

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

*Stó:lō* Social  
Structures  
and Government  
Assimilation

P O L I C Y

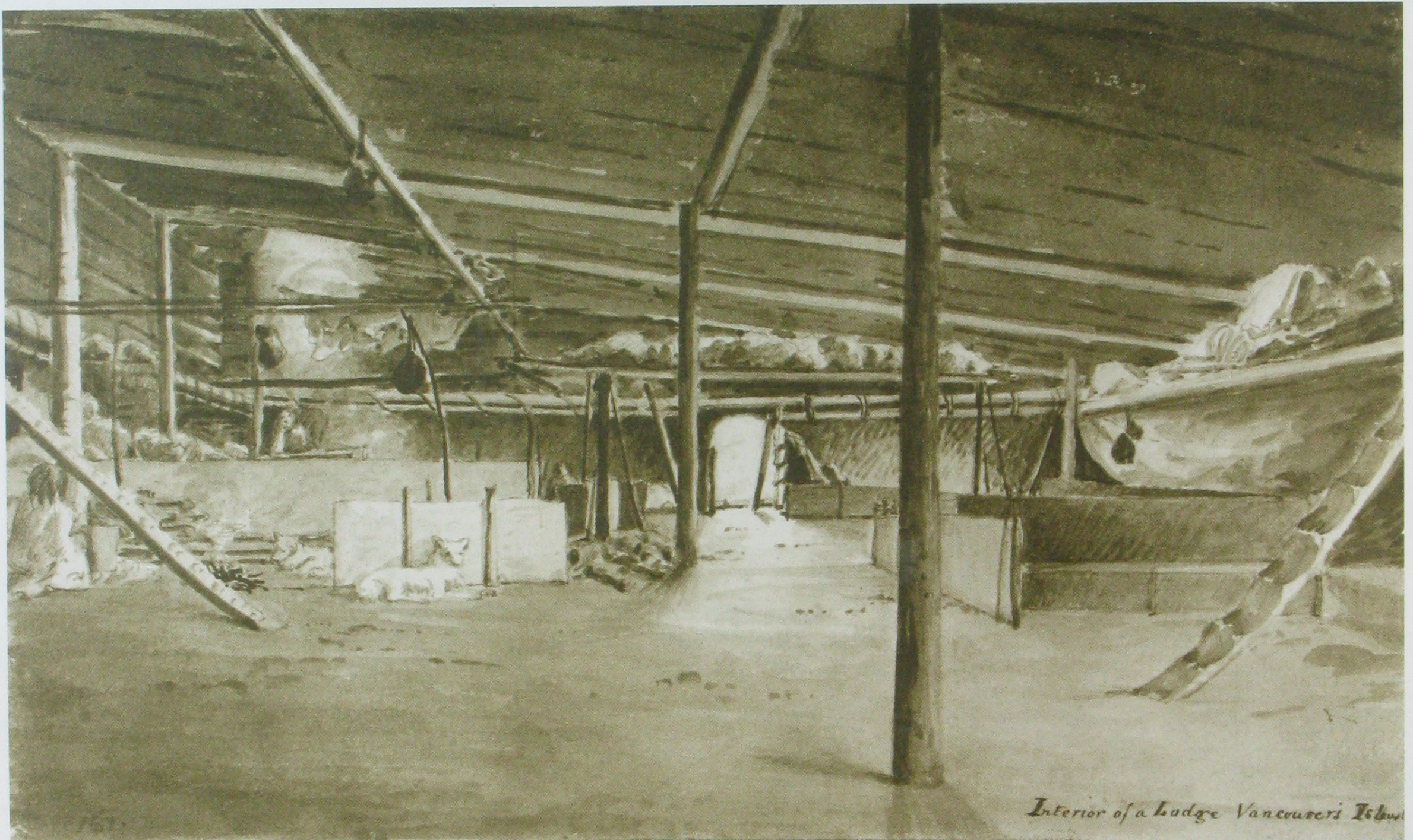


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## I N T R O D U C T I O N :

Two aspects of *Stó:lō* society – the specific status based social structures and unique relationships with the Spirit world – clearly distinguish and set it apart from many other Aboriginal communities. Recognizing this cultural distinctiveness is extremely important if one wishes to truly appreciate *Stó:lō* people and *Stó:lō* history. *Stó:lō* society is as distinct from other North American Aboriginal societies as Spanish culture is from different European cultures. Just as you would never try to learn about Spain by studying Swedish or Ukrainian society you would not try to learn about the *Stó:lō* by studying the Iroquois or Cree. And yet, government policy towards Aboriginal people in Canada has never appreciated these cultural and geographic differences. Indeed, one of the few things shared by all Canadian Aboriginal peoples is the experience of colonization.



*Interior of a Lodge Vancouver's Iskw*

Interior of a winter longhouse. Temporary mat partitions divided the interior of the building, and individual families had their own fire-pits.

This chapter seeks to shed light upon the attempts by the British/Canadian government and its agents to eradicate and assimilate *Stó:lō* cultural identity. To accomplish this, the paper first describes in some detail the way in which *Stó:lō* society was originally structured in the immediate pre-contact, and early contact era. It then discusses the official government policy towards Aboriginal people and documents the local *Stó:lō* experience with these policies.

The *Stó:lō* response to these external threats is indicative of the adaptive and flexible nature of their culture, and in particular, their leadership.





