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By Word of Mouth: A n Examination of Myth and History at the Benares Estate

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BY WORD OF MOUTH:
AN EXAMINATION OF MYTH AND HISTORY AT THE BENARES ESTATE

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by

Mary-Catherine E. Garden

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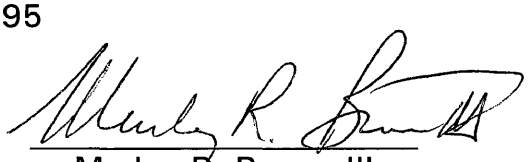

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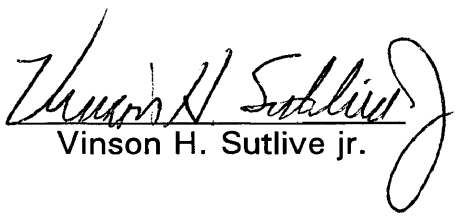

Vinson H. Sutlive jr.

To Geoffrey Harris Sayers,
great-grandson of Captain James Beveridge Harris.
I thank him for sharing his memories, his house, and his family.
It was an honor to journey into the past with him.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey this research has taken into its present form has been a long and varied episode. Along the way many people have contributed their time and talents to this, its final form. First and foremost, the Harris family descendants, Geoffrey Harris Sayers, Dora Sayers Caro, and Barbara Sayers Larson. Without their generosity in sharing their past with me this project would never have been realized. It was a privilege to share their memories and I am grateful.

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Many friends and colleagues supported my efforts. Most recently, the staff at the Department of Archaeological Research, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, in particular, Susan Wiard for her careful editing. Dena Doroszenko was present at the very beginning and consistently offered assistance and encouragement. Particular thanks is offered to Amy Ogibowski who provided a wise mixture of good humor and good advice.

Finally, to my parents who encouraged, supported, listened, and, most importantly, who believed in me--especially when I did not. To them, I offer this thesis. To those venturing into these pages, I offer this caveat:

> The first sentence of every novel should be: "Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human."
>
> Ondaatje 1987:146

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the question of whether family histories and fictional tales can be used as a viable method to enhance an archaeological analysis of an historic period site. Using a model that incorporates the oral evidence in concert and in parity with the other lines of evidence, it was proposed that new data would emerge. This data would contain information which was unreachable through either the archaeological or the documentary record.

A nineteenth-century farmstead, the Benares Estate, was chosen to demonstrate this hypothesis. This house and the occupants have long been associated with a series of historical novels known as the Jalna books. The books have surrounded Benares with a mythology that masked the history and made it impossible to determine the chronology of events occurring at that site. It was equally difficult to determine the larger historical context in which the house and family existed.

The model made it possible to trace the transmission and development of these oral histories and also, to distinguish between two coincident realms of history. The first, a "world-as-experienced", contained factual evidence and centered on the more tangible aspects of the past. The second world, which was identified through a comparison of the oral traditions contained within the Jalna novels and the "leftover" data contained within the oral histories, was the "world-as-imagined". Access to both of these worlds permitted the researcher to move behind the myth and develop a site chronology. More importantly, it became possible to situate the site and the family within the larger historical context.

BY WORD OF MOUTH:
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INTRODUCTION

> Science, social research and the kind of work we call imaginative literature are three quite different forms of enterprise. In the end all of them are forms of story-telling--human attempts to account for our experience in coherent ways
>
> Postman 1993:159

This thesis is a story about a house and a family and it is also a story written about another story. Neither the house nor the family is extraordinary, but through time both have become the protagonists in a much larger tale. A family history and a fictional tale have become entwined and the line between fact and fiction has become very faint. As a result of a mixing of myth and history, the house has come to stand for much more than an ancestral home; it has become the focus for the creation of a personal history and has fostered a national mythology. The myth appears to have replaced the history.

Central to this analysis is the question of whether it is possible to use fictional tales and oral histories as reliable sources of data to create models which will aid in the interpretation of a site. Furthermore, will these models offer an insight into the family history which is not reachable in either the documentary or the archaeological data? The theme of both these queries is integral to specific problems at the Benares Estate.

The focus of this study is a nineteenth-century farmstead known as the

Benares Estate (or more simply "Benares"). The site is located in Southern Ontario and was home to Captain James B. Harris and his descendants for over 150 years. In addition to its local prominence, the house and family have long been cast as real-life counterparts to a fictional family, the Whiteoaks, protagonists of the Jalna stories written by Mazo de la Roche.

Previously, research at this site was centered on reading the past through the documents, while the material remains, oral histories, and the traditions of the family played a secondary role. Yet there remains considerable confusion surrounding Benares. Not only has it been difficult to establish a chronology for the site, it has been almost impossible to distinguish the history of the Harris family from the mythology of the Jalna novels. This "mytho-history" (Yentsch 1988:16) has developed to the level where it has replaced facts and has become more familiar than the history of the family.

I believe that there are two realms of "history" co-existing at Benares, one a history-as-lived, the other a history-as-believed (cf: Leach, quoted in Yentsch 1988:11). In order to understand both the specific context, the inner context which exists at the level of a specific site, and the general context, the milieu in which the site is located and the society in which the family lives out its life, we must gain access to both these worlds.

> There may be a correspondence between a life as lived, a life as experienced and a life as told, but the anthropologist should never assume the correspondence nor fail to make the distinction
>
> Leach 1969:7

At Benares, it appears that neither has the correspondence between the two worlds been made nor have researchers been able to distinguish between the coincident realms of "fact" and "fiction". Thus, the site history remains at a basic level and the questions being asked are elementary and inadequate to determine context.

I propose that by using the oral evidence as the focus of this analysis, it will be possible to gain access into at least one of Edmund Leach's worlds, the world-as-imagined. This will allow us to create a set of variables which can be used as contrast to the data which will emerge from the other worlds. The problem still exists of how to differentiate data from the world-as-imagined from that of the world-as-experienced. To do this it is necessary to focus on a moment in time, a specific event or set of associated events, and examine each line of evidence: the archaeological data, the documentary record, and the oral evidence, in concert and in parity. By this means we will gain access to what Leach calls the "world-as-experienced", or what I suspect many people believe, to be the world of historical fact. It is at this point that we often find ourselves with "leftover" information, data which neither fit in either of these worlds nor appear to be in agreement with other data. The trend has been to discard or discredit this leftover data. Yet, I believe that it is within this set of information that the we will find the key to unraveling the mythology that will enable us to reach the core set of data. We need to examine the "leftover" data; there the information for the larger context will lie, and there we will begin to be able to

discern how people viewed the larger society and how individuals defined their roles within that group. It will then be possible to read the data that exist in the realm of experience against data in the domain of the world-as-imagined, thereby allowing us to determine both the specific and the general context. In turn, we will be able to highlight information specific to the Harrises against the larger context found in Mazo de la Roche's Jalna stories.

The main sources of evidence for this analysis will be the oral evidence, the archaeological data, and the documentary record. It must be noted that while the archaeological data is vital and important component of this analysis, in of itself it is not extraordinary; its role in this study is as a control which is to be used in conjunction with the oral and documentary record. Several other sources of information, which exist as separate and influential entities, will be included within this research. The Jalna novels not only have been translated into several languages, but they have been adapted into other forms of media. These tales exist as a stage play, a feature-length film, and a television mini-series, produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. This is important because it represents the transformation from one form of media to another (cf. Postman 1993). In the way that the nature of information is altered in the transformation from the oral domain to the printed word, so too, do the transformations from print to screen or stage (Postman 1993:18) influence the Jalna mythology. While this paper in no way intends to stray into the realm of literary criticism, nevertheless, it will look at analyses of Mazo de la Roche's

work. At least three major biographies have been written about Miss de la Roche, spanning a period of time between 1966 and 1989. The biographies and earlier reviews are examined as a means of judging factors influential in shaping de la Roche's work.

This study will examine the oral histories and the oral tradition of the family to establish a context for the site. At the most fundamental level, this will provide an holistic interpretation of events taking place at Benares and the changes in the lifestyle of the Harrises over time. At the larger and more pertinent level, this will be a means of looking behind the mytho-history to discover from whence that mythology arose, and what influences shaped its final form. This will be undertaken by focussing on the oral evidence, on the memories of the family gathered through oral interviews with three Harris descendants, and by examining oral tradition extant in both written and spoken domains.

CHAPTER I

THE HARRISES OF BENARES AND THE WHITEOAKS OF JALNA: A FAMILY HISTORY

The history of the house is the history of the family
G. Sayers:1991

Significant portions of the Benares Estate were excavated in 1991 by the Ontario Heritage Foundation (OHF), a Provincial Government agency. The OHF is an arm of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, devoted to "promoting, preserving and protecting" buildings and sites of provincial or national significance. Benares, which was one of the first properties acquired by the Foundation in 1968, is deemed notable for two reasons; first, the house, property and furnishings have remained in the same family for over 150 years and constitute a good example of a nineteenth-century Ontario farmstead. Secondly, at a local level, the family was, and still is, very prominent in the former Town of Clarkson, now the City of Mississauga. However, one of the principal attractions of the property to the Foundation was through its association with the novels written by Mazo de la Roche.

The site was occupied from circa 1837 by the Harrises and their descendants until 1979. Since that time the property has been maintained by

a series of tenant caretakers, and in June 1995, it opened to the public as an historic house museum.

The history of the Harris family began with James Beveridge Harris, an Englishman born in 1792. Following a long family tradition of military service, James Harris joined the British Army in 1817 and in 1828 he was promoted to the rank of Captain. After several years stationed in India in 1834 his regiment was posted to Montreal where he served for two years before resigning his commission. Captain Harris (fig. 1), his wife Elizabeth (fig. 2), and young daughter, moved to Upper Canada[1] to take up life as a gentleman farmer. In 1836 James Harris purchased at auction 284½ acres of land and a 1½ story stone house, located near the town of Clarkson, then known as Springfield. Harris later received land grants which brought his total land holdings in the province to over 945 acres.

The original stone house, built by Edgar Neave about 1835, was largely complete when Harris purchased the property, but it appears that Neave never occupied the house. The Harris family lived in this house (Benares I) until 1855, when fire destroyed most of it, leaving only the summer kitchen at the rear of the building undamaged (cf. The Weekly Review). Following this first fire the Harrises rebuilt (Benares II); however, within a very short time that house was

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1. Before the Confederation of the provinces and territories into the Dominion of Canada in 1867, the Province of Ontario was referred to first as Upper Canada and briefly as Canada West.

destroyed by fire. The extant two-story brick structure dates to about 1859 (figs. 3 & 4). This third house (Benares III) was built on almost the same location as Benares I and incorporates the 1835 summer kitchen in an elongated kitchen wing (fig. 5).

In addition to the daughter born in 1835, three more daughters and four sons were born to Captain and Mrs. Harris. Of the sons, only Arthur survived to adulthood; two boys succumbed to illness, and one was gored by a bull. After Captain Harris' death the house passed to Arthur Harris who, like his father, was a gentleman farmer and continued to farm the property until his death in 1932.

In 1880, Arthur Harris married Mary McGrath (fig. 6), daughter of the first Rector of St Peter's Anglican Church. Arthur and Mary Harris had two daughters, Annie (1882) and Naomi (1883). Benares was willed to Naomi, who never married, but remained at Benares until she died in 1968. Her sister, Annie, married Beverly Sayers and they had three children, Geoffrey (1907), Dora (1916), and Barbara (1920). Geoffrey spent the most time at Benares of the three Sayers children; he lived there briefly during World War I with his mother while his father was overseas and he and his wife lived in the house for 12 years. Benares has been occupied by tenant caretakers since 1981. At this point we begin to see the transition from private family home to public site.

There are sixteen books in the series known familiarly as the "Jalna books". Written between 1927 and 1960, the novels chronicle the life of the

fictional Whiteoak family and their descendants over a century from roughly 1852 to 1954. The series is based upon the central theme of the emigration of Captain Philip Whiteoak to Canada, more particulary, to the south-central area of the province of Ontario. Captain Whiteoak arrived in Ontario with his Irish wife, Adeline, and newborn daughter after long service with the British Army in India. Captivated by the opportunity in a young land, Philip Whiteoak resigned his commission and acquired property upon which he planned to build a house and settle down to life as a gentleman farmer.

The novels were written in the genre of the heroic family saga and have been compared by some of de la Roche's reviewers to John Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga (eg., Hambleton 1966:177), others have pointed out similarities to Mitchell's Gone with the Wind (Givner 1989:218). At the heart of these novels is a celebration of tradition and a return to simpler, quieter times when home and family were paramount (cf., Givner 1989, North 1938). Within the story, Jalna, the house, provides a focus for the lives of generations of Whiteoaks; Jalna represents stability and tradition, and is the guardian of social mores in a changing society.

