Regina Flannery began her fieldwork in James Bay, not as a novice, for she had already conducted fieldwork, two summers before, in a field school headed by Ruth Benedict on the Mescalero Apache reservation in New Mexico (Flannery 1932:27). In the summer of 1933, though, she was, on her own, travelling by train to central Ontario and then on the newly opened 186-mile spur to Moosonee, on James Bay and still then via a five mile canoe trip to the Cree community of Moose Factory on an island of the same name (Flannery 1995:xv). It was in this community that Flannery carried out her principal research during another three summers, from mid-June to mid-September (Flannery et al. 1981:57). Although it was initially Father John Cooper, her professor and mentor, who made the arrangements for her to work in Moose Factory, still in the early 1930s, she was a single woman in a foreign country and a very foreign community where few Crees spoke English and services or facilities of any kind were practically non-existent. It attests to Regina’s determination and self-assurance that she was able to withstand the physical, cultural and linguistic isolation but more so it attests to her engaging personality, as well as her respectfulness, that she was accepted by the Crees and welcomed back each visit. In subsequent summers, Flannery also travelled to other Cree communities on the western side of James Bay (Ontario): Albany and Attawapiskat in 1935 and then on the eastern side (Quebec): Rupert House, Eastmain and Fort George in 1937, doing so as a passenger on the supply ships that also conveyed the Indian Affairs agent and doctor (same person) for a one week visit in each community (Gardner 1990:93). On her last trip to the coast, in 1938, Flannery was accompanied by her husband, Karl Herzfeld, who served as her photographer. On this trip, they flew into Rupert House from Moose Factory in a hydro-plane, causing quite a sensation in the community (Gardner 1990:93). Both of them travelled the following year to Ojibwe communities on the north shore of Lake Huron, at Spanish River and on Manitoulin Island, providing Flannery with comparative material. In 1944, she

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returned to James Bay, this time into the interior, to the village of Mistassini. Her journey there began at the fishing camp of her friend, Valerie Burger, which was located at Grand Lac Victoria, a few hundred kilometres north of Montreal. They made the trip to Mistassini in ten days by motorized canoes and with the help of three Cree guides (Gardner 1990:94, Flannery, personal communication, 1994). There she looked into variations in Cree belief systems. Her research trips to Gros Ventre country began in 1940 and continued beyond the time of her visits to James Bay. Fortunately, Flannery did make one last visit to James Bay, accompanied by her Catholic University associates, the late Bill Gardner, Joan Walker, and Mary Elizabeth Chambers. They travelled there in 1985, at the invitation of Cree people from Moose Factory who had earlier been down to Washington and were overwhelmed with Flannery’s generosity in making Father Cooper’s field notes available to them (John Long, personal communication, 2005). As Bill Gardner writes, there was Regina standing, fifty years later, on the platform at Cochrane waiting for the train to Moosonee, only this time it is known as “the Polar Bear Express” (Gardner 1990:98). There in Moose Factory, Flannery and her interpreter, Ruby McLeod, met once again and Ruby expressed her pleasure that “Miss Flannery had come to see her” (John Long, personal communication, 2005). Many of the Crees had heard of her and all wanted to meet her (Gardner 1990:98), which many did at the Canada Day celebrations.

Flannery received her M.A. in sociology in 1931 from Catholic University of America, having written a library thesis on a mythical dwarf-like figure in Northeastern Algonquian folklore (Gardner 1990:90). Her doctorate followed in 1938, this time from the Department of Anthropology, created four years earlier and where Flannery began teaching in 1935. She undertook her research in the mid-1930s at Catholic University of America, under the supervision of Father Cooper. It was a library thesis entitled ‘An analysis of coastal Algonquian culture’ and, understandably, was very much influenced by Boasian anthropology, focussing on diffusion to study culture change. She excelled in it.