# 1 EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY STÓ:LŌ SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND POLITICAL CULTURE: STATUS AND LEADERSHIP ■

Extended family ties remain the most important social bonds within *Stó:lō* society. Such connections continue to be far more meaningful than any ties joining unrelated people who lived within the same village. This is reflected even in the architecture and occupancy patterns of traditional *Stó:lō lálém* or longhouses. Typically, members of one extended family lived together in large shed roofed longhouses. They averaged 6-18 m in width, and 12-36 m in length, but were also known to be much larger. For example, when Simon Fraser visited *Stó:lō* territory in 1808, he observed a single longhouse at Matsqui (near Abbotsford) that was 192 m long and 18 m wide (640 x 60 feet), or larger than two football fields. Inside, the giant house was divided by hanging woven mats into "square apartments." *Stó:lō* Elders explain that these rooms were the separate living quarters of individual nuclear families. The mat walls could be easily removed when larger areas were required for ceremonies and celebrations. The only room in the longhouse significantly different from the others belonged to the leader of the extended family. Within the large longhouse Simon Fraser observed in 1808, the extended family's leaders room was 27 m (90 ft.) long. Unlike the other smaller compartments, it was elaborately decorated with carved figures and other signs of wealth.

*Stó:lō* social status was reflected both in the physical space people occupied within their longhouses, as well as the positioning of their longhouses within the village. *Stó:lō* society was divided into three distinct social group-

ings. The majority of people were considered high status, a somewhat smaller number were low status, while the smallest group consisted of slaves. Slaves lived with their masters, but were confined to sleeping near the drafty doors of the longhouse, where they would be the first to encounter any raiders who attacked during the night. Members of an extended family who lived in the same village often shared a longhouse, with high ranking family members occupying the most comfortable and protected spaces. Longhouses of low status people were typically constructed along the village edges, in less desirable and more vulnerable locations. In a few instances, entire villages were comprised of low status people. Low status longhouses were also distinguishable because they were typically clad with cedar bark slabs rather than the more valuable split cedar planks used by high status families.



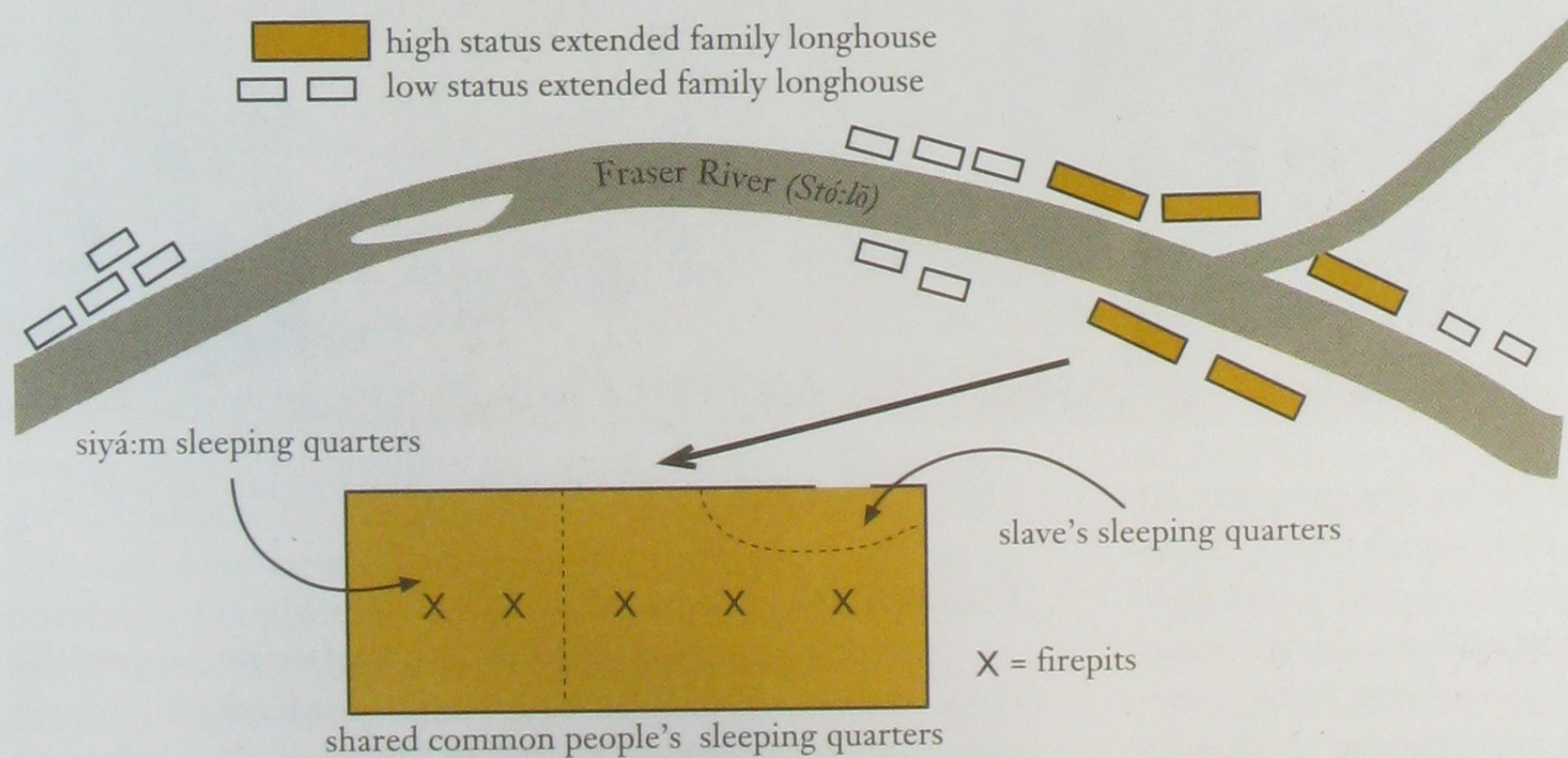
Cranial deformation.