The association between Jalna and Benares grew quite quickly after the publication of the first book, Jalna, in 1927 and was furthered by the publication of The Building of Jalna (1944). Although this latter book was the seventh to be written, the setting places it as the beginning of the Whiteoaks saga, predating the Jalna story by fifty years. The Building of Jalna (fig. 7)

detailed Philip and Adeline's life prior to and including their arrival in the province and it outlined much of the background history upon which the other books were based. Jalna also performed this function but its vantage point was after nearly half a century of settlement and family history at Jalna. The series concluded with Centenary at Jalna, written in 1958. Of all the books in the series, these three, particularly the first two, are thought to be most faithful to de la Roche's original theme and motivation. Many consider the other books to be substandard (Hambleton 1966:203), deviating far from the original theme and possibly written in response to public demand for more stories about the Whiteoaks (ibid).

Superficially, the ties between Jalna and Benares are quite apparent. Passages taken from the novels describing Jalna, match the description of Benares as it looked in the 1920s.

> When completed, decorated and furnished, it was the wonder of the countryside. It was a square house of dark red brick, with a wide stone porch, a deep basement where the kitchen and the servants' quarters were situated, an immense drawing room, a library (called so but more properly a sitting room since few books lived there) a dining room and a bedroom on the ground floor: and six large bedrooms on the floor above, topped by a long low attic divided into two bedrooms
>
> The Building of Jalna:24

> The best quality of brick had been ordered, built on a foundation of stone. The brick was of a fine red that would mellow to the colour of a dark dahlia. The basement was paved with bricks and contained the large kitchen, two servants' bedrooms, pantries, coal and wine cellar
>
> The Building of Jalna:139

Despite some differences such as an extra floor and bedrooms extant at Jalna but missing at Benares, and the different colours of brick, there are key elements notable at Benares which can be found at Jalna. Some of the most important common elements include the library as sitting room, the Benares kitchen in the basement, and the portrait of Lieutenant-Colonel Harris manifested as Philip Whiteoak. The similarities between the two structures leave little doubt that Mazo de la Roche borrowed details of the house (and family) which was located so close to her own home at Trail Cottage. At the very least, Benares and the Harrises must have cast some influence upon her construction of a fictional home and family. Furthermore, Hambleton remarked that Mazo de la Roche's illustrative powers were strongest when describing locations and people which were familiar to her (1966:196). The similarities also extend to the landscape. Jalna is located "on the fertile shore of Lake Ontario" (1944:102) where "the winters are mild...the land yields grain and fruit in abundance" (1944:103). Another character in the novel, David Vaughn, counsels Philip to purchase "A thousand acres of richly timbered land...Nowhere would he find better land, better sport within such easy distance of railway and town" (1944:110).

> Philip Whiteoak bought from the government a thousand acres of rich land traversed by a deep ravine through which ran a stream lively with speckled trout. Some of the land was clear, but the greater part presented the virgin grandeur of the primeval forest
>
> Jalna:19

Compare this to the advertisement of the sale of the Benares property placed

in the Upper Canada Land Mercantile and General Advertiser by Edgar Neave in July 1835. The property was made up of 197 acres with a "never-failing creek of excellent water" and had eighty acres cleared for farming (Unterman McPhail 1992:2).

The Benares Estate is located within what was Toronto Township, since incorporated into the City of Mississauga; during the 1840s this township was engaged in commercial farming and was exporting wheat as part of the Upper Canadian market to Great Britain (Unterman McPhail 1992:4). During the 1860s, the principal crop at Benares was fall wheat (Unterman McPhail 1992:7), but the area was also noted for its apple production. In 1871, Benares was the largest producer in the area (Unterman McPhail 1992:12). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Clarkson was a market town for the City of Toronto located about forty miles to the east. Rail travel between Clarkson and Toronto was frequent and easy, and with the station located a few miles away, Benares was within "such easy distance of railway and town" (The Building of Jalna: 110).

Beyond the physical descriptions, common elements can be found in the fictional characters and within the story of the arrival and settlement of Philip and Adeline Whiteoak. That both Captains Harris and Whiteoak were retired British Army officers who had spent much of their time posted to India, and the point that both Elizabeth Harris and Adeline Whiteoak were Irish women has been previously mentioned. Other points of similarity include the circumstances

of the birth of Augusta Whiteoak, the eldest daughter, and Elizabeth Harris, the eldest Harris child; both girls were born aboard ship while en route to Canada. Additional ties are more tenuous but it should be noted that the Jalna novels featured a spinster, Meg, who remained at home to care for her family, a circumstance which must have appeared similar to unmarried Naomi Harris who had remained at Benares. At various times Mazo de la Roche both denied and acknowledged the similarities of the two homes and the two families. In 1927, she wrote to her publisher, promising to send a picture of Benares so that it might be used for the cover design of Jalna. In the letter de la Roche noted "There is an old house which partially suggested Jalna. It too was built by a retired officer of the British Army in India, and is named "Benares"." (Hambleton 1966:14). In a later letter, dated 1943, she stated that :

> The new book [The Building of Jalna] is about the early days of Jalna and the building of the house in 1853, I have no special house in mind but a composite of several. Neither am I a member of the family! Though, on certain points there is a resemblance to my own
>
> Cane 1986:43

Still later, de la Roche wrote

> Jalna was inspired by the traditions of that part of Southern Ontario on the fringe of which we built Trail Cottage. The descendants of their retired military and naval officers who had settled their stoutly clung to British traditions. No house in particular was pictured: no family portrayed
>
> 1959:181

With de la Roche herself apparently unable to decide whether the source of the books was real or fictional, it is little wonder that her readers were equally

confused about where the line between fact and fiction was drawn.

CHAPTER II

ORAL HISTORY AND HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The use of oral tradition by historical archaeologists is neither new or unheralded; and a number of analyses have appeared in recent years which incorporate both oral histories and oral traditions. Oral traditions and oral histories have long been employed by archaeologists primarily as a means to "round out" their data. However, the wholesale adoption of this source and its potential has not yet been realized; "oral history remains a largely marginal and incidental factor in the practice of archaeology" (Purser 1992:28). Even when used, it is more often seen in studies relating to non-Western groups and/or groups that are or were non-literate. While it is an obvious source of data for historical archaeologists, until recently it remained largely unexploited.

Before discussing the use of oral data by archaeologists, it is necessary first to define this type of information. There are two types of oral evidence: oral histories and oral traditions. Both sources have quite separate means of acquiring and retaining data and as such each contains a very different set of information. Oral traditions, until recently, were perhaps the more familiar of the two types of oral data. Oral traditions include such things as creation tales and myths. Generally oral traditions function on the macro level; they chronicle

events which occurred to more than one person and they are usually common knowledge to a wide variety of people within a group. Distance is inherent in oral traditions; the stories told rarely occur to the teller, and are transmitted via storytellers who pass the tales from one generation to the next (Henige 1982, Vansina 1985). On a larger scale, oral traditions are defined as the

> experiences of a whole ethos of previous generations, acquired from the last immediate one, and retold in the present as they are understood by the present generation. They contribute to social cohesion, dynamic evolution and durability of the culture they represent. They are changed by the changes in the culture around them, and in turn they serve to mold and shape the evolving culture
>
> (Moss 1988:9).

There is disagreement as to the amount of time which must transpire before a tale becomes a tradition. David Henige, among others, calls for traditions to be handed down "at least" a few generations (Henige 1982), while Jan Vansina only requires that the tales go back one generation (1958:3). Regardless of the age of the tale,the key point is the universal availability of this type of memory.

Oral histories operate in direct contrast to oral traditions; oral histories are less likely to be widely known and usually operate on a much smaller scale. Oral histories are personal, are usually centered on the teller, and are accounts of events which occurred to or relate to that individual. The memories embodied within oral histories are located in the recent past and are often passed on to a very limited audience; as such a critical relationship exists between informant and interviewer. The artifact which results from the

transmission of oral histories, the paper translation, is one which has been shaped by both people. Unlike oral traditions which are fairly static in their structure, oral histories tend to be more diachronic; they are subject to change, constantly being reinterpreted and altered by the teller. While these types of oral evidence clearly compliment each other they are also in conflict. Until recently, it was more common to see oral traditions employed in anthropological studies as a source of evidence. Presently, both oral traditions and oral histories are used widely by anthropologists; both provide an unique set of information which is unobtainable through the other lines of evidence.

There has been a long association between archaeology and oral history; early references to the use of oral evidence by archaeologists date to the late nineteenth century (Fewkes 1893). One of the early twentieth-century acknowledgements of the use of oral traditions was the British anthropologist, A. H. L. Pitt-Rivers who noted that the oral traditions were useful only to corroborate other lines of archaeological data (Henige 1982). Most, if not all these applications have been to prehistoric studies. Only in recent years has this resource been adapted by historical archaeologists. There is evidence that oral traditions and oral histories were incorporated into archaeological analyses in the early 1960s (Adams 1982:43, Henige 1982:18-19), but it is more correct to date the studies incorporating oral evidence to the early 1970s (Purser 1992:25). At this time we begin to see wholesale integration of oral histories into analyses of historic period sites. Amongst the more notable early studies

are William Adams at Silcott Washington (1977), Marley R. Brown III at Mott Farm (1978) and Robert Schuyler at Sandy Grove (1978). Of these, Brown and Schuyler have the best understanding of the potential for this resource; acknowledging that it can be more than a means of locating sites or identifying structures.

Work in the early 1980s again focussed on studies with non-literate, that is, oral societies, with much of the work taking place in Africa (cf., Schmidt 1978, Hall 1990). In the latter years of the decade, historical archaeologists working in the United States and to some extent, in Canada began, and increasingly continue, to incorporate and rely upon the data source (eg.,Holland 1990, Klimko and Taft 1991 and Yentsch 1988).

One of the early trends amongst researchers was to use oral histories as a means to identify and/or locate sites and structures. While the use of this research tool has been expanded to include what Adams referred to as "memory ethnography" (1982:48) and despite the fact that there has been considerable evolution and refinement in the inclusion of oral evidence into archaeological analyses, most studies continue to share two basic flaws. First, the tendency in the past was that one or more of the sources was allowed to assume primacy over the others. The secondary sources merely acted as supplements, looked to as a reserve of information missing from the prime source but ignored when that information contradicted the first source. This piecemeal form of analysis whereby one source acts as the arbiter and the data

are selected at whim from the other sources, in hindsight, can hardly be defended as good scholarship. However, the fact remains that there is implicit authority given the documents, in particular, and the archaeological record. Seldom is this reversed; seldom is the oral evidence allowed this same authority.

Second, when oral data are utilized in this type of study it is usually viewed through the text, that is, the documents and the tangible reminders of the past, the material culture. Applied in this fashion, the oral evidence is never allowed to stand independently; the information received is more often than not filtered through the documents and the material culture. Barbara Little (1992:217) credited this tendency to the fact that, as a literate society, Westerners organize according to text; it is, after all a familiar, dependable, and authoritative source. Furthermore, "archaeologists organize questions, research and discussions as text. We privilege text because that is the primary, explicit way in which we understand the world" (Little 1992:218). Yet by adhering to this methodology, the potential of oral history is never realized.

In order to utilize completely the gifts inherent in the oral evidence that data must be allowed "to occupy centre stage" (Vansina 1985:24). To achieve this, we must first turn around the reliance on a single source and use the archaeological data not as the arbiter, but merely as the control. Next, the oral evidence needs to be examined separately, as an independent source, and we need to examine the influences which have shaped that data, before bringing

it back on an equal footing, to use in conjunction with the archaeological and documentary sources. In order to allow its ascendancy we must know which events governed the retention of specific memories. In fact, this is no different than looking at site formation factors in order to determine what has affected the deposition or preservation of artifacts or features in the ground.

Much of the recent trend in the use of oral histories among anthropologists, sociologists and folklorists has been to "giv[e] voice to the voiceless" (Lummis 1987:17). Most commonly, anthropological studies are seen in situations where oral histories are used to demonstrate the individuality of the oppressed, subjugated, or marginalized against a larger, documentarily well-represented group (Metheny 1994).

Historical archaeology is unique in that it "offers the only multidisciplinary articulation and integration of evidence from the material-cultural, natural intellectual and social worlds both in the past and in the present...the strength of historical archaeology lies in this kind of interface." (Deagan 1991:102). Yet this kind of interaction is difficult to achieve; oral evidence is a complex source of information and to get the most from these data, the source of that information itself needs to be understood. Unique problems occur when oral data are incorporated into an historical period analysis, most of which arise out of the de facto reliance on documents. Yet many researchers, using documentary and/or oral evidence, continue to work under the mistaken assumption that one or more of these sources is more valid than another, that

one will offer greater insight to the "truth". In that assumption they are ignoring Deagan's message, they are missing the key words "integration" and "interface".

