

# InfoNorth

## Robert S. Janes and Hector Pitchforth Grave Relocations

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### INTRODUCTION

A FEW KILOMETRES WEST OF THE COMMUNITY of Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) on northern Baffin Island lie the shallow graves of two *qallunaat* who died in the 1920s in different locations and under very different circumstances. One grave holds the remains of the Newfoundland trader Robert S. Janes (*Sakirmiaq*), who died in March 1920 at Kangiq, in the vicinity of Cape Crauford near the northern tip of Baffin Island. Janes' death at the hands of an Inuk set in motion a chain of events, including a murder trial, that would have lasting implications for law enforcement in Canada's Arctic (Grant, 2002). His body, interred temporarily near Cape Crauford, was later retrieved by the RCMP and transported to Mittimatalik for burial. The second grave contains the body of an Englishman named Hector Pitchforth (called *Aullaq*, or *Audlaq*), a resident trader with the Sabellum Trading Company, who died at age 40 in the winter of 1927 near Cape Henry Kater, on the central east coast of Baffin Island. Pitchforth's death was apparently caused by a combination of illness and starvation. His body was conveyed to Mittimatalik by the RCMP in 1927 and buried that summer next to the grave of Robert Janes (White, 1985; Grant, 2002).

The deaths of Janes and Pitchforth occurred during a formative period in Canadian Arctic history, when social, economic, and legal relations between Inuit and *qallunaat* were being redefined. As a result, their graves are of historical significance to the community, to Nunavut, and to Canada. However, over the eight decades that have elapsed since the deaths, the graves have suffered the depredations of time and of benign neglect. They are located on the shore of Tasiujaq (Eclipse Sound) near Qilalukkat (Salmon Creek)—a popular camping and fishing locality and also a tourist destination because of its large Thule culture archaeological site.

The level of human activity in the vicinity of the graves, combined with the fact that they are shallow and dug into fine sand, has made them susceptible to damage arising from cultural and natural activities. Over time, the rocks and sand covering the Pitchforth grave were removed, and damage to the coffin lid exposed the contents to the elements and to the curious-minded. The grave markers had also fallen (or been removed), and for a brief period, they



FIG. 1. Fence erected by community volunteers along all-terrain vehicle trail to protect the Janes and Pitchforth gravesite near Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet).

had been placed on the wrong graves. In addition, frequent travel by all-terrain vehicles along the shoreline between the community and Qilalukkat had carved a deep trail in the soft ground and partially exposed and damaged one side of the Janes coffin. For all these reasons, residents and visitors to Mittimatalik had expressed concern about the condition of the site, and until a long-term solution could be arranged, they took action to prevent further damage to the graves. In 2003, community volunteers erected a fence to protect the graves from additional disturbance caused by ATVs, filled the Pitchforth grave with sand and placed rocks around its perimeter, and placed rocks along the damaged edge of the Janes grave (Fig. 1).

These steps served to reduce the impact of human activity on the site, but they could not mitigate the effects of the active undercutting and washing out of the sandy shoreline that would eventually result in both graves falling into Tasiujaq (Fig. 2). The threat posed to the site by erosion had been a major concern for many years, and there were reports that the graves had, in fact, previously been moved to their current location for this same reason. These reports could not be confirmed, although it is known that in the 1960s the settlement administrator considered



FIG. 2. Aerial view of gravesite in 2004, showing state of shoreline erosion.



FIG. 3. View of site selected for reburial (flat area in foreground). The existing gravesite can be seen in the distance.

but did not act on the idea of moving the graves (P. Ootoowak, pers. comm. 2005).

In 2004, responding to a request from the community, and with the permission of relatives of the deceased, the Government of Nunavut undertook the exhumation of the remains and their reburial in a location where the impacts from human activity would be reduced and the threat from erosion eliminated. The work was conducted under the Nunavut Archaeology Program, established in 2002 by the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth (CLEY) as a means to help communities manage, investigate, and protect archaeological resources. Under this program, the department has conducted projects in eight Nunavut communities, including site inspections, development impact assessments, community site surveys, and full-scale excavations. This project was the first exhumation and reburial under the program. The provision of archaeological training and employment opportunities for Inuit is a key component of the Nunavut Archaeology Program, and in 2006 a multi-year archaeology field training program commenced in partnership with the Inuit Heritage Trust.



FIG. 4. Grave of Hector Pitchforth prior to excavation.



FIG. 5. View of Hector Pitchforth grave showing loose boards from original lid.