## High Status: *smelá:lb*

*Stó:lō* people's status was derived not only from their personal achievements, but also from their family's position. High status people usually came from high status families. *Smelá:lb*, which translates as "worthy people," is the *Halq'eméylem* term for high status families. To be *smelá:lb* – that is "worthy" – a person had to be from a family that "knew its history." Knowing your history meant, among other things, knowing which productive fishing or berry picking sites your family owned, legends about the mythological past, special information about plants and other resources, and having

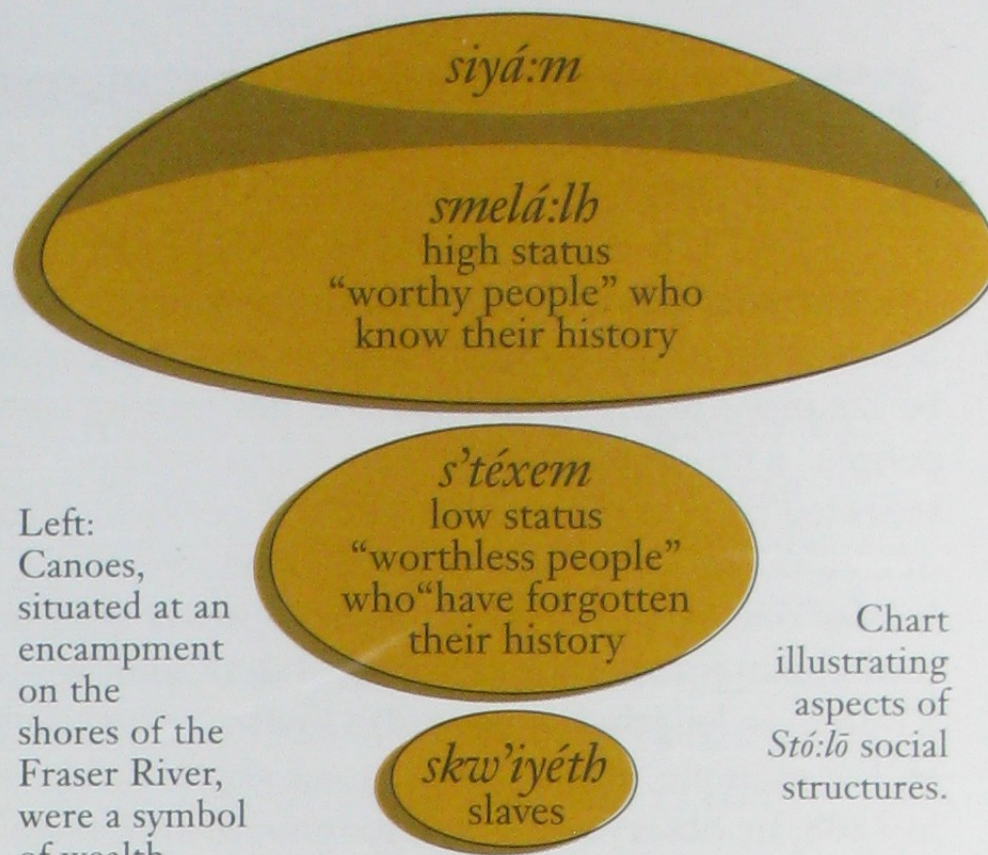
a relationship with the spirits of prominent family ancestors. Children of worthy parents had certain advantages over other children. Special inherited high status family names guaranteed access to and ownership of family assets.

According to the *Stó:lō* Elders who shared information with the anthropologist Wilson Duff in the 1940's, *smelá:lb* parents from *Stó:lō* communities between present day Langley and the ocean flattened the foreheads of their infants to distinguish them from children of lower status families.<sup>1</sup> This process, called "cranial deformation," was permanent and irreversible. Moreover, it could not be performed after an infant was more than a few months old, by which time the skull becomes hard and impossible to manipulate. In this way,



Status was reflected in the physical space *Stó:lō* people occupied within villages and longhouses.





Left: Canoes, situated at an encampment on the shores of the Fraser River, were a symbol of wealth.

Chart illustrating aspects of *Stó:lō* social structures.

certain outward signs of status were ascribed by birthright. Likewise, some high status people pierced their nose and spoke a special dialect which further distinguished them from low status people.

