Figure 1).

In the summer of 1900, Mutch returned to Blacklead Island for another two-year stay. On 1 June 1901, Boas wrote to him in care of Noble in Aberdeen, saying, “I am sending with this note that part of our description of the Eskimo that has been printed up to this time” (Boas 1901a: 1). Three weeks later Boas sent Noble another package to forward to Mutch, containing “more proofs [...] in continuation of those sent you a few weeks ago” (Boas 1901b: 1). This is a reference to the first volume of *The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay* (Boas 1901). This volume was printed in sections, with gatherings 2, 3, 4, and 5 marked on the first page of each with the date “June, 1901.” (Subsequent gatherings are dated October, November and December 1901). Thus it was probably the first 80 pages of the volume that Boas forwarded to Mutch. Boas hoped that Mutch would be able to judge by the illustrations and descriptions in what respects his collection needed to be supplemented. In March of the following year, Boas sent a copy of the complete volume to Mutch’s wife. Mutch would not see it until his return to Peterhead in November. In the volume’s introduction, Boas gave Mutch his due:

Ever since that time [1883] Captain Mutch has manifested a keen interest in Eskimo ethnology, and has utilized his almost uninterrupted stay in Cumberland Sound to carry on inquiries on this subject. From time to time he has sent me valuable replies to inquiries regarding obscure points; and in 1897 [...] he kindly consented to make a collection for the American Museum of Natural History, and to write down all he could learn regarding the ethnology of the people [...]. In the fall of 1899 Captain Mutch sent to the Museum his collection and the notes which are embodied in the present paper. All the statements given here, so far as they pertain to Cumberland Sound, are based on his observations (Boas 1901: 4).

The book describes the material culture, social organisation, customs, religious ideas, and traditions of the Inuit of Cumberland Sound and the west coast of Hudson Bay. The section, “Tales from Cumberland Sound,” consists of 81 legends and stories, of which 72, comprising 139 pages, were collected by James Mutch, the remaining nine being provided by the missionary Edmund James Peck, who also collected legends and stories for Boas at Blacklead Island (Laugrand et al. 2006: 285-289). By comparison,

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~~One who lived at Pactic.~~

At a wit-jwakt. lived in Showmea
Till his son one day. wet off
in his kayaking and never returned:
The father and mother. could not ind
are. living longer. than. in Suspence
One day. they start. and follow
the shore. from Davis Straits. looking
in every. light for. Their son. or. his
kayak. or. things that might have belonged
to belong to him: but day after day.
they march. along. desmoothing their son.
and still hoping: to find him or signs
of him. Do mention the time alone.
~~will show that the distance was distance~~
names of the places they touched would-
take up too much space.. and. to des-
cribe the turns they make. would be
too tedious. as they wander while they
look. for their lost one. on the shores
of. Davis S. and Cumberland Sound.

Figure 1. A page from one of James Mutch's notebooks containing a legend from Cumberland Sound (source: American Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology Archives, File 1900-5, Notebook 5, page 609).

“Tales from the West Coast of Hudson Bay” comprises only 27 pages, being 30 short tales collected by the American whaler George Comer. It is clear that the bulk of this book derives from the collections of James Mutch.

The Cumberland Sound collection: 1900-1902

In April 1900, Boas wrote to inform Jesup that Mutch and Comer were both returning to the Arctic that summer. He described the collections that the museum had so far received from them as “remarkable” and pointed out that they supplemented each other. He asked for an appropriation of \$90 to have each whaler’s notes typed so that each could be supplied with a copy of the other’s work. He asked also for another \$250 to have Mutch make a full collection from another group with whom he expected to come into contact. He reminded Jesup, “If we should be successful in this undertaking, our Eskimo collections from the eastern part of America would be unrivalled” (Boas 1900c: 1). Mutch was excited about the prospect of comparing his own and Comer’s notes and of collecting for Boas again. He asked Boas to “[...] mention all the questions you should like me to ask the Eskimos. Or where you see any part of any tale not fully connected, or anything you would like to know about, which I may be able to get for you [...]” (Mutch 1900b: 2-3).

Mutch wrote to Boas from Blacklead Island in 1901 before the supply ship’s return to Peterhead. He had not been able to collect all the items Boas wanted, in part because of many deaths among the Inuit. But he sent what he had collected to his wife, who sent it in “one large bag & small box with books & dolls,” to New York in January. (Mutch 1901: 1). Mutch returned to Peterhead in November 1902. He had taken no whales that year and the sealing and walrus hunting had been poor. The *Alert* had been lost in the sound on September 26; Mutch and her crew had returned in the auxiliary vessel, *Kate*. In December he sent more material to Boas, including a notebook he had compiled, containing “what I have found refered (sic) to in your letter about the tales in Cumberland Gulf, also a thing or two about the dresses I sent off some time ago [...]” (Mutch 1902: 1). He returned the first gatherings of *The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay*, marked up with his explanatory comments. He mused proudly, “Now it’s five years or more since I began the collections you refer to in your book [...] with my name mentioned as being the collector of” (Mutch 1902: 5).