Her dissertation sought to determine what was the coastal Algonquian culture, and she drew a boundary that covered the maritime provinces in Canada down to the coast of North Carolina. Her opening statement expresses her hope that it should be possible to show the relationship of this area with other areas, as well as the sources of influences
which contributed to the culture of the region, and, arrive at a knowledge of the coastal Algonquian culture before such influences affected it (1939a:2). Her reading took her not only to this large geographical area but it also led her to the reading of neighbouring cultures, such as the Iroquois. A rough count of her bibliography yields 544 publications, mainly books. She was also able to use the results of her fieldwork in James Bay, undertaken in the same years as she was working on her thesis. She identified 327 cultural traits which she grouped in this fourfold manner: (1) the elimination of traits which were non-diagnostic; (2) traits attributed to European influence; (3) traits that were due to independent invention, which numbered 43; and, (4) traits common to both Algonquians and Iroquois, numbering 73 (1939a:177). Her conclusion was that the coastal Algonquian area is a unit, with northern New England and Virginia standing out quite clearly as contrasting sub-areas (1939a:196). Flannery’s 1939 identification of cultural traits still serves the academic community. One example is Charles Martijn’s reference to this work to identify a 17th-century Maritime people as Micmac (2003:89, n.11).

Flannery, in her modest way, in the 1970s used to downplay the importance of her work. Much as kinship studies with attention to bifurcate merging etc. seem so old-fashioned today and to us, so did these earlier studies seem to her. They were not – and she and other anthropologists bequeathed to us an enormously rich body of data. More importantly, Native peoples are the greater beneficiaries as they are able to become reacquainted with aspects of their culture that had been lost to them due to the assimilationist policies of the state.

Following Boasian anthropology, Flannery also engaged in memory ethnography for which we are all grateful, particularly the people at Moose Factory. She arrived there on 1 August 1933 intending to interview older women who could, as she writes, “relate their experiences in the latter half of the nineteenth century.” She had not intended to record life histories but she did, of Ellen Smallboy, over three summers, asking her to talk of her life when she was first married 58 years previously, that is, in the 1880s. She writes that Ellen had a wealth of personal details but I strongly suspect that this history grew out of the personal dynamics that developed among Regina, Ellen and her interpreter Ruby McLeod, for she writes of Ellen’s and Ruby’s “patience and good humor during the many hours they spent in instructing me in ‘the old way of life’” (Flannery
1995:xv). The life history was published only in 1995 and is widely used. It is now in its second printing. It provides a marvellously instructive account of what life was like out on the land, how Ellen’s family coped under good and bad conditions and is particularly insightful for the glimpses we are given into Cree interpersonal relations, well over 120 years ago.

Anthropology was a young discipline without a lot of experience to pass on to students when Flannery first undertook her fieldwork. Yet she was intuitive about certain procedures as well as analyses. One of the most striking, I find, is in her working with Ellen Smallboy. Flannery muted her presence. She might ask Ellen about the translation of a Cree word or ask a question but otherwise allowed Ellen to do the talking with, she says, “as few interruptions as possible.” This way, she tells us, Ellen volunteered information on subjects about which she would never have asked (1995:7). In an earlier work, she is more informative about her methodology, saying there is little to suggest except being a good listener, knowing when to take part in the conversation and when to be silent and now and then turning inconspicuously the drift of the topic” (1934:12). After all, Regina was not going to let things slip by.

Although studies of culture traits and memory ethnography were the main approaches in American anthropology in the 1930s, Flannery also has provided us with several subject-oriented studies. Her first published article based on her fieldwork in James Bay was in 1934, though her first publication had been in 1932, the ‘Position of women in Mescalero Apache culture.’ The James Bay one was entitled, ‘Gossip as a clue to attitudes.’ She first presented this as a paper at the meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Columbus, Ohio on 28 December 1933. Can we pause for a second and imagine the scene? Flannery must have been one of the very few women presenters, and here she was as a young woman of 29, a graduate student, addressing a room full of male anthropologists, preoccupied as they were with the lofty matters of society – politics, economics and warfare – standing before them and talking about gossip. It took spunk – a lot of it – and I regret I had not thought of asking Flannery how she and her paper were received in 1933.