#### Low Status: *s'téxem*

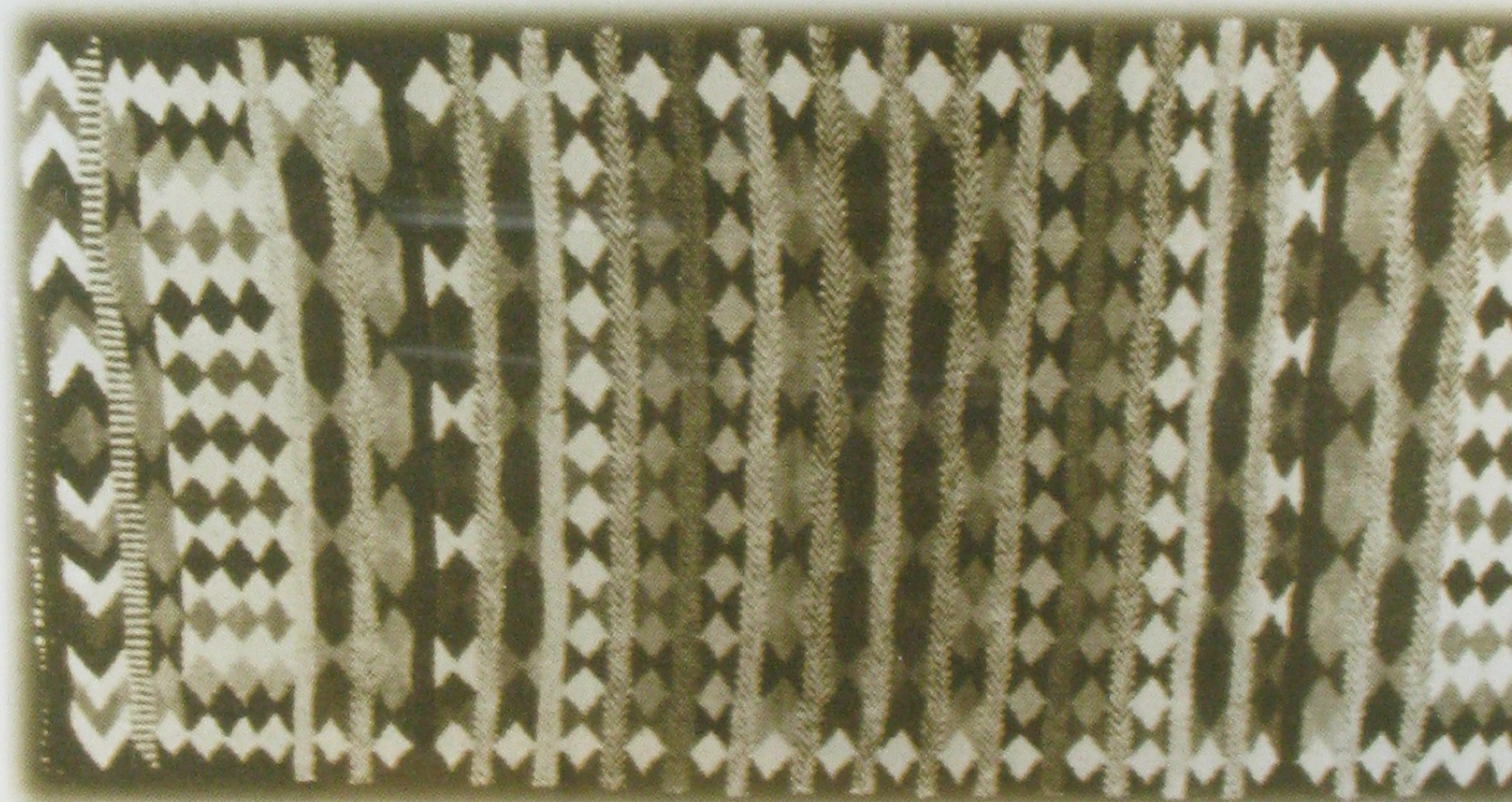
People from low status families were typically referred to as *s'téxem*, which translates as “worthless people.” Other English terms used by *Stó:lō* Elders to describe people of this lower status are “poor people,” “nothing people,” or “younger children.”<sup>2</sup> Elders explain that *s'téxem* implies “people who have lost or forgotten their history.” People without a history could not access the hereditary privileges of high status families. As a result, upward social mobility was a rare occurrence. The stigma of having *s'téxem* ancestry always haunted low status people regardless of their personal achievements. Someone from a worthless family had no opportunity to learn good manners or access the private knowledge of high status people, let alone have rights to the best fishing sites and berry patches.

#### Slaves: *skw'iyéth*

*Skw'iyéth*, or slaves, were the one segment of *Stó:lō* society whose status was entirely determined by birth. Children of slaves were destined to be the property of their parents' masters as well. To distinguish them, slaves were compelled to keep their hair cut short.<sup>3</sup> Long hair was associated with aspects of spirit power. High status slave owners may have prohibited their slaves from growing long hair to ensure they did not become spiritually powerful and thereby potentially more rebellious or inde-

pendent. Whatever the cause, short-haired slaves were easily and immediately distinguishable from other community members.

Not all slaves, however, were born into servitude. Some (typically women) were captives taken from other communities during raids. Others were purchased from neighbouring villages, acquired at potlatches, or accompanied high class women as wedding dowry. *Stó:lō* Elders explained that slaves lived with their owners and carried out their menial tasks. But, as anthropologist Wayne Suttles explains, they were socially “non-persons” in that they could not receive a special name or inherited privileges and, as such, slaves “mainly lived lives of drudgery.”<sup>4</sup>



*Swōqw'elh*, a goat wool blanket, which represented of wealth.

#### Leadership: *si:yá:m*

Some high status *smelá:lh* people became especially respected and developed a reputation for leadership. Such people were referred to as “*siyá:m*,” (*si:yá:m* when referring to more than one). *Siyá:m* implies “unblemished ancestry,”



“political” *siyá:m*

provided leadership in

dispute resolution  
and regulating  
access to family  
owned resources.

*shxwlá:m*

provided leadership in

important areas  
of health care  
(often women).

*stómex*

provided leadership in

organizing and  
executing raids  
and counter raids.

*tewít*

provided leadership in

in aspects of  
resource procurement  
relating to hunting.

Different people had leadership responsibilities over various aspects of early nineteenth century *Stó:lō* society.

“good manners,” “extrahuman support,” and “wealth.”<sup>5</sup>

The requirement for unblemished ancestry illustrates how important hereditary status, or “pure blood” was to the *Stó:lō*. Good manners were an outward expression of a quality education and healthy home life. Extrahuman support refers to spirit power. The *Stó:lō* believe the spirits of their ancestors and spirits of certain animals play important interactive roles in people’s day to day lives. Expert hunters or fishermen attributed much of their success to their special spirit power, as did spiritual leaders (many of whom were women) and warriors. Likewise, *siyá:m* were careful to credit aspects of their historical knowledge and oratory skills to the assistance of prominent ancestral spirits who guided them in their activities. *Stó:lō* spiritual leaders explain that spirits often interacted with people in a manner similar to a memory, but other times they were specially acquired during “spirit quests.” They involved a person going into seclusion for a number of days, in which they fasted, did strenuous exercise, and meditated.