A fundamental problem with the automatic acceptance of the written word is that the material record omits a whole category of information because most of what happens on a daily basis, and the things that people recall most clearly are those things which rarely, if ever, get written down (Allen & Montell 1981:25). This information which does not get written down lies at the heart of anthropological interpretation. This omitted information includes what Olga Klimko and Michael Taft call the "intangibles...[the] beliefs attitudes and associations which color the perceptions of members of a community" (1991:152). This, of course, is where oral evidence excels.

An added flaw in many of the studies geared towards a broader-based approach is that each source is considered to be independent of the other. Creative work like Mark Leone and Parker Potter's adaptation of Lewis Binford's idea of "ambiguity", wherein the "truth" is divined through the investigations of the observed differences in the sources (Leone and Potter 1988:14), also fall short of exploiting the sources to their fullest extent. Likewise, in some of these studies, it is apparent that the authors do not fully understand the depth of interaction and influence which each source has upon the other. Analyses which continue to consider each line of evidence separately have little hope of reaching any greater insight into the past. Certainly new facts might be

gleaned, but without integrating the data it is rather like three different witnesses to an accident; more information is available but one is no closer to getting to the truth.

Oral history defines a "reality", in this case, an "ethnographic reality" (Adams 1982). Often, although the oral tradition provides "an expanded version... of events it is a version which is quite different from the conclusions which would be drawn if the historical record stood alone" (Cane 1986:26). The point is that while oral history does provide a reality, it is by no means the only reality, and in addition to the ethnographic reality, there is also the documentary reality and the archaeological reality. Somehow all of these "realities" must be coordinated in order to get as accurate picture as possible.

> The search for the past - which is at the heart of both archaeology and oral history - is a difficult business. The archaeologist's understanding of the past is limited to what physical evidence mains. The oral historian's search is limited to what is recoverable from the memories of witnesses to the past. Separately, neither artifact...nor "mentifact" give an entirely accurate picture of the way things were: together, they bring the past into somewhat sharper focus.
>
> (Klimko & Taft 1991:143)

The idea of playing off the various sources against each other, which may appear at first to be an objective means to filter out extraneous or irrelevant details, really is responsible for creating yet another story, this one of the anthropologist's making which may not posses any more factual details. In fact, what is being produced is a context which is largely the manufacture

of the researcher. The researcher is inventing the past and the past becomes a construct of a twentieth century scholar.

When oral evidence is incorporated into an archaeological analysis, the question which should and must be addressed is: "why does a particular body of oral history or oral tradition exist?" What do the stories, legends and myths tell us about the people; of what larger phenomenon are they indicative? The nature of the source should be examined to determine the best way of using this data. For example it has been long established and accepted that oral evidence is a poor resource from which to obtain absolute dates or establish a chronology (Vansina 1985:173, Yentsch 1988:16). Memory works in different ways than written histories; the information changes, recalled events assume greater or lesser importance over time, and new information is added to the "corpus" of memory (Foucault 1972).

All these factors must be acknowledged and investigated in order to achieve the best use of oral evidence. Incorporating this kind of evidence into an archaeological analysis demands that we recognize that the data contained in the oral histories and the oral traditions are multi-faceted and arise from a variety of sources. Furthermore, during the time in which the data have been in the spoken domain, they have both changed and been changed by events occurring at the family level and at the level of the society. Too often it seems that the information contained in oral histories is taken at face value, that all information is viewed as of a similar nature and is considered as a homogeneous

source. Within this assumption lies a fundamental flaw, "The past of an individual does not allow itself to be apprehended as simple, immediate, transparent or total presence" (Donato 1978:575), and only when we have looked at the source of data for each line of evidence, analyzed each as a separate entity, and taken into account the very different nature of each resource, will it be possible to compare one with the other. In this way we seem to be following Leone and Potter's (1988) dictum of looking for the ambiguities among the sources which contain the truth and which will, in due course, reveal the answers. In fact, the proposed methodology is quite different. Under the Leone and Potter hypothesis, they are creating another story; they are manufacturing context. What we need to do is to allow the evidence to reveal the context rather than to create it.

The model for this analysis necessitates the use of three disparate sources and we need to be able to use each in its own fashion. However, it is critical that the following points be kept always at the forefront of the research: 1) it is incorrect to assume that the documents can stand alone and apart; documents and memories are closely linked and each is influenced by the other, 2) any discussion of the documents must also address the relationship between them and the oral evidence, and 3) it is presumptuous of researchers to attempt to analyze archaeological data while concentrating on a single source of evidence. To ignore any or all of these points means that the context established under this methodology will be incomplete.

Robert Schuyler described this failure to treat all the available sources equally as archaeologists forgetting "their birthright as anthropologists" (1988:38). Instead, he continued, "They do not treat the documentary record, the second source equally. Either they ignore or at best allow the archaeological remains to structure their use of written sources".

Trevor Lummis, in discussing the use and validity of oral evidence, noted that its importance lies not in "its ability to create sources for the understanding of unrepresented groups; it provides the basis for considering a much wider range of historical questions." (1987:18). This larger scope should be more thoroughly investigated by anthropologists, more particularly by historical archaeologists. It is simply one more method which will allow us to develop context; it is a means of enlarging the research design. Furthermore, "the aim of oral history is to gain information about the past...to grasp the way in which a person constructs and makes sense of his or her life at a given moment" (Plummer quoted in Lummis 1987:19). The latter half of this quotation has intrinsic and fundamental value for the research undertaken by social archaeologists. This sense of construction bears directly upon the relationship between the individual, the material culture, and, ultimately, what will be found in the ground and interpreted.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY AS LIVED AND HISTORY AS BELIEVED

> Mythology...is the history we don't believe; history is the mythology we do believe
>
> Carroll 1990:190

Research into the Harris family and Benares has been undertaken for several years in many different forms. Prior to the 1980s, most of the work centered around the construction of family histories and much of the research was conducted by family members. Kathleen Collaton Sayers, Geoffrey Harris Sayers' wife, was instrumental in the transcription of most of the family tales and in the collection of data. Her research includes documentary information as well as oral histories, and particularly important are notes from conversations with Annie Harris Sayers, Geoffrey's mother. Kathleen Sayers' notes span the period between the 1960s and 1980, and are an invaluable source of information.

In the last decade two formal reports on the site and family have been completed. The first, published in 1986, was written by Fred Cane, an architectural historian, and took much of its shape from architectural data and the written record. The second report by the firm of Unterman McPhail completed in 1992, was a social-cultural study of the Harris family through the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Like the earlier

report, this one was based almost wholly on documentary evidence.

Two archaeological projects have been undertaken at the Benares site, a survey of the property completed by Archaeological Services Inc. in 1986 and longer, more extensive work conducted by the OHF in 1991 and 1992.

The largest body of oral data is a series of informal conversations held between this author and the eldest of the Harris descendants during the summer of 1991, and three formal interviews held with each of the three informants. In addition, there is an extensive set of interviews held between the three informants and staff the OHF to determine a furnishing plan preparatory to the development of the house as a museum. Through this medium, information relating to the fire and the history of the family emerged.

In this chapter, the fire events will be examined, each from the varying perspectives of the different forms of evidence. The chronology of events will be recounted separately so that information unique to that form of evidence will be highlighted. This will allow us to begin to differentiate between and to define the material belonging to the world as lived and the world as imagined.

History as Remembered:

Information for reconstruction of the events as described in the oral histories of the family was gained largely from three people, Geoffrey Harris Sayers (fig. 8), great-grandson of Captain James Harris, and Mr. Sayers' two younger sisters, Mrs. Dora Caro and Mrs. Barbara Larson. Mrs. Caro left

Benares in the 1930s to move to New York, and she continues to live in the United States. Mrs. Larson still lives in the "log bungalow" located about a mile from Benares and has lived in the area all of her life. Mr. Sayers also has lived in or near Clarkson all his life. For twelve years after the death of Naomi Harris, he lived at Benares with his wife, Kathleen Sayers. The story as told by the three surviving Harris descendants is as follows: one Sunday morning, as Captain Harris and his family were returning from Church, they spotted smoke on the horizon. By the time they reached Benares, the fire was well underway and little could be saved. Although the stone building was a ruin, the attached kitchen was saved, as were a few small items of furniture, notably a coffee urn and a small table. Other details about the fire itself are sketchy; usually at this point in the story all three of the informants mention that after fire the family had to live in temporary quarters. While Mr. Sayers and Mrs. Larson are very specific and name the attic of the kitchen as the location, Mrs. Caro is more general and speaks of the outbuildings, maybe the woodshed (Caro: 1994). Key elements in this phase of the story center around the size of Arthur Harris and the presumed discomfort of fitting his 6' frame into a small attic as well as the great difficulty of finding a home for him, his wife, and their eight children.

The location and the description of the second fire are less complete than the first. However, it does seem as though the Harrises were living in a second, temporary structure while a more permanent house was under construction. Again, a member of the family, in this case Aunt Lucy, James'

youngest daughter, had a central role in the story. Apparently, Lucy, suffering from chilblains one December night went out onto a second-story balcony to get snow to relieve their itching. While there, she smelled smoke and noted two men running off across the field. Lucy woke the family who were able to save some items but again a great deal was lost and once again the family was homeless. There is rarely any mention of the living arrangements after this second fire. Usually the story proceeds from that point to building the third, extant, house.

The story recounted above is the stripped down version constructed from details common to all three tales. Additional details will be discussed shortly, but those are points which only two of the informants agree upon or which are unique to one tale.

It is clear that all three informants believe that both of the fires were set deliberately by people outside the family. Both Mrs. Caro and Mrs. Larson note that the servants set the fire and both mention that it was to conceal a robbery (Larson 1994, Caro 1994). This theme of theft also occurs in Mrs. Sayers' notes, where she writes

> "The couple who worked for the family had disappeared, and not a trace of the silver (household) was found in the debris. Seems a drastic way to pinch the silver-and presumably that was reason for the bonfire"
>
> (K. Sayers n.d.)

Mrs. Caro (1994), in telling the story recounts;

"That [the first fire] was done by somebody from outside, either Indians,

> the Indians- why we blame everything on the Indians I don't quite know but then everything at those times was blamed on the Indians (they couldn't get any other reason) [laughs] or that may have been the one it was the ill will of somebody..."

Mrs. Larson takes the servant story further, offering as proof a silver coffee urn in her possession which, she says, was dropped and damaged in the course of the robbery (Larson 1994). Mr. Sayers, in his most recent interview in 1993, did not mention a cause for the first fire, but noted in an earlier discussion that it may have been caused by blocked chimneys (Sayers 1991).

The interlude between the fire in Benares I and the building of Benares III is the crux of the problem. It is here that the oral histories and the documentary sources are most divergent. It is important to note, at this point, that before the archaeological work undertaken in Operation 8 (behind the potting shed), the story as told by the informants was less specific. At that time it was Mr. Sayers who provided the most definitive statement about Benares II, a building which is generally assumed to be a frame structure. For a number of years, Mr. Sayers had spoken of a building located "farther back" of the summer kitchen; not surprisingly, this detail is also found within Mrs. Sayers' notes. However, neither of the other two informants cite a specific location for the Benares II structure. When questioned, neither Mrs. Larson nor Mrs. Caro could remember a location being mentioned. After the excavations revealed the foundations of a building and debris from a fire in a structure which the archaeologists have tentatively labelled as Benares II, the focus of the

Benares II stories centered on that area:

Barbara Larson: "...we are sure that the second fire out in what would be the out..."
Denis Heroux[2]: "Behind the potting shed, in the wooden potting shed"
Barbara Larson "And that would have taken place in '55"

The most important detail of this period seems to be that the family took up residence in the attics of the kitchen and the potting shed. Once again, there is a tangible item which can be offered as proof of this story: a rope bed frame was made for the attic and in 1992, was still there in the attic.

The details of the construction and the description of Benares II are lacking in all of the informants' stories. The only information which is available is that the house was frame and had a second-floor balcony. That the building was frame is deductive evidence; each of the three informants at one time or another has stated that it must have been frame in order to have caught fire so quickly when the men set a fire against one of the outer walls.