This is not an idle paper about an idle subject. In it, Flannery very forcefully demonstrates the role gossip plays in social control and correspondingly transmits the values and attitudes of the people (1934:11), a
number of which she describes, some through narrative accounts. As well, remember, she is standing before this body of men and she argues that the study of gossip "has a real place in ethnological field study and publication. It seems to give living insight into the inner life and thought of the people ..." (1934:12).

The next year, also a few days after Christmas, Flannery was again before this august body of men, this time in Andover, Massachusetts, talking about another subject foreign to them and likely suspect, 'The position of women among the Eastern Cree.' Throughout the paper there is a strong comparative element, what was to become the hallmark of subsequent Flannery writings. In this paper, she compared the matrilineal Iroquois women who, she says, "are usually described as a ... society in which the position of women is signally superior" (1935:82) with the Cree women she worked with in Moose Factory. Flannery was treading on relatively new ground in this study of women, yet she laid out the parameters others also used in subsequent years, looking at property rights, divorce, the status accorded a woman's labour, and the political and religious domains. Always a careful thinker, Flannery, still the graduate student, recognized that each of these domains had to be evaluated separately. Thus she was able to conclude that in the economic field there was fairly equal status with men but in the socio-political and religious arenas the men held a more favourable position in Cree society (1935: 83-86). These findings she tempered with reminders to her readers that personality and individuality count for a lot – and one could find hen-pecked husbands even in Cree society (1935:84)!

Two other papers from the 1930s were also ground-breaking in subject matter but, more importantly for today, furnish us with information that would otherwise have been lost. In 1938 Flannery published a paper in *Primitive Man* that drew on data she had collected in her three field seasons in James Bay. The topic was cross-cousin marriage, important to anthropologists then for both kinship and comparative studies. In the 1930s, in eastern James Bay, marrying first cousins was beginning to be avoided because of the teachings of Christianity, and Flannery could see that on the other side of the Bay in Moose Factory, where Christianity had taken root for a longer time, the practice had pretty well died out, though it was known.
One of Flannery's greatest thrills, remembered to the present, was witnessing a shaking tent ceremony in Rupert House in 1938. In her article (1939b) she describes who the conjuror was, the preparation of the tent, the crowd of spectators as well the voices of the spirits from within and she witnessed the tent shaking violently when two spirits were fighting. Not surprisingly, Flannery, presumably feeling great empathy, risks interrupting her reader's focus on the spirit world, by recounting how once in a while, the great spirit, Mistapew, would ask for a smoke and so a cigarette would be lit and shoved under the tent.

She ends her account of the ceremony by noting that she could not explain how the tent shakes. Many years later, Flannery told her three Moose Factory visitors in her office in Washington, D.C., that her husband, who was a physicist, examined the structure the next day but could not explain it either. (Incidentally, to the Crees in Rupert House in the 1930s, she described her husband's occupation as a teacher of electricity.) Greg Spence, one of the Crees who visited Flannery in the mid-1980s, discussed with her the shaking tent ceremony. He felt that Flannery had accepted its mystery and the skill and powers of the shamans (John Long, personal communication, 2005).

Other papers followed in the 1940s, such as an account of a brief visit to the Spanish River Indians on Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Huron in which Flannery (1940) honestly reported that her sojourn there was too brief to compare properly these Ojibwe people with the Crees, though that did not prevent her from publishing a 25-page paper filled with useful details of their religious practices, land tenure, recreational culture - that is, their games and other pastimes as well as a host of other subjects, all of which is reminiscent of her doctoral dissertation, though on a much smaller scale. This interest in comparative work surfaced again in 1946 when Flannery revisited, in part, her dissertation subject - the Northeast hunters - but this time added greater analytic details such as pointing out that the shaking tent complex stopped at the St. Lawrence River or that warfare was characteristic of the southern regions, though one cannot draw a sharp line.