*Si:yá:m* also needed to be wealthy. In fact, when used as a verb, the word *siyá:m* literally translates as wealthy.<sup>6</sup> In *Stó:lō* society, high status people demonstrated and reinforced their social position by throwing elaborate ceremonial potlatches (known in *Halq’eméylem* as “*stl’éleq*”), wherein they redistributed vast amounts of wealth within their communities. *Si:yá:m* accumulated wealth in a number of ways. This was commonly done through the ownership, regulation, and control of productive resource sites such as fishing rocks and berry patches. Wealth also came in the form of gifts, received in recognition for assisting people to resolve a dispute. It was also acquired by recognition for acting as a speaker or master of ceremonies at large public gatherings. The more respected a leader became, the more gifts they would receive. Each gift was wealth, and the greater a leader’s wealth, the higher their status.

The expression *siyá:m* can also be understood as meaning “respected extended family leader.” As mentioned, extended families ties were the most important social bonds within traditional *Stó:lō* society. These connections were far more meaningful than any ties joining unrelated people who lived within the same village. A *siyá:m* controlled the most important extended family ceremonial rights and names, and regulated access to productive family owned resources sites. It is important to

note, however, that the word “*siyá:m*” was not an official title, nor was being *siyá:m* a specific political or economic office with prescribed rights and responsibilities. *Si:yá:m* were neither appointed nor elected officials, and they had no means of enforcing their will or decisions upon others. People simply respected their opinion, and tended to accept their advice and follow their lead.

Drawing on information acquired in the 1940’s during interviews with prominent *Stó:lō* Elders, Wilson Duff explained that,

Within each extended family there was no doubt one man who made everyday decisions on matters involving the family. In multi-family villages, heads of families were no doubt loosely ranked by prestige, with one man standing above the others and holding the most sway over the village as a whole. This man... spoke and others listened, he suggested and exhorted and the others took action. His power over his own kinsmen was considerable, since he had the greatest voice in controlling the family’s property, names, and actions as a group. His power over unrelated families was less, depending upon his personal reputation for wisdom in leadership. Yet, apparently he did tend to develop a habit of leadership’ over the whole village and undertook certain duties as a village official.<sup>7</sup> ☺

Duff further observed that all *Stó:lō si:yá:m* were “ranked in ascending scale regardless of place of residence, but this was a social ranking and only incidentally and to a limited degree a political one.”<sup>8</sup> People living in one village often accepted that their local extended family *siyá:m* might not be as highly respected as another *siyá:m* from the same extended family in a different village.

Being recognized as an extended family *siyá:m* did not mean a person was the leader over all aspects of family or community life. While the term *si:yá:m* is generally used to describe people who are recognized as political or social leaders, other people had expertise, responsibilities, rights, and privileges in other fields. For example, in the early nineteenth century there remain at least three types of healers or “doctors” (*shxwlá:m*, *syuwí:l*, and *syéwe*), each of





Family owned dip netting site located along the Fraser River.

which are responsible for various aspects of their extended family's health. Many *Stó:lō* spiritual leaders are women. Women also exercised special leadership roles concerning the passing down of hereditary privileges such as the right to wear a *sxwó:yxwey* mask. Likewise, there were people called, *stómex*, who assumed responsibility for organizing and conducting raids and counter-raids on members of unfriendly extended families in other villages. Expert hunters who led their extended families in catching winter supplies of game were called *tewít*. Thus, even today leadership and *siyá:m* are distributed within *Stó:lō* society. People with special skills, knowledge, and spirit power become acknowledged as leaders within certain fields.

Commenting on the flexible and informal nature of traditional *Stó:lō* leadership, anthropologist Michael Kew observes that "there was a lack of uneasiness among the *Stó:lō* over the imprecision of social roles." In other words, the *Stó:lō* were not overly preoccupied with assigning prescribed political authority to par-

ticular leaders. This sometimes confuses *Xwelítem* people, because it does not easily coincide with the structures they are accustomed to. However, by becoming more aware of *Stó:lō* social structures we can hopefully better appreciate how difficult it has been for the *Stó:lō* to adapt to mainstream Canadian political society. For the purposes of this chapter, focus will be given to the family *siyá:m* who assumed leadership roles which most closely correspond to what mainstream society defines as political leadership.