Only Mr. Sayers and Mrs. Larson offer concrete dates for the fire, although it is generally agreed that approximately two years occurred between fires. Mr. Sayers dated the first fire at 1847. Other markers which he offered for the fires include the statement that at the time of the second fire, his Aunt Lucy was 13. Arthur, too, is mentioned in this story. Apparently as the fire raged, he stood outside and watched his long underwear go up in flames.

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2. Architectural historian, Ontario Heritage Foundation, part of a team interviewing Mrs. Larson and Mrs. Caro about the house plan and furnishings December 1, 1992

Interestingly enough, Mr. Sayers' wife suggested that the first fire dates to either 1847 or 1849 (K. Sayers n.d.). Barbara Larson, who in 1992 dated the first fire to 1850, with the second in 1855, later changed those dates to 1852 and 1857 (Larson 1994), and commented that Arthur was "only a young man of about, I think 12, 11-12...".

Arthur Harris was born in 1843, and his younger sister, Lucy, was born a year later. By the reckoning of ages in Mr. Sayers' version, the second fire would have occurred about 1857 and according to Mrs. Larson's account the second fire occurred after 1855. Added to this is the oft-repeated comment about Arthur fitting into the attic. In adulthood, photographs show Arthur as a lean, tall man; however, it is unlikely that at the age of 11 or 12 he would have achieved full height. The final, curious point is that none of the three informants mentions the accommodations after the second fire. The lone reference to where they lived between the second fire and the construction of Benares III is found in Mrs. Sayers' papers. In two different documents describing the house plan, she mentions that the family "camped out" in the back kitchen "while the present Benares was being built" (K. Sayer n.d.).

History as Written:

The documentary record paints a slightly different picture. Very few personal papers have survived from the early period of the Harris occupation, obviously due to most of the papers having been destroyed in one or the other

of the fires. Fred Cane, the author of "Benares: A History of the Harris Family and their home in Clarkson, Ont.", noted that only three of Captain Harris' letters survive: two examples of personal correspondence, and one business letter (Cane 1986:34).

One of the letters is a note written by Captain Harris in March 1856 to the Department of Crown Lands, requesting replacement copies of land grants which he had received upon his retirement from the army. In that letter Captain Harris stated that the grants "given about 1839... were burnt in my house." The other letter, dated July 20, 1857, is from Captain Harris to his sister Margaret Anne Patton, in Scotland and referred to the fire as "my second misfortune". Further on, in the course of informing her of his son's death, he wrote that "...the workmen were at the new house and they brought his body home and laid it out".

An article in the local paper, The Weekly Review, dated Sunday November 17, 1855 referred to the fire(s) at Benares stating in part

> Fire- We regret to state that the dwelling of Captain Harris in this Township was destroyed by fire, on Sunday last, while the family were at church. It is supposed that the fire originated in consequence of an accumulation of soot in one of the chimneys. The kitchen attached to the house was preserved, together with a portion of the furniture...

The date of the fire, therefore, would be the previous Sunday, November 11, 1855.

There is also a memo in the minutes of the annual meeting of the Vestry of St Peter's Anglican Church, Springfield, held in March, 1856 which recorded

that "all the Church Accounts were burnt in Captain Harris' house". At that time Captain Harris had been acting as warden of St. Peter's.

In terms of establishing a chronology, the newspaper item is, of course, the most concrete. It establishes an exact date and it seems that there could be little argument with the date of at least one of the two fires. While this re-examination of dates may appear redundant, it is one of most critical points because here the oral tradition and the documentary record are most divergent. The 1855 newspaper item and the two 1856 letters provide a nice framework, and we can feel fairly sure that a single fire occurred during the period between November 1855 and March 1856. The letter in 1857 wherein Harris thanks his sister for her help to him in his "second misfortune" is another good clue. Thus, we have another frame for a fire, between March, 1856 and July, 1857. Added to this is the notation in the same letter that workmen were up at the "new house". The language employed by Captain Harris and his choice of the words, "the new house", contrasted with the phrase, "they brought his body home", suggest that "home" and the "new house" were separate entities.

The last document is a receipt for work to be undertaken on the construction of the Benares III. The receipt is undated, although the paper upon which it was written bears a watermark of 1856 (cf. Cane 1986).

While secondary evidence, the Cane report must be discussed briefly before continuing, as it is basic to the development of the idea that the written data suggests there were only two houses constructed, Benares I and Benares

III. Its importance is that since this report was based upon documents and structural evidence, it has long been considered as the final authority, discrediting much of the oral history, which appeared to disagree with Cane's hypothesis, was discredited. Cane appears to have been willing to accommodate portions of the oral evidence when they fit nicely into his story.

Based upon the documentary record, Cane assumed that there was no question that Benares I and Benares II were essentially one and the same. After the first fire which he dated to November 11, 1855, he suggested that the second house was rebuilt within the shell of the first. His evidence for this came from the contractor's receipt which stated that "The old walls to be removed by the contractor and the Stones to be worked in the cellar Walls of the new building" (McClelland, Mikel and Rowse: 1991). Only after the second fire in December, 1856 (1986:32) did the family move to a different location. This move, which Cane suggested might have been into one of the log cabins on the property, accounted for the tradition that the Harrises lived in a frame house. As for the "farther back" aspect of the house, which was thought to be a consistent element in all the oral histories, it appears now to have been a construct of Geoffrey Sayers. In any event, Cane rationalized this difficult point by suggesting that it refers to the fact that the front of Benares III was moved sixteen feet west of the front of the stone house (Benares I). While it must be noted that Cane did try to incorporate traditions found within the oral histories, it is nonetheless clear that in cases of doubt he retreated to the documentary

sources. This is somewhat surprising because Cane himself was aware of the protean nature of the two sources with which he was dealing

History as Dug:

This then leaves only one other line of evidence from Benares: the archaeological data. Three areas were excavated which are critical to the interpretation of the fires and rebuilding events at Benares. These areas, referred to as "Operations" under the Parks Canada system of excavation (Swanneck 1977)[3], are: 1) Operation 1, which was located around the perimeter of the 1857 house and the original stone kitchen, 2) Operation 6, conducted within the interior of the kitchen beneath the floorboards, and 3) Operation 8, located to the north of the potting shed where a large concentration of artifacts had been recovered around and on top of a large mound (fig. 9).

The first and most critical point is that the excavations around the perimeter of the house and kitchen revealed a single layer of burned material. Furthermore, when portions of the c. 1835 foundations were uncovered the single burned layer abutted the limestone. During construction on the house, an area underneath the front porch which has been in place since c. 1857 with its foundations unaltered, again produced only a single burned layer. In this case, the layer had not been swept clean as had the others, and showed clear

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3. Operations are terms for specific areas excavated within a site. Each operation is usually made up of smaller units (eg. an individual excavated square) which are known as "suboperations".

evidence of shovel marks down into the layer itself. Finally, in Suboperation 1D the builders trench for the 1859 house, Benares III, cut the layer of burned material. Together this evidence suggests that there was a single fire on that location. Had there been two fires, there should have been two layers of burned material or some other indication of the rebuilding or landscaping during the occupation of Benares II.

Operation 6, the summer kitchen, was excavated to clarify some of the information about changes to the interior of the building. The kitchen, after all, was the one area about which there was agreement between all the sources. In addition to the claims that the kitchen had survived the fire, it was largely agreed that the kitchen had retained its appearance through time and had always been a large room with a small corner pantry and a hearth at the east end, which had been closed off in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Not only were several footings for interior walls discovered below the fill, but a limestone foundation for a large central hearth belied these assertions. Most important, a layer of burned material was found just above the subsoil, its position and appearance was virtually identical to that found on the exterior of the buildings. Clearly, neither of these deposits predated the construction of the stone kitchen. In both cases, the layer of burned material abutted the interior walls, indicating most obviously that the walls had been in place at the time the material was deposited. The stratigraphic position of the burned layer indicated that it had occurred fairly soon after the building was constructed.

Working strictly from the stratigraphical record, it is tempting to suggest that the kitchen, too, suffered during the fire and was at least partly burnt--perhaps the roof caught fire. However, the architects noted that the roof had never been altered, and in fact, retains its original pitch and structure (McClelland personal communication: 1991). More important, this conflicts not just with the oral histories but also with the article in the Streetsville paper. The walls against which the burned layer abutted were determined to be original, whilst the foundation for the hearth clearly showed a builder's trench cutting through the burned material.

Operation 8, located behind the potting shed in the north central portion of the property, produced the most surprising results of all. The units were laid in along the north wall of the potting shed in order to investigate the high concentration of artifacts recovered from the surface, and to investigate further the potting shed. Little was known about the building, the only information being the reference to the family sleeping in the loft and Mrs. Sayers' note that it was a very old structure (K. Sayers n.d).

Beneath two middens, both of which dated to the late nineteenth century, the remains of a fieldstone foundation, planks, and ferrous sheets were found. Lying within this rubble was a large assemblage of domestic artifacts all badly burnt. The ferrous sheets were later identified as probably roofing sheets. To date, only the southern portion of this feature has been excavated, but the dimensions across the excavated area and the size of the mound

indicate that the structure would have been the size of a large out-building or a small structure. The shape of the potting shed is, in itself, suggestive of a building which abutted another structure; to this end the outer wall boards were removed to look for charring of beams, but no indication of burning was found. The two midden deposits above the layer of building debris were unaltered by heat and contained assemblages dating to the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The ceramics from Operation 8 showed that the ratio of utilitarian vessels to fine wares is about 1:2. If we break down this operation into events, we see that the earlier midden, Midden #2, showed utilitarian wares and fine wares to be about evenly split, although the utilitarian wares never accounted for more than two-thirds of the sample. Conversely, in the later Midden #1, the fine wares took a much larger role in the assemblage; in all the lots, save two, fine wares made up at least seventy-five percent of the total.

While it must be stressed that the artifact analysis is only a preliminary one, therefore not complete, nonetheless several patterns appear which are worth noting. It seems likely that these differences may be a means of tracking the family's status in the years following the second fire. The preliminary data suggest that the fortunes of the Harris family may have begun to improve over time.

The early midden, Midden #2, is notable in that it contained elements of a set or sets of tableware which dated to the late nineteenth century. The cause for this deposition is unclear, but it may relate to a period of transition

when Arthur Harris began to assume more responsibility for the farming activities, culminating in full ownership upon his father's death in 1884. It is not uncommon to see the purchase of new wares as a site undergoes a change in owner or occupant. More important, the assemblage within Midden #1, contained within the remains of the burned building, showed that both utilitarian and fine wares were well-represented. It would be unusual to find such an assemblage in an outbuilding; even if there had been some sort of food-related activity taking place in that building, one would not expect to see that amount of fine wares. Their presence, therefore, suggests a more concentrated activity, such as occupation of the structure for a period of time.

When the three versions of the events surrounding the fires are examined separately, we can focus on the central elements of each. By laying bare the details of each individual tale it is possible to familiarize ourselves with, and to focus upon, the central elements of the individual accounts. Similarly, by identifying the sources of the data it is easier to track the evidence to its source, therefore, to determine to which of the worlds it belongs. Thus we are able to use each line of evidence, in concert, with much more confidence.

CHAPTER IV

UNRAVELLING THE MYTHOLOGY

> Like so much in Canada, its spirit was Chekhovian, clothing in a present dubiously accepted, a regret for a past which had never been.
>
> Davies 1995:113

When the oral histories were examined on an equal footing, common links appeared between them and the archaeological and written evidence. The three stories were presented individually in the previous chapter so that they could be viewed in their entirety and on their own. By examining the oral evidence as a viable and separate entity, we were able to determine that points which had been considered previously as contradictions, were instead, indicators of quite different phenomena. When all the sources were allowed to speak, each in its own voice, it transpired that all had a great deal in common, and that most of the gaps and contradictions of the oral traditions could be accounted for.

In order to fulfill the goal of realizing the potential of the oral data it is important to look not only at the details which are present but also at those which are absent. One of the most important omissions in the oral tradition at this site is the location of the living arrangements after the second fire. This is a curious phenomenon, particularly when the memories of the living arrangements following the first fire are so clear. However, if we consider that

the family may have resorted to similar living arrangements following the second fire as they did after as the first, it is possible that their memories may have combined two periods of "camping out" into a single event. Jan Vansina (1985:179) and others have noted that this telescoping of separate events into a single episode is a common occurrence in the retention of memories.

Based upon the idea that oral histories and traditions are composites of several sources it is interesting to look at some of the data from Benares to observe changes occurring over time as new data from other sources were incorporated into the corpus of memories. The best example of this can be seen in regard to the location of Benares II.

