

MCTS Invited Talk

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Nature and the Science in Moravian Instrumental Meteorological Observations from Late-18th century Labrador

From the first year that missionaries of the Moravian Church established their stations amongst the Inuit of the northern coast of Labrador, in 1771, they began producing daily instrumental meteorological observations of significance to European scientific networks of the day. Scientists equipped and guided those undertakings. Digitized information on air temperature and pressure together with more qualitative information on wind direction and estimated speed, the state of the sky (day and night) and precipitation has already allowed our project to begin identifying and tracking polar lows travelling from Labrador to Greenland across the Labrador Sea. Substantial manuscript copies of the observational booklets for Moravian Labrador and Greenland survive (with gaps in time and location) for the late 18th, mid-19th, and late 19th and 20th centuries in various archives and other locations, such as Ecoclimatology at TUM. One of the big questions in science and technology studies posed by Donna Haraway (Primate Visions) is: "What may count as nature for late industrial people?" This paper explores the earliest set of meteorological observations (1771–1787) for the material on recurring phenological events of nature. Why did missionaries track the information, and why is the material of interest to modern scientific research today?

Dr. Newell's research interests span a range of subjects within these broad areas: Canadian social and economic history, science and technology in industrial society and Pacific/Northwest Coast fisheries and anthropology. She was Director of the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, UBC, 2003-2011, and a 2012 Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study in South Africa. A founding member of the International Board of Trustees, Institute for Advanced Study, Technical University of Munich, she is now a Visiting Fellow of the Institute, where she is collaborating with Professors Annette Menzel, Ecoclimatology at TU and TUM-IAS, and Cornelia Lüdecke, Center for History of Science and Technology, University of Hamburg, on the Historical Climatology of Moravian Greenland and Labrador.

When: Tuesday, May 2, 2017, 5 pm

Where: MCTS, Augustenstr. 46, room 270