### The Political Process: Checks on the Influence of *Siyá:m*

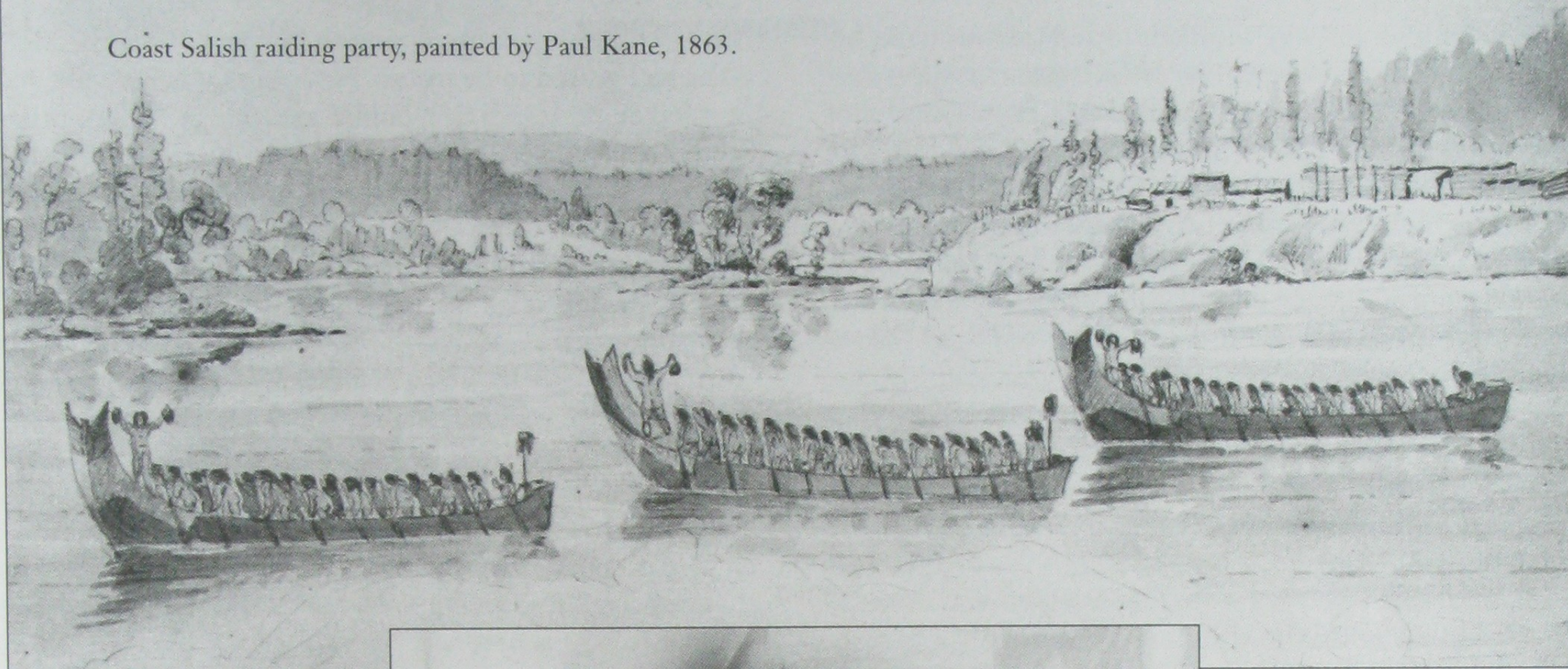
In the early nineteenth century, when an extended family had to make a major decision, the various family leaders met to discuss the matter. In such instances, *siyá:m* sought to harmonize extended family interests, and achieve a consensus of opinion. If agreement could not be reached easily, discussions might continue for days. If consensus ultimately proved unattainable, the matter was typically set aside and left unresolved. It was not uncommon, however, on occasions when only a few people refused to follow the advice of their local *siyá:m*, that the dissenters relocated to another



At St. Mary's Mission on the Fraser River in May, 1867.



Coast Salish raiding party, painted by Paul Kane, 1863.



er village and lived under a different family *siyá:m*.

As described, traditional *Stó:lō* leaders exercised their authority very differently than contemporary Canadian political leaders, and were not elected for prescribed terms of office. *Sí:yá:m* did not need to pass laws and record them in books for others to obey. They had no need for a police force or army to enforce their will, and did not require a separate judicial system to interpret laws. The actions of both the leaders and the extended family were regulated by customs, not laws. People listened to *sí:yá:m* and typically followed their leadership because they respected their wise opinions, conflict resolution skills, and proven good judgement.

*Sí:yá:m* were responsible not only for their extended family's general welfare, but also for their actual comfort.<sup>10</sup> Extended families had a number of options if their local *siyá:m* failed to provide for them or did something offensive. Typically, when *sí:yá:m* became discredited, their extended family stopped deferring to their opinion or following their leadership. If this happened, a *siyá:m* quickly dropped in influence and status.



Contemporary *Stó:lō* *siyá:m* Sonny McHalsie.

Gossip, an important tool of social leverage, was employed to ensure that all people knew of a tarnished leader's failings. *Sí:yá:m* who lost their family's support could attempt to regain it, but loss of status was a difficult thing to overcome. Yet, it is important to note that *sí:yá:m* worked very hard to retain their family's respect. For instance, within the recorded oral history of the Chilliwack people there is only one instance of a top ranking *siyá:m* ever being rejected and deposed.

In rare cases when members of an extended family determined that a prominent person's behaviour threatened the community, various extended family leaders occasionally arranged to depose of the person. In 1952, anthropologist Wilson Duff was told a story by *Stó:lō* Elder Edmond Lorenzetto which illustrated the lengths *sí:yá:m* would go to restore inner-family tranquility

and inter-family peace. Mr. Lorenzetto told of a great *siyá:m* named "*Likwetem*" from a village near the present town of Yale in the Fraser Canyon. *Likwetem* had three brothers "who did a lot of killing for little things." When a *siyá:m* from a village near the present town of Hope



passed Yale on his way to obtain dried salmon from his storage area in the canyon, one of *Likwetem's* brothers shot at him. The Hope *siyá:m* landed his canoe and shot *Likwetem's* brother dead. This did not upset *Likwetem*, who appeared glad that the “trouble maker” had been killed. However, *Likwetim's* other two aggressive brothers organized a raiding party and attacked the village near Hope in retaliation. The raid ended with a second of *Likwetem's* aggressive brothers' death. Later, *Likwetem* “gave some Hope people permission to do what they wanted with his third brother.” Two men from Hope secretly travelled to Yale and set up an ambush. As *Likwetem's* canoe passed by, the people from Hope shot dead the last of *Likwetim's* brothers. *Likwetem* did not stop his canoe, but rather “just told his pullers to keep on paddling.” As Lorenzetto explained, *Likwetem* “knew that the business was done.”<sup>11</sup>

The drastic action of killing a bad leader was rare, even in the nineteenth century. Such practises certainly do not occur today. However, the traditional *Stó:lō* technique

everywhere stopped referring to him as a “Grand Chief” – he had ceased to be *siyá:m*. No longer was he “called as a speaker” at important public gatherings. When other chiefs and respected Elders were introduced or “called as witnesses” his name was conspicuous by its absence. The dishonoured “Grand Chief” became a social and political outcast, ostracised from respectable high status *Stó:lō* society. By dealing with the issue in a traditional and culturally appropriate manner, the *Stó:lō* quietly exercised their own form of justice and a version of self-government.