And then the Gros Ventres benefitted from Flannery's presence and studies for the next thirty-five or so years, not to mention the Department of Anthropology and *Anthropological Quarterly* - but then we got her back!
Once again, I should have asked but I would imagine that Flannery’s return to James Bay was due to a happy combination of factors. Here they are – in no order of primacy, perhaps more chronological. Flannery retired from the University in 1971 and had more time. In the early 1970s, Treaty Nine claims in Ontario and a hydroelectric project in Quebec turned the attention of a number of Canadian-based anthropologists to the anthropological record, and there was Flannery’s and Cooper’s very considerable early record. I first heard of Flannery’s storehouse of James Bay information in about 1975 from Krys Siechiechowicz of the University of Toronto, working for Treaty Nine. It was she who told me of Flannery’s willingness to share the records of Father Cooper of which Flannery had become the administrator on his death in 1949. I might add that until recently, Flannery was very careful with the distribution of her own field-notes because they were of more personal matters than those of Father Cooper’s. I believe she perused all of them, handwritten on slips of paper the size of index cards, worrying they might name illegitimate children, note cases of incest, etc. More recently, she turned over these notes to communities interested in them.

Certainly the most important factor in Flannery’s resumption of writing on James Bay subjects was the Mary Elizabeth Chambers factor. Although a graduate student in Mayan archaeology at Catholic University, Chambers worked for many years as Flannery’s assistant, not only as a second set of eyes as Flannery’s were sadly failing but, from what Flannery has said, as an insightful and critical collaborator. Also very important was Flannery’s attendance, thanks to the assistance of Bill Gardner, at a number of Algonquian Conferences in Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Chapel Hill and Chicago, where she must have drawn some energy and inspiration from the great reception to her stunning observations of Cree life in the 1930s, providing new information and a sense of life in the communities then. Lastly, I would think that as steward of Father Cooper’s field notes, Flannery saw in them an opportunity to round out some of her research in James Bay, as well as use his in ways that met the contemporary needs of researchers and Native peoples. Thus, Flannery produced another three remarkable papers in the 1980s, and the Ellen Smallboy book, though completed several years earlier, was published in 1995.
In 1981 Flannery, Chambers and Patricia Jehle co-authored a paper, published in *Arctic Anthropology*, on the Witiko or Windigo, as it is better known in the Ojibwe language, referring to the cannibal spirit. Many have written on this phenomenon who have not done fieldwork, so this article is an important addition to our understanding of this elusive spirit. Flannery and her collaborators’ analysis differs from other studies in that they distinguish between Witiko as a folkloric being vs. the Witikos who are humans possessed by this cannibalistic craving. Accordingly, they separate the stories that relate to the first category from the second and find twelve occurrences of what they believe are accounts of the actual Witiko. Their findings, based on the Flannery and Cooper research of the 1930s, stand in contrast to later writers whose research in the 1960s led them to view the Witiko as a “non-specifiable figure, akin to the Christian devil” (R.J. Preston 1980:124).

