

## 1763 to 1867 – Oral Histories and Biographies

How do we know what we know about the past? All investigations of the past require the examination of historical evidence and the analysis of multiple perspectives. Historical evidence includes archaeology, works of art, photographs, material culture, written documents, and oral testimony. Historical accounts of a given event can be textual, oral, or visual, with each type representing perspective(s) on what happened, and why. Historians and students of history analyze these accounts to develop an interpretation, or a historical narrative.

### Oral History

Like many peoples and cultures around the world, past and present, Indigenous civilizations in North America have long trusted the oral transmission of stories, histories, lessons, and other knowledge as a way of maintaining a historical record, documenting agreements, and sustaining cultures and identities. Oral transmission is supplemented by written and visual texts, symbols, and memory prompts (including music, beadwork, pictographs, petroglyphs, birchbark scrolls, hides, tattoos, and designs woven into clothing). Traditionally, historians privileged written text over oral histories, but this has changed considerably in the last few decades. Oral evidence has frequently proven accurate, as illustrated by recent teamwork between Indigenous knowledge holders and scientists, historians, and social scientists during the search for the lost Franklin Expedition.



“Captain McClintock’s First Interview with the Esquimaux at Cape Victoria” (Illustrated London News, 8 October 1859).

### Activity 5: The Franklin Expedition: Investigating Primary Source Evidence

In 1845, the British government commissioned Sir John Franklin to continue the search for the Northwest Passage in the Arctic. Two ships, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, set off on the expedition. The ships — and the men on board — disappeared, never to be heard from again. Searches for the Franklin Expedition began in 1848, but the ships were only found in 2014 and 2016, respectively, after scientists finally listened to the Inuit oral testimony that had been preserved since the fateful event.

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- Investigate the history of the Franklin Expedition. Read and listen to the oral history testimony in the **Exploring the Arctic through Oral History Feature** on The Canadian Encyclopedia. Further information on the Expedition can be found by reading the **Franklin Search** and **Sir John Franklin** articles.
- Write a reflection on the importance that Inuit knowledge and oral history played in finding the two ships. What does the role of different primary sources in the Franklin search tell you about how different sources of evidence are valued by different groups?