Boas informed Professor Hermon Bumpus, museum director, that “Mr. Mutch obtained a number of specimens in excess of the order placed by me. I recommend their purchase. The total amount that we have to pay him would be \$100 instead of the \$50 first agreed upon” (Boas 1903a: 1). There is no explanation in any correspondence extant to explain the discrepancy between this figure and the \$250 appropriated in 1900 (Figure 2).



PA-053579

Figure 2. The Blacklead Island whaling station, 1903 (photo: Albert Peter Low, Geological Survey of Canada, Library and Archives Canada, PA-053579).

The Pond Inlet collections: 1903-1908

In 1903 Mutch left the employ of the Noble family, his employer of nearly four decades, and joined another company based in Dundee. He wrote to inform Boas that he would take the ship, *Albert*, to Ponds Bay that summer. Boas was, of course, delighted that Mutch would be returning to the Arctic and to an area untouched by museum collectors. He pointed out to him:

Ponds Bay is a region where, so far as I am aware, nobody has ever made any collections and studies. With your thorough knowledge of the Eskimo, it will be easy for you to gather up all the old material that the people are keeping in their huts, and to get, of weapons and other newer things, whatever seems to be of importance. I am sure, that if you have time to devote the winter months to collecting tales and traditions and information about their customs, that you can do a work of immense importance (Boas 1903c: 1).

Boas offered to pay Mutch \$750 “for a good collection of specimens from the Ponds Bay tribe, together with information in regard to their habits, beliefs, and traditions” (Boas 1903c: 2). As in the past, he offered to prepare questions for Mutch to follow in eliciting information from the Inuit. In his reply Mutch was clear that he

would be able to collect once again for Boas, provided that it did not interfere with his duties to his employer:

I am quite willing to go on collecting the whys and wherefores of the Eskimo customs, but not to have anything to do in getting the clothes or skin gear: that does not include the skin they use to cover their face while at their plays. You can put in a thousand questions or more, and I will try and get the best answers and give them the best way I can (Mutch 1903a: 1-2).

Boas responded with a plea for Mutch to make the collection as complete as possible, listing “pots and kettles, harpoons, sealing and whaling gear, household articles, the masks that they use at their plays, their games and amusements, etc.” as well as skin clothing, as items that he should collect. (Boas 1903d: 1). In his reply, Mutch wrote that his employer had no objection to him collecting for Boas, provided that Mutch supply all the material for barter to secure the objects and stories. He added, “I am very much pleased to be able to say that I have got what I did not expect—Liberty to do all you asked for—if it is to be had” (Mutch 1903b: 2).

Mutch took the *Albert* first to Cumberland Sound where he hired Inuit willing to relocate with him to the Ponds Bay (now Pond Inlet) area of northern Baffin Island to assist him in whaling. They spent their first winter in Erik Harbour but experienced poor whaling the following spring, so they relocated the vessel to a protected harbour between Beloeil Island and the Baffin coast, which they named Albert Harbour. The ship would remain there for the next three winters. Early in 1904 Boas (1904: 1-2) wrote another letter to Mutch, asking about the people of Ponds Bay and their customs, including specific questions about “our old friend Sedna.” Mutch received the letter in early July via another Dundee ship, the *Eclipse*. He responded in September, describing some of what he was learning from the Inuit, and telling about the whaling. He added that there may be a chance to fill all of Boas’s order during the coming year.

The year 1905 was a poor one for whaling and hunting from Mutch’s station. In the fall he took passage to Scotland aboard the *Eclipse*, leaving the *Albert* and a crew to continue whaling and trading the following year. His collecting of ethnographic objects had been unsatisfactory. He wrote from Peterhead in early 1906 that “[...] there is nothing amongst the Ponds Bay people they can spare. No oil lamps, no stone pots, and few sledges—they are a poor lot” (Mutch 1906: 1). Nonetheless he had managed to make a collection and listed some of its contents: “I had five dolls made of wood dressed with seal skin and deerskin as I could not get the big dresses. They are now parceled along with some things, a bailer used in kayak, made of a muskox horn, an old bone knife, a piece of an ivory one &&¹, a flint Toonee knife &&— now ready to be sent all in one parcel” (Mutch 1906: 3).