The next paper from Flannery and Chambers also appeared in *Arctic Anthropology* in 1985. It is a study of the role of dream visitors. Not having vision quests as did other Algonquian peoples, the Crees of James Bay of yore relied on the help of spirits to guide them in hunting and these spirits came to them in dreams. Again, the study draws on the Flannery-Cooper notes from all the communities of James Bay they worked in, and it also bears Flannery’s imprint of very careful and methodical research, as shown by her chart depicting the striking similarities and significant differences in the role of Mistapew between the East Cree and the neighbouring Montagnais peoples, studied about the same time by Frank Speck. Not only does the article provide this important contrast but it also is importantly comparative and instructive in drawing in the research of anthropologists from the 1950s onwards. As a result, we learn from Flannery and Chambers that the Mistapew spirit rose to dominance in the later years, evidently symbolically replacing the other spirits Flannery and Cooper had heard about and recorded in the 1930s. They consider this fading away of the dream-spirit complex, the Powatakan, as having “lost much of its function as an organizing principle for the seasonal round and as an explanation for hunting success [it] would seem to offer little of relevance for the modern hunter, who may travel to the interior by light aircraft, serve as a guide for sports fishermen … and harvest a predictable quota of beaver annually” (1985:21). (See also Long, Preston & Oberholtzer, in this volume, for an in-depth discussion of this paper.)
In the last of the articles in Flannery’s 1980s James Bay renaissance, Flannery (1986) chose to work through some of Father Cooper’s notes on hunting territories, an issue that has been debated in the anthropological literature since 1915 but also an important subject for Cree groups claiming rights to ancestral lands. I can imagine that Flannery chose this topic as a way of fending off the many researchers knocking at her door for access to these notes but, more importantly, it allowed her, as the steward of Father Cooper’s papers, to ensure that the correct interpretation was placed on them. As a departure from Flannery’s usual enquiry, this new research was unknown to me or Charles Bishop, who were the conveners of a session on family hunting territories at the Canadian Ethnology Society meetings in 1985. Fortunately we learned of it in time to include it in the publication which appeared in *Anthropologica* the following year (Bishop & Morantz 1986). It is an important methodological analysis as the authors review Father Cooper’s publications in relation to his own field data. They also draw in some of Flannery’s data which demonstrate the ebb and flow of people in and out of hunting groups and the pragmatic accommodation of the Cree to external factors (R.J. Preston 1986:13). According to Richard Preston, who wrote the foreword to the volume, it is a thorough and judicious update that establishes different time lines stretching back in the 19th century as well as an examination of the differential adequacy of the various reports given to Father Cooper (R.J. Preston 1986:13), and we were proud to have been able to include it in the volume.

The Ellen Smallboy monograph (Flannery 1995) was completed in 1988 and provides a portrayal of a Cree woman’s life 100 years earlier, in the late 1880s. Here, Regina “pieced together” her accounts in a remarkable narrative that informs us of life in the bush of that era and from a woman’s perspective, no less.

I am not sure how long Flannery was working on her next project but she did begin it with the help of Beth Chambers and latterly with the assistance of Viviana Christian. I first heard about it in 2002. Given Flannery’s continuing failing eyesight, I assumed it was a small-ish project and never dreamed, until I saw the results in 2003, on paper, on several diskettes and on a CD-ROM that she had most ambitiously undertaken to extract from her own and Father Cooper’s field notes all the oral tradition that each of them had recorded in the field and on both sides of the Bay. I
counted 130 stories, of varying lengths, and this compendium does not include the stories she had already published. Each story was accorded a title (by the person entering it onto the computer), and they are graphic, descriptive titles such as ‘The lazy wife’ or ‘Big eagle carries off a man.’ Each bears the name of the storyteller and his or her community, as well as the year the story was recorded and by whom. Furthermore, Regina has grouped these stories into six categories, drawing upon and modifying the categorization used by others, such as C. Douglas Ellis (1995) and Margaret Fisher (1946). Under Atalokan or mythical stories are: (1) Legendary Tales, (2) Heroic Episodes (3) Cautionary Tales, (4) Folktales. Under Tebatcimowin or eyewitness accounts are: (5) Spirit Helpers and (6) Local Tales and Legends. Having arranged the stories thematically within each of the categories, she then began the ambitious undertaking of seeking to determine if these same themes occurred in eight other collections of Algonquian oral tradition. She organized charts on which to do this but none of these carry entries. Instead, there is a file with each anthropologist’s name and a listing of his/her published stories accompanied by a comment. For example, on Speck’s ‘Tseka’bee Snares the Sun,’ “He has incidents that happened during the period of darkness which we don’t have.” Or, under Tanner, Regina comments on the myth about the leader of the caribou, “ours is different in detail ...” or on ‘The boy who was kept by a bear,’ “we also have it” and then lists other similar stories. Or, under Cooper’s collection on the Tête de Boule and the story of the wolverine, is the comment “this is not at all like Preston’s Wolverine and skunk.” So the insightful comparison goes on for pages. In addition to determining the widespread nature of themes, Regina also looked for the distribution of elements and devotes about five pages looking at the “threes,” singling out in each collection its occurrences, such as: “3 breaths back to life,” “3 whoosh’s of the caribou,” “3 animals sent.” As well, she began one analysis based on “ritual sealing” such as the “sealed nature of the dwellings.” Evidently she intended to do more of this type of analysis, in referring to the work of Stith Thompson (1929) on the distribution of themes.