## 2 GOVERNMENT ASSIMILATION POLICY ■

In order to appreciate the ways government legislation has impacted traditional *Stó:lō* social structures and leadership styles, it is necessary first to review the earlier British laws which dealt with Aboriginal people in what is now central Canada. Early in the nineteenth century, the British government adopted policies to “protect and civilize” British North America's Aboriginal people. They wanted to “protect” Aboriginal people from the fast encroaching settlers and whiskey pedlars, and then “civilize” them so they could be integrated into mainstream society.

### British Attitudes Towards Aboriginal People

Most Europeans of this era accepted the Biblical teaching that God had given humankind a divine right to “subdue the earth and have dominion over the animals.” Europeans had traditionally interpreted this to mean that most of the earth's natural resources were predestined to eventual exploitation. However, a growing number of people living in Britain and along the eastern Canadian seaboard, where nature had already been transformed, began pressuring the government to protect Aboriginal people in their natural environment. This protection required that unspoiled land be “reserved” for Aboriginal people's exclusive use, at least for the short term, until they could be assimilated into the broader European culture.

Responding to these pressures, in the 1830's British Parliament passed several laws designed to “protect” and “civilize” (or assimilate) Canada's Aboriginal population. These laws were viewed as an experiment in civilization, and formed the basis of Canada's future Indian reserve policy and the “Indian Act.” Accordingly, in what is now central Canada, relatively large centralized Indian reserves were created. They became social laboratories, where well-intentioned, but ethnocentric *Xwelítem* sought to remake Aboriginal people in a European mould. They were intended to strip away the fabric of Aboriginal society and replace it with that of European “civilization.” In accordance with the scientific method, the experiment placed Aboriginal people into a controlled environment called an “Indian reserve.” According to the theory, once in this controlled environment, Aboriginal people's interaction with undesirable stimuli – in particular whiskey pedlars – could be



Contemporary *Stó:lō siyá:m* Michelle Douglas receiving traditional recognition when appointed to the *Stó:lō* Nation Special Chiefs' Council.

of quietly casting aspersions upon a discredited leader while publicly ignoring them does remain a powerful instrument of social control in contemporary *Stó:lō* society. For example, in the 1980's the *Stó:lō* Nation publically recognized certain *Stó:lō* leaders for having consistently given of themselves over their lifetime to better the entire *Stó:lō* population. These people were given the honorary title of “Grand Chief.” A few years later, one of these men was accused, and ultimately convicted in the BC provincial court, of sexually abusing children. News of his guilt spread quickly throughout *Stó:lō* extended families. While no official action was ever taken by the *Stó:lō* Nation to strip away this man's honorary title, people



RED JACKET



STOMACH BITTERS

Nineteenth century  
patent medicine labels  
portraying the  
stereotypical image of  
the “noble savage”  
suggested that life in  
the “natural state” was  
more healthy than  
living in urban  
industrialized cities.

The Biblical verse in which God said to Adam and Eve “subdue the earth” was interpreted quite literally by many people and businesses in the nineteenth century. Here we see the effects of nineteenth century logging techniques in *Stó:lō* territory.



regulated, while positive stimuli – Christian missionaries, respectable farmers, and the like – could be introduced to act as catalysts for “positive” change.

By the 1850’s the British government determined that their early experiments were not working as well as originally anticipated. They decided part of the reason for their failure was that Aboriginal people’s exposure to the best elements of Euroamerican society had not been intense enough. A two-pronged approach was then adopted to accelerate the assimilation process; the first focussed on either replacing or assimilating extended family leaders – *sí:yá:m*, and the second targeted Aboriginal children. The government realized that *sí:yá:m* people carried great influence. It was felt that by winning them over or replacing them, the assimilation process would be more effective with the rest of the community. With regard to children, the government assumed that by assimilating young children their efforts would be essentially completed after one or two generations, as soon as the “old people” had died off and been replaced by the new assimilated generation.

#### ASSIMILATION TECHNIQUE #1: UNDERMINING ABORIGINAL LEADERS

##### Missionary Activity

Some of the initial foot soldiers in the government’s assimilation policy were Christian missionaries. Prior to the 1858 gold rush few missionaries had visited *Stó:lō* territory, and what visits did occur were brief.<sup>12</sup> It was only after the arrival of over 30,000 *Xwelítem* miners into *Stó:lō* territory that serious and concerted missionary activity occurred among the *Stó:lō* people. These were initiated at the request of the colonial government who was primarily interested in having the missionaries counteract the affects of unscrupulous whiskey pedlars who followed the miners to the gold fields. Father Chirouse, the first missionary to arrive in *Stó:lō* territory in the wake of the gold rush, recorded that the concoction being passed off to the *Stó:lō* as alcohol was in reality a toxic “mixture of camphor and tobacco juice.” Chirouse estimated that alcoholism was effecting well



over half of all *Stó:lō* families.<sup>13</sup> While the missionaries, no doubt, had reasons to paint as bleak a picture of the situation as possible in order to encourage their supporters to make financial contributions, there is no reason to dispute the general assumption that alcohol had become a significant problem for *Stó:lō* communities during the gold rush.