One of the arguments against the existence of the structure was the ambiguous location. None of the informants could pinpoint the site more closely than a vague "further back" or "on the northeast section [of the property]". Furthermore, it appeared at the outset, that is, before 1991, that only one of the informants, Geoffrey Sayers, remembered this detail. This lack of corroboration from either Mrs. Caro or Mrs. Larson seemed only to confirm that this detail, "the weakest part of the oral tradition," (Cane 1986:28) was a mistake. Instead of dismissing it, what should have been considered was the origin and the route of transmission of this phrase. Mr. Sayers' faith in the phrase "further back," which he said was told to him directly by Arthur Harris, as it turns out was based on more than a simple blind relay of information from his grandfather. During his residency at Benares, Mr. Sayers

encountered at the back of his property, several large cut limestones located near a tree with an iron hook in it. Combining his folk knowledge with these material objects, Mr. Sayers concluded that the stones were foundation stones and putting them together with Arthur Harris' description of the location he deduced that this had been the site of Benares II. It is not surprising that neither of his sisters would have held this item in their recollections, even if they had heard it, because they did not have a physical object, the foundation stones, to link to that memory. In retrospect, Mr. Sayers' conclusion was incorrect, but the elements used to arrive at that point were not. This illustrates once again the danger in dismissing a segment of the oral tradition without looking at the origin of that statement.

Further evidence of this linkage of memory to concrete items arises in the terminology applied to some of the outbuildings. In interviews with Mrs. Caro and Mrs. Larson, the outbuilding where the family lived after the first fire is most often identified as the "potting shed." Enough evidence exist to raise the question of whether the potting shed did house the family or is memory locating it there because it is the only one of several outbuildings still standing.

The terminology for two of the extant outbuildings has always been ambiguous. One of them, a stone building, is referred to by the family as either the "dairy" or the "icehouse." Technically, neither is correct. It appears that the term originated because the building was used for cold storage, and both ice and dairy products were stored there at different times. The wood

outbuilding, is now known as the "potting shed" is also referred to as the "toolshed" (eg., G. Sayers 1993). When the informants talk about the family living in the outbuildings, the term "woodshed" is also used (cf. Caro 1994). It is also possible that these terms refer to a changing function for this structure. Little was thought of this wandering terminology until Mrs. Caro, when looking at photographs in early 1993, indicated that another building, a shed where Arthur Harris used to store his wood and saws,"a woodshed", stood next to the potting shed. This suggests the possibility that the location of the structure which housed the family had been transferred from an invisible to a visible reminder of their past.

It emerged from conversations with Mrs. Caro and Mrs. Larson that both of them were confident about the existence of Benares II. Yet neither has been able to offer a specific site for the building, and the documents in this case are unable to provide further information. However, there is clear evidence in the archaeological record that the house was located to the north of the potting shed. Equally strong evidence indicating that there was but a single fire on the site of Benares I and III forces us to look elsewhere for the explanation. The solution to this dilemma can be found only within the oral evidence, within the tradition of a building located "further back".

Once the Operation 8 area, behind the potting shed, was identified as the possible location of Benares II, and this was made known to the informants, Mrs. Larson's and Mrs. Caro's accounts shifted slightly to include this new

data. This is not to intimate that their knowledge is made up, or that by moving to incorporate new information the oral histories and traditions are invalid or unreliable. Quite the opposite, it illustrates McMahan's (1989:6) point between the closed nature of documents versus the open system of oral sources. Documents are static objects, which once created change little. Conversely, memory is a changing resource with new information being acquired and assimilated constantly. Therefore, elements of a tale which may appear initially as unreliable or questionable because they change over time are more likely indicators of new information which is being received and synthesized into memories of the past.

Equally important to the dissemination of the oral accounts is that in each of the examples cited above, it was apparent that all the memories retained at the core level were heavily dependent on ties to physical objects. The coffee urn was offered as a link to the robbery and subsequent arson, and the rope bed was proof that the family had lived above the summer kitchen. It is critical if we are to understand fully the oral data that phenomena such as this are identified before using the oral record as a line of evidence.

Little has been said about the written sources; as they are sparse, it is both more difficult and simpler to discuss them. The primary documents sources do not contradict either the oral evidence or the archaeological data. In fact, four of the five items provide a nice framework, indicating a specific time period for the fires.

The one difficulty is in the newspaper article which noted that the summer kitchen was undamaged. There is a definite layer of burned material within the kitchen which is virtually identical to those strata associated with the first fire. Yet, due in part to a lack of artifacts, there is no time frame for this event. The simplest solution is that this fire occurred after the building was constructed in 1835 and before the posited 1857 installation of the hearth. However there is no clear evidence to support this idea.

All the informants, when presented with this problem "very strongly believe" (Larson 1991) that the feature belongs to an earlier time. According to them, the burned material seen beneath the floor is evidence of a fire which occurred prior to the Harris occupation, and the hearth is a structural remnant from the Neave, or some earlier, occupation. In fact, the nature of the stratigraphy and its relationship to the extant structure makes this impossible. There is no historical evidence to indicate that any other structure had ever been built there.

What is significant about this account is that it is the only occasion when the oral evidence proves to be wholly incorrect. It is even more notable that this coincides with a situation which is poorly, if at all, understood by any of the researchers. It is possible that the informants may be subconsciously attempting to fill in an obvious and important omission. Hence, we can see that adaptation of information, even when based upon a concrete object, can be fallible. It is therefore critical always to acknowledge the external influences

which mold that data.

In the end we are left with only a single discrepancy within the oral evidence, the dates of the fires. No one working with oral traditions has ever suggested that attaining absolute dates is a good use of oral tradition; in fact, many advise against it. Various events, both catastrophic and ordinary, tend to telescope several memories into a single episode (Vansina 1985:160) and the number of generations through which the information has been transmitted all contribute to a fundamental flaw in obtaining a concrete date from oral tradition or histories; people remember events, not dates (ibid). The early dates for the first fire offered by Mr. Sayers and, originally, by Mrs. Larson, are a conundrum. Mr. Sayers' information appears to have come from his wife's papers, and much of her information seems to have come to her from Annie Sayers. There is no good reason offered for the very early 1840s date of the fire. When questioned, Mr. Sayers referred to Kay Sayers' history, and noted that the fire mentioned in 1855 in the Streetsville newspaper was the second fire, and that the omission of the first was due to a mistake in reporting (G.Sayers 1992). Cane suggested that the early dates, either 1847 or 1849, correspond with a fire in 1849 which destroyed much of downtown Toronto (1986:28). There are no explanations offered by Mrs. Larson. There are several factors and events which suggest that it is unlikely to impossible that the first fire occurred before 1855.

The history of Benares is still being written and no more so than in the

period between 1991 and 1995, when the site was undergoing the transformation from family home to public museum. Much of the evidence was in the process of being acquired and analyzed, whether discovering new facts within the documentary and archaeological record or increasing information being relayed to the interviewer as the relationship between informant and interviewer was strengthened. Each piece of evidence meant that the data had to be considered as a history which was evolving and not as a static entity. To have considered the oral evidence as a single homogeneous acquisition would have masked the shaping forces. It became evident that elements which had previously appeared as errors or omissions now began to emerge as markers of very different and significant social forces which were acting upon the data.

The question asked at the beginning of this research, and indeed the research design of the archaeological project, was one founded on assumptions and/or hypotheses which later proved to be false. The "mytho-history" surrounding Benares and the Harris family was so prevalent and had developed to such a level that by 1991, the research design focussed upon the Jalna books; namely,how did those tales reflect the history of the site and how did they provide an example of what the Harrises thought or somehow conveyed to the outside world.

At the outset, the connection between the Whiteoaks and the Harrises and between Jalna and Benares was thought to have been of prime importance to the interpretation of the Harris family. The assumption was that the

Whiteoaks were the ideological equivalent of the Harrises, and that by reading the stories as text, it would be possible to obtain evidence about the history as manufactured by the Harrises and their descendants, and that insight would be gained to the presentation of the lifestyle which the Harris family conveyed to the world at large.

The key is that when the oral histories are examined we find that there is little profession of status by the Harrises or connection with the fictional family. The Harrises were and are an ordinary family made extraordinary by the mythology. The Whiteoaks are not the Harrises. However, we are not able to determine this solely on the basis of a comparison between the Jalna books and the oral histories of the family; indeed, using information contained within the oral histories, it is tempting to find links between them. More interesting than whether the Whiteoaks are the Harrises is the examination of the way in which the two families and two houses are similar.

It is clear from a comparison of the house portrayed in the novels and the plan of Benares, that this building is indeed the inspiration for Jalna. Physically, Benares equals Jalna and this leads to the area where we find a link between the two houses and the two families. Benares acts as a central metaphor for the Harrises as Jalna acts as a central metaphor for the Whiteoaks.

> The way of life in Benares was something that I understood was the way one should conduct oneself...It was a place, it was the standard of living...it was our compass
>
> (Caro 1994)

> "If a house could be said to look smug, certainly it did. It seemed to say "I will remain here to justify your lives as long as this country survives
>
> (Centenary at Jalna 1958:11)

Certainly the story of the Harrises' arrival in Upper Canada is neither unique or unusual. So common is this scenario in the early years of Canada that locations and families spanning the province have all at one time or another been cited as the inspiration of Jalna, and locally, at least one other Clarkson native (a prominent poet) claims her family as the Whiteoaks (Livesay 1965:26).

The oral history and the traditions seem to provide a detailed and accurate history of Benares and the Harris family. But is there anything within the oral tradition that links the Harrises with the Whiteoaks and Benares with Jalna. The stories and the tradition relayed seem very family-centric, very home-oriented. But where is Jalna in this scenario?

Before answering, it could be hypothesized that, instead of the history of Benares being considered as a single entity under the thrall of the mythology of Jalna, there are two histories of Benares, an "early" history and a "later" history. Evidence of the existence of these histories is found with the oral evidence. The early history constitutes Leach's history "as lived". This history is built up around and focusses upon the house. It relies heavily on the association with concrete items, items ranging in size from the coffee urn to the house itself. The early history uses the inner data, basic, factual evidence given us by the oral histories, to create a core level context and, in turn, begins to

reveal an understanding of the setting of the family and the site.

The later history is just that, one which has developed more recently. This history is found within the "leftover" information, the data that exist in the realm of the imagination. The information relayed to us in this history is rarely tied to material objects and tends to contain the beliefs and sentiments of the informants. Here we find information about the family, information which is much more a personal and a social history of the family. Remembered events are less factual and more emotional: we hear stories of family life at an intimate level. Through the history as believed/imagined, we begin to get a sense of the society and the context in which the family is living. The informants are relaying history as they remember it, not history as told to them.

Returning to Jalna, how then do these two histories of Benares bear any connection to the Jalna stories? The simplest answer is that both the Jalna stories and the Harris family history are constructed in two worlds. However this explanation still does not answer the question posed at the end of Chapter 4, how we explain the adoption of, and the maintenance of, the Jalna myth over time to the present day.

Having determined that the later history of Benares is one which is largely manufactured can we then determine whence that latter history grew. Why, more than forty years after publication of the first Jalna novel, and thirteen years after the final book, did this mythology suddenly happen? Of course, the Jalna-Benares link emerged soon after the publication of Jalna: people would

"occasionally" arrive up the driveway to gaze at Benares (G. Sayers 1992). Yet it is long after the publication of Jalna that the full blossoming of this mytho-history at Benares occurs and it appears that this genesis of the mytho-history lay outside of the Harris family. Each informant denies that he or she encouraged or believed wholly in the Benares-as-Jalna myth, and each has noted that it is a recent development. Dora Caro (1994) has suggested that the Benares-Jalna connection flourished in the years between 1968 and 1981, when Geoffrey and Kay Sayers were in residence and were in the custom of opening the house for tours or for charity fund-raising events.