What the Flannery collection of stories and commentaries does not do is look at the context in which the stories were related, provide comments about the storytellers, what led to their telling of these stories, who else was present. In a memo Beth Chambers wrote to Regina she pro-
posed such an expansion of the study and suggested that it "is a very con-
temporary approach."

In a draft of her Introduction to this collection Regina writes that
none of the stories was specifically elicited for a study of James Bay folk-
lore but hers and Father Cooper’s interest in the “old times” was widely
known and that meant old stories. Flannery mentioned that at Moose Fac-
tory she was known as the Atalokanesqueo or ‘Atalokan woman’ because
of her overriding interest in the “old ways.” Flannery suspects that some
of the stories, the longer ones, were told to her in the form of shorter, sepa-
rate stories but she is presenting them as given. She also quotes from
Alanson Skinner that in a 1904 measles epidemic many old people died at
Moose Factory and he seems to be questioning what might have been lost.
What was lost by the 1920s, she tells us, are the songs appropriate to spe-
cific figures. These songs were formerly dispersed throughout the tales,
likely enlivening the narration. For instance, Ellen Smallboy could sing a
Cinkabic song but could not tell the story because she could not remem-
ber the whole of it. Some of the older informants could sometimes give
the words of a song but never the tune. Some people were excellent story-
tellers, such as William Louttit and also his mother before him. Harvey
Smallboy, the son of Simon and Ellen, was also considered a good story-
teller but his father objected, as a Christian, to recounting the old stories
(personal communication, 2003). Flannery distinguished between stories
told by the old and the young. The former would not tell a story unless
they knew it in is entirety while the younger Crees would give “snippets.”
She also said there was a contrast between east and west coast stories and
male and female informants. In each case, alas, she only records in brack-
ets – “give examples” but provides none. Moreover, as a young female
anthropologist, she believed she was not hearing some of the saltier tales
the men might have told or was hearing an expurgated version, noting that
Skinner put into Latin some sections he deemed risqué. Further, she com-
ments that stories varied with the point the narrator wanted to make and,
as well, could be altered by the interpreters who might add comments or
details in the English translation.

It was not only late in life that Flannery manifested this abiding
interest in the oral tradition, for it takes us back to her Master’s thesis of
1931, which examined a mythical, dwarf-like figure, Memegwecio,
among northeastern Algonquians and, of course, her writings call on them
often, as illustrative material. Her summaries of the oral tradition on a CD-ROM along with all of the 130 stories and her notes and charts have been, at her request, distributed to the Cree communities on both sides of the Bay as well as to researchers interested in this field. It should not surprise any of us that she did far more than ensure distribution of her record and had begun a very important comparative study of the oral tradition. She told me she was frustrated that she had not completed this analysis, but that she accomplished so much with such faded vision is a testament to her commitment as a scholar. Of course, we are all amazed and envious that her great knowledge, intelligence and wisdom had not diminished, even in her 100th year.

Native American society is said to privilege cyclical time, and it seems appropriate that Flannery, as her last work, had returned to her first interest. What more can one say than to salute Regina Flannery, an extraordinary woman and friend and a meticulous and perceptive scholar who gave us so much. We are indebted to her for serving as our elder.

REFERENCES