The year 1905 was also an unsatisfying one for Boas. Problems between him and Hermon Bumpus had been escalating for some time but the disagreements were

¹ The “&&” means “etc.”

brought to a head when Morris Jesup disapproved of Boas's methods of public display of cultural artifacts in the ethnography department's display cases. There was no easy resolution to the situation and Boas resigned as curator of ethnology in May 1905, a number of months before Mutch's return to Peterhead (cf. Darnell 1998). Boas maintained a connection with the museum, however, to complete ongoing projects, including overseeing the completion of Mutch's and Comer's collections of Inuit ethnographic material.

The parcel Mutch referred to in his letter of January 1906 reached the museum after Boas' departure, but Boas was responsible for receiving and paying for it. That parcel, plus one sent in late 1904, was all Mutch had been able to collect and Boas was clearly disappointed. He wrote to Bumpus in April of 1906 to explain that Mutch's notes were quite complete but the specimens collected were few. He suggested that Mutch be paid two-thirds of the amount committed (Boas 1906: 1).

Mutch went out again to Ponds Bay and spent the winter of 1906-1907 there, devoting part of his time adding to his collection for Boas. At the end of December 1907, back in Peterhead, he wrote to Boas telling him that the collection was ready to send off, and describing parts of it, in particular the kayak implements and the Inuit usage of a small gun sledge in sealing. Writing up the notes was always an ordeal for Mutch, who commented, "I began some time ago on the customs and traditions and other particulars which you expressly asked for but they take me such a time to do a little that it will take me fully a month yet—what you would manage in no time" (Mutch 1907: 2). Museum officials were pleased with this collection. In February of 1908 a curator wrote to Mutch, noting that they had paid him \$500 in May 1906 as part of the 1903 agreement, and were now forwarding him the balance of \$250. They also asked if he would continue collecting for them. Mutch responded in the affirmative.

In 1907, Boas published *Second Report on the Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay*. Almost half the volume deals with the unique Inuit culture of Southampton Island, and information for this section was provided almost exclusively by Captain George Comer. The rest of the volume incorporates material provided by Comer and Mutch, supplemented with a little information from Reverend Peck. Mutch's contributions included more observations on the Inuit of Cumberland Sound, Hudson Strait and Ponds Bay. Mutch also provided 18 legends from Cumberland Sound; shorter than those in the first volume, they comprise 19 pages. In his introduction, Boas noted that Mutch had revisited the Arctic twice since 1899, including two years at Ponds Bay, and that he had provided the first accurate observations on the Inuit of that area. The years to which Boas refers are Mutch's two years on Blacklead Island (1900-1902) and his two years at Erik Harbour and Albert Harbour (1903-1905). Unfortunately the observations that Mutch made in Ponds Bay during the winter of 1906-1907 were not received in time for inclusion in the volume, and have never been published.

That same year, another volume appeared. Berthold Laufer, like Boas a German-born anthropologist who had had a falling-out with the American Museum of Natural History, had solicited contributions to a volume of essays to honour Boas on the 25th

anniversary of his doctoral degree from Kiel in August 1881. Despite its 1906 printed publication date, the volume did not appear until April of 1907. Along with the scholarly contributions, it contained a 16-page chapter by James Mutch. Entitled “Whaling in Ponds Bay,” it told of the voyage of the *Albert* to northern Baffin Island in 1903 and Mutch’s two winters spent there. In plain, unadorned language, probably edited lightly by Laufer, Mutch told of the customs of the Inuit of northern Baffin Island and their interactions with other Inuit groups. He described the whaling enterprise that was his reason for being there, but devoted most of the article to the Inuit, describing especially their clothing styles and their seal hunting methods (Mutch 1906[1907]).

Final years

In January 1908 Mutch wrote to Boas about his plans for the future. They centred around whaling and trading from the *Albert*, which he and a number of shareholders were purchasing. Mutch had also decided to return to Peterhead every fall; there would be no more wintering in the Arctic. Two years later Mutch wrote Boas at least three letters. He was going out on the *Albert* for the spring and fall season for walrus and whale in Davis Strait. He forwarded Boas some quartz arrow heads and part of an Inuit boy’s costume, and described some kayak implements he had bought on Disco Island, Greenland. And he asked if Boas had “other wishes than collecting tales and old relics from old foundations” (Mutch 1910a: 1).

Boas replied to Mutch with a suggestion. “If you should intend to stay there [Pond Inlet] again,” he wrote, “I hope you may be inclined to get some more information about the stories and customs of the people, and I should like to suggest to you that it might be a good plan to look around carefully on old village sites for old specimens. Whatever of that sort you can find is of value, and I think will give you a fair return in money” (Boas 1910: 1).