An answer to the question of the flourishing mytho-history may lie in an examination of the events which occurred after Naomi Harris' death in 1968. Benares had been deeded to Naomi by her father, Arthur Harris, in 1932. She left the house to her two nieces and nephew, Mrs. Caro, Mrs. Larson, and Mr. Sayers. According to provisions in her will, if none of those three moved into Benares, or if a use for the house could not be found within two years of her death, the house would be sold. In 1968, the area was being developed and it was obvious that should it be sold, the likely result would be that Benares would be razed for a subdivision. Clearly, this was not an option. Benares was the central object in the legatees' past and to remove it would be to erase a tangible reminder to them and to others, of the history and the status of the Harris family. With that removal their history would be diminished. We see this idea reflected in statements made by Geoffrey Sayers and Dora Caro when they

remember the threat to the house in 1968: "We also knew if it was sold it'd probably become a nice six acre subdivision and the house would be bulldozed and we didn't want that because all of us had been in and out it all our lives and [it] was part of our lives" (Sayers 1993) and "I'm very glad it's not been torn down, been made into a school or an apartment or an old persons home. I'm glad it's going to be what people are doing with it [ie., converting it to a museum] because I can go back and remember what I had when I was little and as I was growing up" (Caro 1994). This idea, this sense of holding fast to an unchanging vision of the past, runs throughout the Jalna stories. Mary Ann Neely (1970:4) discussed this

> I discovered another source of energy...It is protective and introverted and springs up as a defense mechanism against the force of destruction, the blight of bungalows and factories of urbanization and industrialization

This theme can be traced beyond the immediate environment of Benares or Jalna to a much higher level, "...the gradual encroachment of destructive modernity on the primitive beauty of this land and on the primitive strength--physical, mental and spiritual--of its inhabitants. This is probably the most Canadian aspect (apart from the setting) of Mazo de la Roche" (Neely 1970:97).She continued, quoting Northrop Frye,"The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection with a spontaneous response to nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today is particularly strong in Canada" (ibid). Here, for the first time we see a tie with the specific locations and

settings of the two houses to a larger, national setting. For the first time the history of Benares is tied to the history of Canada.

Negotiations during 1968 with the OHF and the City of Mississauga resulted in them occupying Benares at some financial cost to Mr. and Mrs. Sayers. At this time, during the negotiations, the preservationist spirit rose and we see the first hint of the adoption of the Jalna myth by a member of the Harris family. During the negotiations to obtain the three acres between the house and road, an action which was important if the original layout and "feeling" of the property was to be maintained, Geoffrey Sayers' lawyer remarked that this extra frontage would be needed for parking should "that place [Benares] becomes as famous as that Anne of Green Gables place" (G. Sayers 1993).

Anne of Green Gables, heroine of several novels, is easily the most famous fictional Canadian. The home of the author, L.M. Montgomery, "Green Gables", which is located in Prince Edward Island, has long been preserved as a museum devoted both to the author and to her character. Each year hundreds of thousands of tourists come from around the world to visit "Anne's house". Similar to Jalna, many of the places noted in the Green Gables books can be found in the surrounding countryside. What is most important about Mr. Sayers' lawyer's statement is that it suggests that there is an agenda here, that Benares has a significance beyond the level of the community and that it must be preserved. While Mr. Sayers himself did not make the remark it has been

repeated by him several times, and it is clearly a sentiment is one which he has appropriated. At this point, the battle is still private, yet by reaching out to incorporate this myth Mr. Sayers has the means to make it public. He could associate with and benefit from the fervor of nationalism prevalent at the time. However, Mr. Sayers did not need to look to another house with another mytho-history; the myth of Jalna was close at hand and within those tales there lay a public statement of a private history.

At this point we need to look briefly at the larger context in which these events occurred. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw several events which played a significant role in Canadian history and much influenced Canadian ideology. Canada celebrated its centennial in 1967 and for the first time experienced a surge of patriotism in the wake of its new-found identity. Long in the shadow of both Great Britain and the United States, Canadians for the first time recognized within themselves a unique national identity. This period around 1967 was marked by the creation of several Federal and Provincial cultural agencies, including the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1968. Of equal importance during the early 1970s, the nation was faced with the first threats to the unity of the country in the Quiet Revolution and the Quebec Crisis (cf. Hambleton 1966). It is hardly a coincidence that in the early 1970s, the televised version of Jalna was adapted and produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The tales of nation building found in the Jalna novels and were a reassurance that the Canada of the past would continue into the

future, even in the face of sometimes contradictory evidence.

On one hand, at Benares, there is the personal, private history operating on the community level, which has developed out of the attempt to preserve a lifestyle. This a private history, but it is one which embodies much larger issues. It appears that the nostalgia, a central theme of the Jalna stories, and also of national proportions, has infected the Benares preservation issue. The family began to operate the Jalna myth in a very specific, individualized fashion in order to save a personal relic. Within this context we see evidence for the adoption of the larger Jalna mythology by the Harris family. Statements such as "The history of our family is the history of the whole of Canada" (Larson 1994), are telling.

On the other hand, Mazo de la Roche mourned the loss of a way of life and was herself trying to hold onto a fast disappearing way of life. "Every aspect of her first forty years of life shows that wherever she looked she saw only change and unwelcome change at that" (Hambleton 1966:217). Another of her biographers also referred to this idea "We are apt to look at the Jalna way of life as a rich design for living largely forsaken by the rushing modern world" (North 1938:7). Philip Whiteoak himself offered a comment on this theme:

> Philip said "We discussed the future of the province...They want to build up the population slowly but solidly of sturdy British material. They want both freedom and integrity in the land...Lets go slow and sure. Lets keep British"
> "And Irish" added Adeline

> "I'm with you" said Wilmot "Here's to the building of your house and this Province"
>
> The Building of Jalna:122

The building of Jalna is a metaphor for the building of a province. That Jalna remains timeless is reassuring to people who are facing the dissolution of an old way of life. Using the house as the central metaphor of stability and unchanging values, de la Roche mourned the past. It is no coincidence that the landscape of the Whiteoaks is so clearly identified and identifiable to readers, nor is it coincidence that there are references to historical events or prominent Canadian personages of the past; this only makes the book more relevant to the readers. "Jalna with its surrounding countryside and its antecedents can be fixed in time and on place. It is a memory of the early days, a composite picture of the province of a hundred years ago..." (Hambleton 1966:67). The real house, Benares, takes on this role for the public. For the family it becomes an embodiment of its personal history and for the public it becomes a focus for their national history and allows the public to become a part of Canada, to assume a role in history.

In the end, all this crystallizes within the program to save Benares. The family is aware of some of these things; we can see links in their roots to the whole of Canada. It is obvious, too, that Mazo de la Roche's readers sense the nostalgia. Not only did that nostalgia speak to Canadian readers, it transcended the borders of the country, providing an universal message or

reassurance in times that were unsure:

> Mazo de la Roche was a favourite in occupied countries, and late among displaced persons. Her appeal is easily understood because she enabled her readers to return for a time to a world of stability, of enduring traditions and of deep rooted family loyalty. Perhaps this aspect will ensure the survival of her works for another generation, as an escape for those bewildered by the disappearance of established values and nostalgic for a glimpse of the past
>
> Neely 1970:1

In that statement lies the answer for her popularity amongst people who were far removed from Jalna and from Benares. Canadians were not only provided with a sense of stability, they could recognize themselves within the Jalna stories and by extension, within history. In the introduction to the pamphlet promoting the mini-series cite the sponsors of the televised version of Jalna gave the following reason for their involvement in the project;

> General Motors of Canada and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce have long been searching for a television property which would be most representative of the Canadian way of life--past and present. A story of Canada, about Canadians, for Canadians...We believe the stories of the "Whiteoaks of Jalna" to be exciting history, as well as providing insights into the unique Canadian character

That the "Whiteoaks of Jalna" was defined as history is very significant. The lines between Benares and the Harrises as "real" entities and the Whiteoaks and Jalna as fictional began to blur. Benares became an object upon which to hang the mythology and the "history" embodied within the Jalna novels and in the course of this transformation, the house moved out of the private domain into the public realm. At that point what had been a private history, into which

the public had been allowed rare glimpses through the Jalna novels, became accessible.

The broadcast of the "Whiteoaks of Jalna", coupled with the surrounding publicity, focussed attention on Benares, it was the physical manifestation of the metaphor for which Jalna stood. With Benares standing firm and solid one did not have to believe that the Jalna stories were fictional. The house tours given by the Sayers which presented a facade of gracious living and a return to the past only served to reinforce those ideas. The history of the family and the anecdotes related by Mr. Sayers on these tours allowed visitors to get behind the public persona, allowed them to become part of the history, and enabled them to close gaps of "us" and "them".

The result of this was that Benares became community property, prompting comments from neighbors, "We consider this our house you know", or "I'm always interested to see what's happening at the Whiteoaks house", and "Jalna, to us, meant Benares: that gracious, square brick house with the wide front porch and a long scullery at the back built of stone" (Livesay 1965:28). This community ownership is further seen in the street names of the subdivision surrounding Benares: Mazo Crescent, Jalna Avenue and Whiteoaks Avenue.

The Jalna novels, therefore, provide insight at two levels: first at the specific site level and second at the level of society. In her novels Mazo de la Roche offered a description of the observed, material world and also of the

world-as-experienced. Mazo de la Roche not only wrote in the spirit of the times, she was very much a construct of Canada in the early twentieth century (Hambleton 1966:216). Both the physical landscape and the cultural landscape were detailed in her novels. By reporting things observed: the house, the landscape, the family, and by relaying information from the oral histories, de la Roche also reported on things experienced. In that way the novels were very "factual". The attitudes and sentiments in the Jalna novels allowed her readers enables us to grasp a sense of the period. Ultimately, what she provided us was the larger context.

The identification of two levels of memory allowed us to read the one set of data from the other in using the oral history and other sources at Benares. So, too, reading the one fictional world against the other fictional world allows us insight into the world of Jalna. Once there, it becomes apparent that the questions should not center around whether the Whiteoaks are the Harrises and Benares is Jalna, this is a simplistic form of question and does little to further our knowledge of context, rather we should ask what was it within the novels and within the Harris family history that fostered the association and later the mythology between Benares and Jalna. Certainly the similarities in the cultural landscape had much to do with the initial association. However, how does one explain the maintenance of that myth over nearly seventy years, and how does one explain why the myth and the focus on Benares have been espoused by readers outside of Canada, people who have never had access to Benares and

therefore are unfamiliar with the site itself. Obviously there is some greater motivation here and like the analysis of the Harrises' history, the answer appears to be found not in the world-as-lived but in the world-as-experienced. To discern the reasons for the continuing association of Jalna with Benares, we must look beyond the material objects to the outer context, the realm of the imagined.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> We treasure the connections with the wider past. Gratified that our memories are our own,we also seek to link our personal past with collective memory and public history
>
> Lowenthal 1985:197

The goal set out at the beginning of this paper was to achieve an holistic analysis of the Benares site in order that the chronology of events occurring in the nineteenth century might be clarified, and that a site context might be determined. The vehicle through which this was attempted was the oral histories and oral traditions. By focussing on the oral evidence as a primary source rather than a supplementary bank of information, the proposition was that interpretation could be approached from a different angle and that the oral data would stand as a source in their own right without being filtered through the documentary or the archaeological record.

The integration of oral history into an archaeological analysis is difficult; this resource is just now being fully used by historical archaeologists, and as such it is necessary to learn more about the nature of the data and the mechanisms of acquisition. Without accomplishing this, critical data may be overlooked. In essence, we need to remember those lessons we learned when first incorporating documents with archaeological evidence.

It must be remembered always that the sources being examined in the course of this study are disparate. On the one hand we have the tangibles, the archaeology, and the house. The material objects contrast with an abstract idea of a house, a family, and even of a culture as embodied within the oral traditions of the Harris family and found in the Jalna books. Both exist in a symbiotic relationship. The books are at once a picture of the times and a repository for information about the Harrises' history which lives within the oral domain as well as feeding into the mythology. It is important to the survival of the site and the personal history of the Harrises, that their history underwent two transformations: first, that their story, or at least Mazo de la Roche's perception of that history, was publicized in the form of the Jalna novels. This first transformation is important because it reified the oral history; by moving the stories from the oral to the written domain, the family histories were given a new authority. This, in turn, made a private history widespread and by commingling personal/individual stories with public/group history, a tale grew which had, and still has, national relevance.

The second transformation involved the move from the printed form to the realm of television. Not only did this make the mythology available to an even wider spectrum of viewers, the transformation to the television screen lent further authority and veracity to the mythology (Postman 1993:127). Likewise, by bringing these stories to a modern medium, the Jalna tales were "updated", modernized, and made available to a new generation of Canadians. Before

leaving this subject, it should be noted that a second televised version of Jalna was produced in 1993 by a joint Canada-France team. Significantly, this was a French-language version and was set in Quebec. Even more significant, this production, was rebroadcast during May and June of 1995, dubbed into English. A case could be made that, once again, the Jalna tales are providing reassurance to Canadians in a political environment that contains such threats to Canadian unity and culture as the renewed forces of separatism in Quebec and the institution of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Neil Postman (1993:154), in his comparison of a social researcher and a novelist, commented that both groups have unique perceptions which they bring to the construction of history and to the recounting of human events.

> Their interpretations cannot be proved or disproved but will draw their appeal from the power of their language, the depth of their explanations, the relevance of their themes and the credibility of their examples.