#### EXHUMATION AND REBURIAL

In preparation for the work, replacement coffins and grave markers were made in the community, and the new gravesite was prepared. In selecting the new gravesite, emphasis was placed on removing the threat of erosion, making the site accessible for visitors, and avoiding the archaeological site and several ATV trails that crisscross the area between Qilalukkat and Mittimatalik. Although the local topography presented some challenges, a suitable location was found—a flat area approximately 175 m southeast of the existing graves at an elevation well above sea level (Fig. 3).

Prior to excavation, the Pitchforth grave consisted of a shallow depression surrounded by small boulders partially embedded in the sand (Fig. 4). The grave marker consisted of a weathered wooden cross positioned at the west end of the grave and held in place by small boulders. Excavation proceeded by first exposing the perimeter of the coffin. Removal of the overburden revealed a rectangular wooden box measuring approximately 145 × 75 cm and several loose boards, presumably pieces of the original lid, which had been placed there in 2003 when the feature was filled



FIG. 6. Grave of Robert S. Janes prior to excavation.



FIG. 7. Community volunteers Lorna Kilukishak and Shelly Elverum exposing the collapsed lid of Robert Janes' coffin.

with sand (Fig. 5). Beneath the boards, the coffin was completely filled with fine damp sand. The skeletal remains of Hector Pitchforth were concentrated at the west end of the coffin and were in good condition.

Robert Janes' grave was situated approximately 2 m east of the Pitchforth grave. Several boulders at the west end of the feature supported the grave marker, and the level ground surface was covered with a thin mat of vegetation (Fig. 6). Stripping off the vegetation exposed a layer of fine sand approximately 20 cm thick. Removal of the sand revealed a wooden box measuring approximately 215 × 90 cm. Its lid had collapsed and lay directly on top of Janes' body, which otherwise showed no evidence of disturbance from the time it was buried (Fig. 7).

Because the project was "non-investigative," the bodies were exhumed and reburied as quickly as possible. The



FIG. 8. New gravesite of Hector J.H. Pitchforth (left) and Robert S. Janes, overlooking Tasiujaq (Eclipse Sound), Nunavut.

remains were handled in a careful and respectful manner, and as they were removed, they were immediately transferred into the new coffins, transported to the new gravesite, and reburied. The replacement grave markers, modeled after the original marker on the Janes grave (carved by RCMP Corporal Finley McInnes; S. Grant, pers. comm. 2005), were then set in place. The inscriptions on the new markers read as follows:

Robert S. Janes of Newfoundland  
Sakirmiaq  
Born ?  
Died 1920 near Cape Crauford  
Baffin Island

Hector J. H. Pitchforth  
Aullaq  
Born 1887 in Meerut, India  
Died 1927 Cape Henry Kater  
Baffin Island

Janes' date of birth does not appear because efforts to determine the date were unsuccessful. The Inuktitut word *sakirmiaq* refers to the English term "second mate," in which capacity Janes served in 1910 on the CGS *Arctic* under Captain Joseph Bernier. Relatives of Hector Pitchforth provided the inscription for his grave marker, to which the Inuktitut word *aullaq* was added. The word *aullaq* is the root of the verb 'to leave,' and Inuit referred to Pitchforth by this name apparently because of his habit of repeatedly asking people departing from his trading post if they were leaving (i.e., "*aullaqpit?*") (Harper, 1973:36).

The original grave markers, which were badly weathered, have been accessioned into the Government of Nunavut's museum collection. At present, they are stored at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife.

Grant (2002) remarked that the abandoned bodies of the fur traders were still waiting for someone to take them home. Whether or not the bodies are already in their final resting place, concerned residents have taken steps to ensure that they will be well cared for near Mittimatalik. On a sunny day in late July 2005, relatives of Hector Pitchforth held a private service at the new gravesite overlooking Tasiujaq (Fig. 8).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fieldwork was conducted under Nunavut Territory Archaeologist Permit No. 04-018A. The Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth thanks the mayor and hamlet council of Mittimatalik for their advice and assistance with the project. Special thanks are extended to Philippa Ootoowak for her invaluable help with both the project planning and the fieldwork. Sincere appreciation is extended to the relatives of Hector Pitchforth and Robert Janes for their permission to undertake the work. Thanks

are also extended to David Pitseolak for making the caskets and grave markers. The fieldwork could not have been completed without the generous assistance and support of Parks Canada staff Carey Elverum, Brian Koonoo, Terry Kalluk, and Blair Fyten, and community volunteers Lorna Kilukishak and Shelly Elverum.

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