Late that fall Mutch was back in Peterhead with 202 walrus hides but no whalebone. One whale had been struck and lost. He had hunted in the Kivitoo area of Davis Strait and off Sukkertoppen, Greenland. He had still not managed to put an engine into *Albert*. He informed Boas, “I did not find out anything new in the Eskimo customs this time, further than they are to go over to the Christian side, that the latest from Kevutung.” He added, “[...] there are a few of them [who] does (sic) the preaching. They can all read and write” (Mutch 1910b: 3). Three years later he wrote that: “They have all gone over or mostly all to the missionaries’ way of thinking for the time and long may it last” (Mutch 1913: 2).

Boas was well aware that many of the Inuit of Baffin Island had espoused Christianity for he had also corresponded with the Reverend Edmund James Peck, the missionary who had established a station of the Church Missionary Society at Blacklead Island in 1894. Peck had introduced the syllabic orthography to the Inuit at Blacklead Island and from there the system had spread quickly throughout Baffin

Island and the west coast of Hudson Bay. In 1907 Boas had written to George Comer suggesting that he have Inuit write out incantations in syllabics. No similar letter to Mutch has survived but the suggestion was made for in 1913 Mutch informed Boas, "I did not get the Eskimo to write out old tales in Eskimo" (*ibid.*: 2). Indeed, throughout all Mutch's years of collecting for Boas, his notes were all in English, though liberally sprinkled with Inuit words and names.

It was four years before their correspondence resumed. In 1917 Boas wrote to tell Mutch of the death of their mutual friend, Wilhelm Weike, who had died in Berlin on June 11 at the age of 57. He had left his wife well provided for; the couple had no children. Mutch wrote to Boas in May of 1918 from Ireland where he was preparing for a voyage to Baffin. The price of walrus hide had dropped below the point of profitability and the war had made it difficult to get supplies. But still he continued to go out each year. The Sabellum Company, for whom he now worked, had four stations in Baffin. Local Inuit did the trading and Mutch sailed to take out supplies and bring back the produce. He told Boas that "Knaeker [Kanaaka] and a few more whom you met are now all old looking, but old and young know about you" (Mutch 1918: 2) and "I am really glad to know you still remain upon the top of the world and care to hear of a place you had a good hand in making your name to be known for ever and ever" (*ibid.*: 1). And, despite his age, he maintained his enthusiasm for helping the anthropologist, reminding him, "If you ever write again to me, you might if you cared ask any number of questions and I will answer them" (*ibid.*: 2).

One final letter completes their correspondence. On 27 November 1922 James Mutch wrote from Peterhead. He had been out to Davis Strait again that summer, leaving home late in the season. The trip had been a disaster. He had made land in Frobisher Bay but ice had prevented him from reaching any of his other stations, and he had lost the schooner *Vera* in the harbour at Holsteinsborg, Greenland, where he had put in for repairs. He had come home via Copenhagen on a Danish vessel and confessed, "I can truly say I am glad to be home and will not or do not intend to go out any more, although I cannot say I feel too old, my family think it time for me to take it easy" (Mutch 1922: 4). It was indeed time for him to take it easy. His association with the Arctic had begun by at least 1865 and covered an incredible span of at least 57 years.

Conclusion

A few years after his retirement, Mutch and his wife moved to South Africa, where their only daughter had moved earlier. He died there in 1931. Many *Qallunaat* have given their best years to Baffin Island. James Mutch gave almost all his years to Baffin Island and its people. Unschooling but not uneducated, since 1883 he had been of invaluable assistance to Boas, whose career in anthropology had had its beginnings with the work he had done with the assistance of Mutch as host, benefactor and interpreter. It is probable that until their meeting, Mutch had scarcely devoted any thought to the unique position he was in, living at ease in two worlds as different as

Cumberland Sound and Peterhead during a time of acute social change for the Inuit. It was his discussions with Boas in the winter of 1883-1884 that turned him into a collector of both the material and intellectual culture of the Inuit. His work complemented that of George Comer, collecting in Hudson Bay. While Comer secured more material specimens, Mutch's collections included far more of the intellectual culture of the Inuit. Both men served Boas's purposes well, allowing him to advance his own career by writing and publishing on the Inuit without ever again visiting the field. Boas described Mutch as "a remarkably good collector" who "obtains with his specimens the fullest information" (Boas 1903b: 1). In his own right, as Franz Boas well knew, Mutch was a rough and untutored ethnographer, living in the rare condition ideal for the role he voluntarily assumed as collector of both Inuit material and intellectual culture, as an insider accepted by the Inuit.

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Note: AMNH stands for the American Museum of Natural History, New York (Division of Anthropology Archives), unless otherwise noted. APS stands for American Philosophical Society, Boas Professional Papers.

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