Furthermore, they are "bound by time, by situations and above all by the cultural prejudices of the writer" (ibid). Rather fortunately for the Harris descendants, when their history, their connection to the past was in danger of being severed, it occurred coincidentally with the popularization of Mazo de la Roche's own history. Suddenly, the Harrises had a means of applying the Jalna stories to their history to assuage their fears of loss of connection and discontinuity of their past through the destruction of their house and, by extension, of their family and their history. Likewise Canadians and

disenfranchised people have a means to connect themselves with the past, to adopt a myth which can lend validity to their histories; people without history gain a past. As Benares and Jalna merge, so Jalna and the saga of the Whiteoaks merge with story of Canada.

The Jalna mythology which surrounds Benares masked the rest of the history. This is not to say that the mythology is invalid or insignificant as it, too, is part of the entire history of the site and the family, after all, "myth is merely the sum total of traditions" (Leach, quoted in Vansina 1985:167). The problem was that by considering the oral traditions and the oral history as a single, albeit multi-faceted, unit, it was impossible to look behind the myth. In order to investigate the roots of the mythology, it was important to examine the roots of transmission and to look at the influences which contributed to the final body of recalled history. In the case of Benares, there were two forces driving the mytho-history. The first was at a very specific, localized level, and while applied on a very limited basis, it acted as a sort of catalyst for the larger force. The myth was encouraged by the Harris descendants, and while the distinction is clear in their minds about the differences between them and their fictional counterparts, they nonetheless capitalised on the Jalna stories in order to ensure that their past, as manifested in the house, would be secure.

That this was possible was due to the larger force. The Jalna books are artifacts of the time during which they were written and they are not applicable to most of the history of the Harris family. They set the stage, allowing us to

determine the atmosphere in which the mythology is born and grows. This allows us to outline that mythology against the larger scene, thereby to highlight the core data against the larger context:

> The mind can grasp other contexts and other meanings as long as it pieces together the "spirit" of the times from individual segments of historical reality rather than imposing the formula from the outside
>
> Hodder 1986:88

The oral tradition which makes up one of these "segments of historical reality" allows this to happen; the data was allowed to emerge, rather than to be constructed from the vantage point of the researcher.

The mythology became established because of this larger setting. By assuming a role in the mytho-history the neighbors and the community all gain historical significance. By accepting the myth the community is accepting history. Dennis Tedlock, in discussing Zuni creation songs, described this as "an attempt to come to terms with an historical event and at the same time reassert tradition" (1983:110). Jalna allowed the Harris descendants and, more importantly, the community, to look backwards in time yet also locate themselves in the present. It is notable that when the Jalna stories were adapted for the CBC production, each hour-long episode included a segment from the past, plots lifted directly from the novels, as well as a segment from "the future" added by the team of writers (cf. The Whiteoaks of Jalna promotional pamphlet, anon.).

The other aspect of this analysis was to examine the specific data to

obtain answers to questions posed by events occurring at the site level. By examining the oral evidence at this level and taking into account the unique qualities of this source of information, it was possible to establish an inner or core context for the site, something which had been previously unobtainable. Contained within the family accounts were elements which had been considered errors, but were, in fact, related either to the method of transmission of the memories or stood as indicators of new information being assimilated within the corpus of memory. In the course of this analysis, it became apparent that many oral traditions hinged upon association with concrete items. While not dependent on a physical object or structure, the memories tended to be clearer and more detailed when there was a tangible reminder of their past.

In her work with house legends Anne Yentsch found that above-ground houses tended to be remembered more than houses which had disappeared from the landscape (Yentsch 1988:16). This should mean that at Benares, the houses which should be remembered would be Benares III and possibly Benares I, due to the extant kitchen wing. In fact Benares I and Benares II, the original stone house, and the temporary frame house, were the most clearly recalled. Probably this is due to the association with the two fires, although it may be also that history-as-relayed to the descendants by their ancestors is more significant in their memories than the history-as-lived by the informants.

Oral traditions and oral histories do not tell us about the past; they tell us how people felt about the past (Vansina 1985:196). In the example of

Benares, we had available and reliable sources in the archaeological and documentary evidence which provided us with a sense of what people used to get through their daily lives, but there was a less clear idea of how they thought about life and how they saw themselves in the society in which they lived.

None of these sources is secondary, each is a primary source consisting of a set of information contained within the resource in a manner unique to that source, be it archaeological, documentary, or oral. It is not enough to look at the final product of the source of evidence; the route which the data took on their way to that final composite shape is equally important

One of the most common complaints leveled by historical archaeologists against the use of oral traditions, oral histories, and family folklore, is that there are too many inherent contradictions, that they are unreliable and inconsistent data. In fact, the example of the Benares site suggests that there are many fewer contradictions or errors than appear on first reading of the oral evidence. In this example, within the errors and the leftover information details pertinent to the larger, surrounding context were found. Likewise, within the "mistakes" at the core level, many of the questions revolving around specific events could be resolved. The old methodology of borrowing liberally from the oral evidence when it fitted other lines of evidence does not allow one to get more than a superficial interpretation. By ignoring the awkward elements of the oral tradition or history we are foregoing the chance to move beyond the "facts" and into the ideology.

How did we get here, from the level of the site and the hope of setting context? It certainly was not through the documents, the material culture, or the oral histories alone. None of the "historical" information was able to provide us with these answers. When used alone or in part, the lines of evidence tended to focus only on the "facts"; only one of Leach's worlds was being considered. With too much focus on the "world-as-experienced" the "world-as-imagined" was being ignored; one of these worlds cannot exist without the other, and both are related to and dependant on each other. Without using a concert of sources, without triangulating the evidence, we are unable to gain access to both these worlds. However, use of them together does not necessarily guarantee success in the interpretative reading of both of the worlds. The analysis of a moment of time at Benares, the fires, allowed us to determine which data belonged to which world. Too often data which cannot be linked to a tangible element and/or a fixed event are discarded. Yet within the leftover information we can find the "whys" and "wherefores" and the impetus and the motivation. Within the world of imagination the heartbeat of the mytho-history lay, and without looking to the feelings or sentiments, we were unable to learn about the mytho-history, we just continued to construct more stories. The Jalna books, composed of mytho-history and oral tradition, acted as the means of comparison. The core level of information was read against the broader, imagined level, in turn read against the larger mytho-history extant within the ideology of the society. All is interdependent and without

making that first comparison of sources we are unable to move on. Using this methodology ensured that the questions remained at a very elementary level. At Benares, the only significant question that would have been asked was whether Mazo de la Roche copied her characters and their lives from the Harrises. Against the larger issues these questions are neither very interesting nor do they have any significance beyond the level of the site. The use of oral history allowed us to move beyond the simple, albeit necessary, questions of establishing chronology for the site and for events which occurred there. Oral histories and traditions have more to offer than "giving voice to the voiceless". Instead, the use of oral histories and tradition allowed us to raise the level of questions and heightened the standards at which one should expect to undertake research.

The concept of two coincident worlds: a real world of experience or of historical "fact", "surrounded on all sides by another world of imagination" (Leach, in Yentsch 1988:11) is critical to this paper. The documents, the material culture, those tangible items of the past are too often relied upon to construct a version of the past. Yet by relying wholly or partially on those sources, we were unable to gain access to the second world, the imagined world. Without that information we were unable to read the one from the other, and as in the interpretation of data in physics where it is necessary to acknowledge and take account of the background noise in order to calibrate the data, we cannot hope to establish a context if we cannot read the history

against the myth and the myth against the history.

Anthropologists have the unique opportunity to be able to examine events from the level and the perspective of the individual; there is the potential to gain access and insight into both the "history-as-lived" and the "history-as-believed". This, therefore, is the difference between investigating this problem as an anthropologist rather than an historian: the "imagined" space was given house room.

FIGURES

Figure 1 Elizabeth Moloney Harris
Ont. Heritage Foundation

Figure 2 James Beveridge Harris
Ont. Heritage Foundation

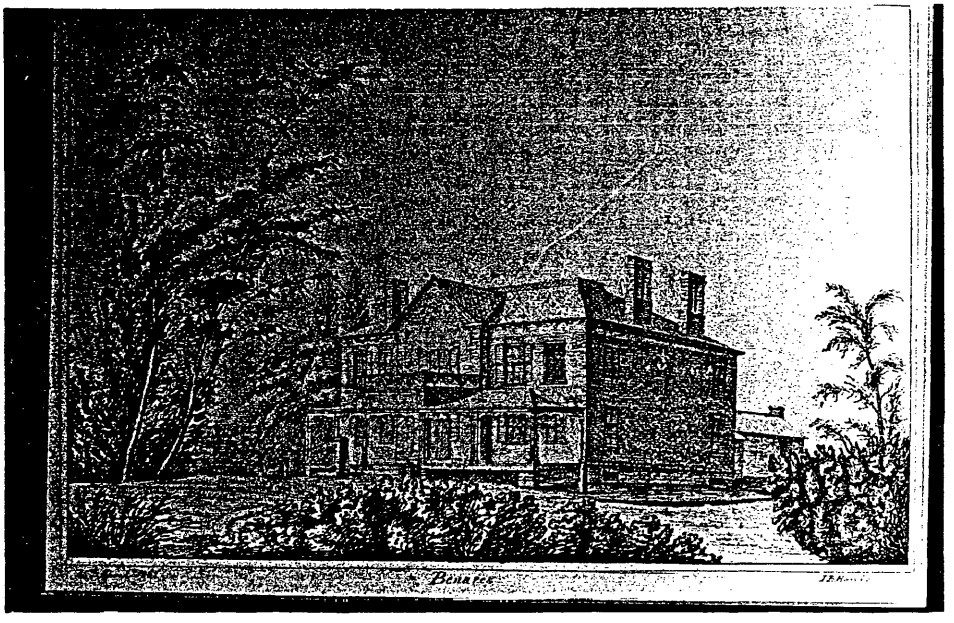

Figure 3. Benares, April 25, 1862 sketch by J. B. Harris
Ontario Heritage Foundation

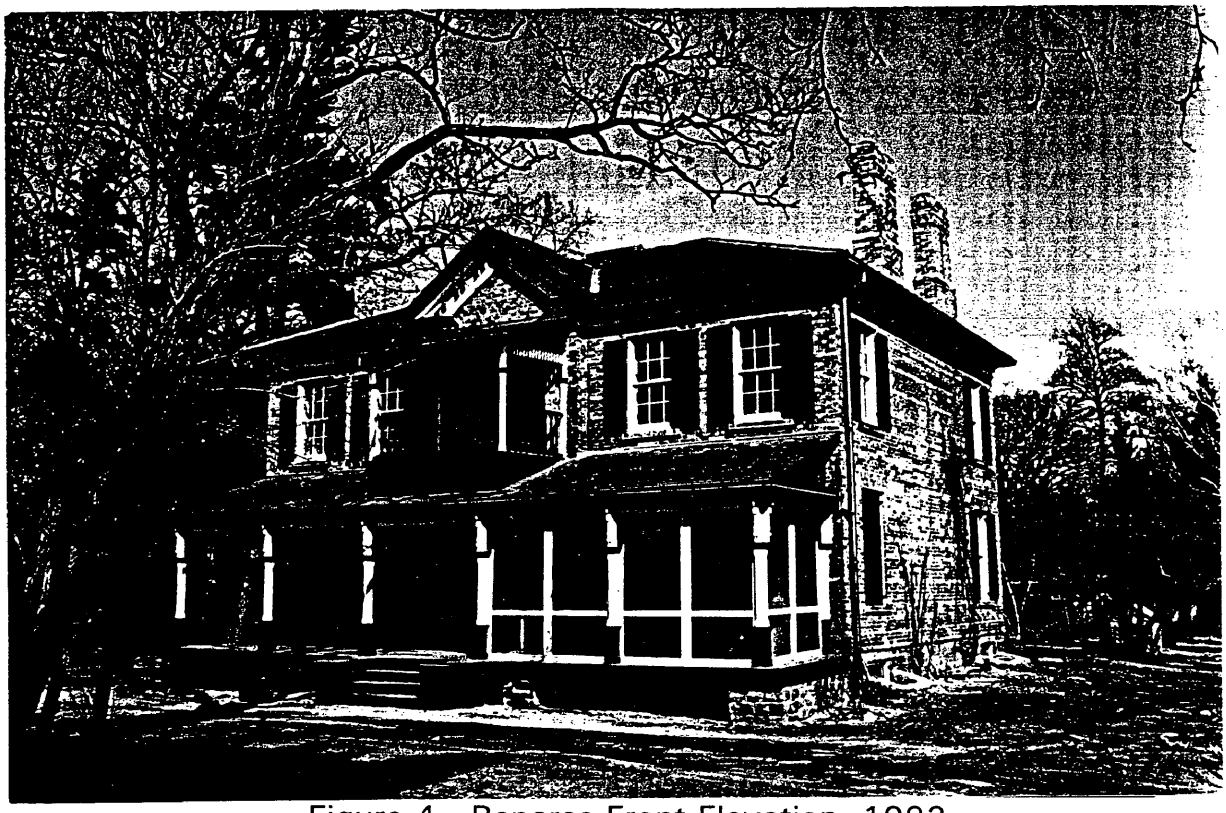

Figure 4. Benares Front Elevation, 1992
Ontario Heritage Foundation

Figure 5. Benares, Back View showing 1835 Kitchen
Ontario Heritage Foundation

Figure 6. Arthur and Mary McGrath Harris
Ont. Heritage Foundation

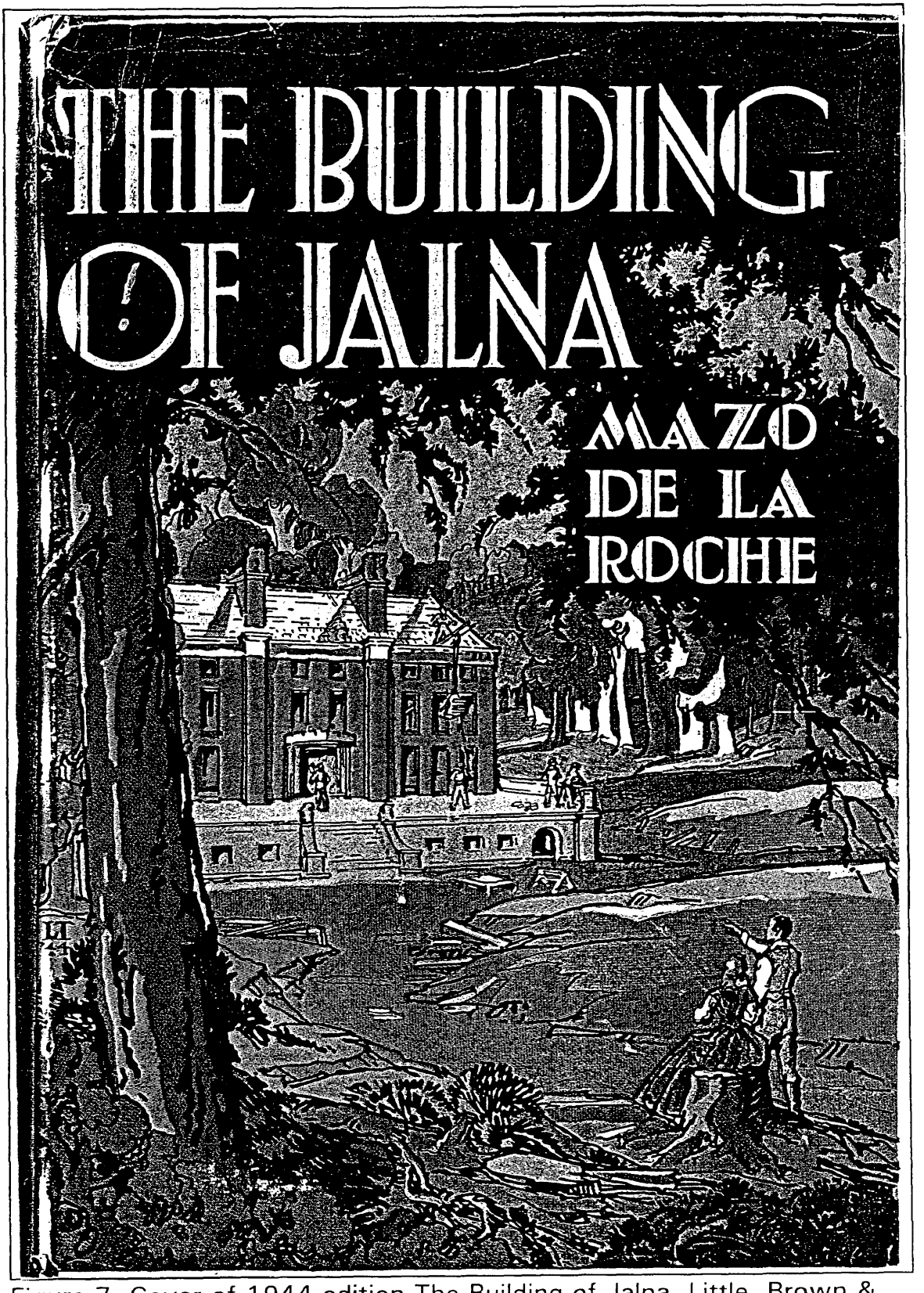

Figure 7. Cover of 1944 edition The Building of Jalna, Little, Brown & Co.

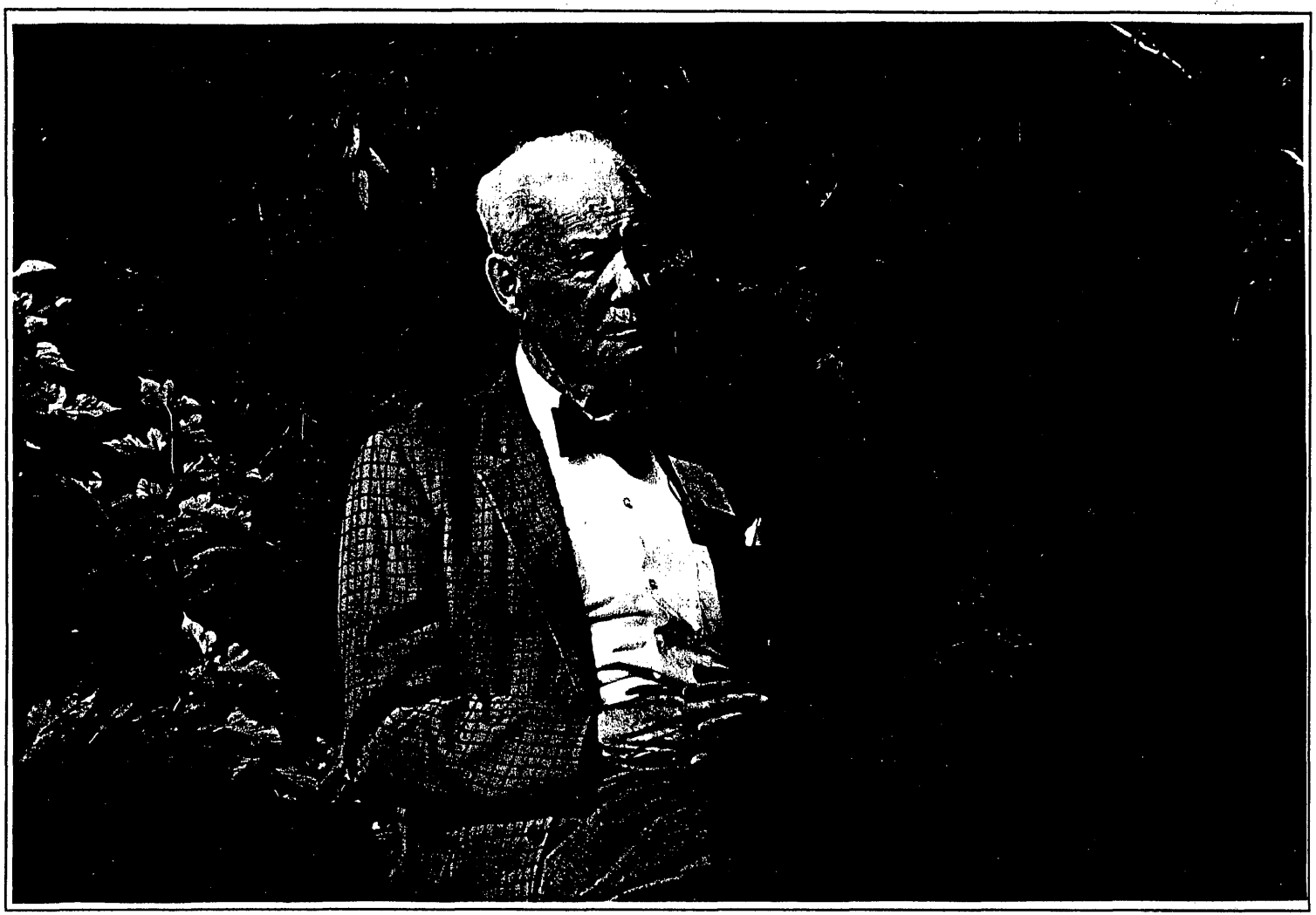

Figure 8. Geoffrey Harris Sayers 1992
photo courtesy of Tessa

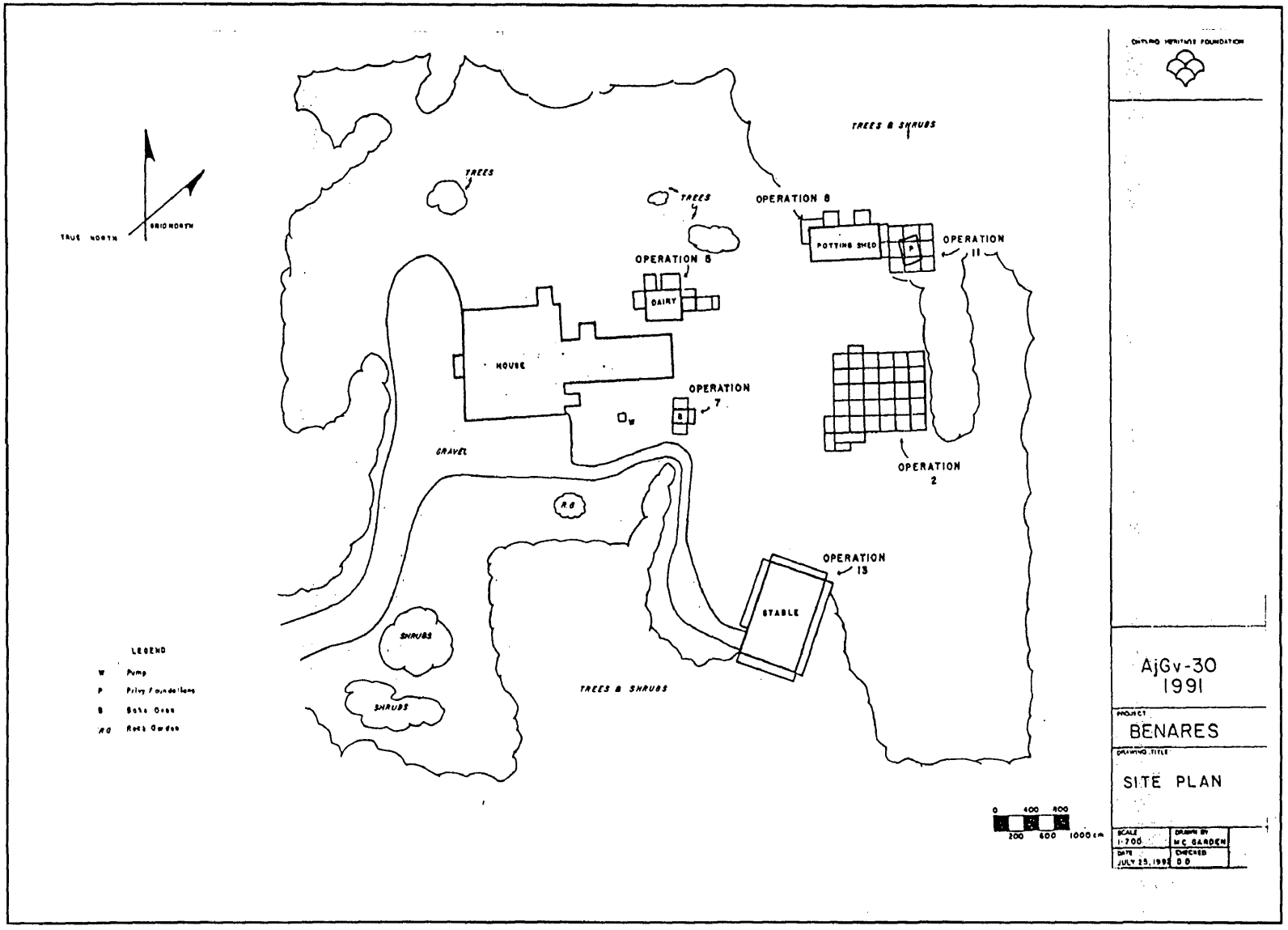

Figure 9. 1991-1992 Archaeological Excavations, Benares Estate
M.C. Garden/ OHF

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