The first missionary to settle permanently among the *Stó:lō* was the Catholic Oblate priest Father Leon Fouquet. The current name for the site where he first began his work continues to bear testimony of his activities to this day. Founding his "Mission" in 1861, Father Fouquet immediately set about learning the *Halq'eméylem* language and studying *Stó:lō* culture to learn the best way to gain their acceptance and win them over to his cause. Once he understood aspects of *Stó:lō* society he designed his missionary activities to take advantage of *Stó:lō* concepts of *sí:yám*. To accomplish this the Oblate priest identified sympathetic traditional *Stó:lō síyám*, and with their assistance established "Temperance" or "Sobriety" Societies. To assist the *síyám*, Fouquet and the other Oblates identified *Stó:lō* community members who were supportive of the missionaries' work and appointed them "captains" or "watchmen."

The missionaries were initially viewed with some suspicion by the *Stó:lō* leadership. Their experience during the gold rush had taught them to be cautious of *Xwelítem*. However, according to the Oblates, the majority of the *Stó:lō* quickly came to appreciate the missionaries' assistance. Whereas "during the first five or six months the Indians would not even approach the missionaries" by 1861 "everywhere, the Indians, en masse, (had) enrolled under the Banner of Temperance... With the Chiefs at the head, captains and watchmen were organized in every camp."

The first concerted Oblate effort to counteract the whiskey pedlars occurred at the *Stó:lō* village of Cheam, near Chilliwack. The main local *síyám*, a man named Alexis, was instrumental in assisting Father Chirouse. In describing the event, Chirouse said that after he had addressed the community he found that nearly 200 *Stó:lō* had gathered around him and Alexis, while only 15 remained at the whiskey pedlars shack which had been built right among the *Stó:lō* homes. Alexis then recommended that they burn the shack down. Following this incident Chirouse claims the Oblates "received many requests to visit other camps and establish 'sobriety societies.'"<sup>14</sup>

The story of the battle against the gold rush era whiskey pedlars has great contemporary meaning for *Stó:lō* people. In the summer of 1996 Ohamil Elder Ralph George invited the RCMP and a TV news team to visit his community so he could show them the devastating impact drug pushers were having on *Stó:lō* society. With Mr. George's assistance the RCMP were able to destroy a marijuana crop with an estimated street value of \$150,000. When a CBC radio reporter asked Mr. George if he was concerned for his safety he replied that

he was more afraid for the safety of the children:

I'm an old man. If the Vancouver motor bike gang who grows these drugs and pushes them on our kids wants to get me I don't care. I've lived a full life and I've seen the damage drugs and alcohol have on our communities. If I try to stop the drugs I might get hurt, but if I don't, a lot of children are going to get hurt for sure. Its just like the whiskey pedlars from the old days. The Elders and *sí:yám* have to stand up and say we won't stand this sort of abuse of our communities."<sup>15</sup> 

Elder Ralph George is a legacy of the *sí:yám* of the last century.

Recognizing that they could not achieve their goals if the *Stó:lō* leadership was hostile towards them, and encouraged by their close and apparently successful relationship with Chief Alexis of Cheam, the Oblates, and later the Methodists, moved to promote the conversion and assimilation of *Stó:lō* community leaders. The assumption was that if they could convert the elite, the rest of the community would follow. Not surprisingly, then, when the missionaries could not convert an existing leader they often attempted to undermine that person's position by promoting a new leader who was more receptive to their objectives.

All too often, communities were pulled apart by interdenominational feuding between the different missionaries.<sup>16</sup> Reporting on the activities of the Methodist Missionary Thomas Crosby at Chilliwack, the Oblate Priest Father Marshal proudly commented that Crosby was "set up in the centre of these (Catholic) villages, unable to spread his work." However, Marshal noted that according to his *Stó:lō* supporters, the Methodist was intimidating *Stó:lō* people into becoming Protestants by threatening them that those who rejected the Protestant faith in favour of Catholic doctrine "would be chased from this land and transported along with the Catholic priest to an island of the ocean, where there is no sweet water, no drink and no food of any kind; where he would soon die of misery."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, in his autobiography *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, Reverend Crosby paints the picture in reverse, stating that the Catholics subjected those *Stó:lō* who had shown interest in the Methodist faith to "the most bitter persecution;" circulating illustrations of Catholic Indians going to Heaven, while "Crosby and his friends went head first into the lurid flames of hell-fire."<sup>18</sup>

Competition, for the loyalty and allegiance of *Stó:lō* leaders remained a characterizing feature of Catholic-Protestant and interdenominational Protestant relations in the Fraser Valley throughout the nineteenth century. In 1886, the Oblate priest Father Edward Peytavin described the competition between the Catholic Church, the Methodists and the Anglicans for the souls of the Skw'átets community (now called Peter's Reserve). He



claimed that of a total population of fifty-one, thirty six were Catholic; the remainder Protestant. The traditional community leader was reportedly an Episcopalian Anglican and the Methodist families allegedly “refused to recognize an Anglican Chief.” In response, the Methodist Minister had appointed a “Methodist Chief.” This action, according to the Oblate, was unacceptable to the remaining Catholic population. Thus, in order to “maintain peace and discipline among the Catholics,” Peytavin reported that he “had to choose a Catechist or Zealator,” for the Catholic majority. Once appointed, the Catechist was allegedly given by his “co-religionaries” the “title of Chief:” “There are now three (chiefs) in this little village, it is the Catholic Chief who has the most subjects, the Methodist Chief is in Control of thirteen, and the Episcopalian has only his wife to govern. This situation causes much laughter among whites and Indians.” Father Peytavin’s report described a similar situation existing at *Shxw’ōwhamel* (just down river from Hope), only in that community, the priest lamented, the Catholics were “losing ground.”<sup>19</sup>

In all probability, there was much more going on at *Skw’átets* and *Shxw’ōwhamel* than the Oblate Father’s simple description might imply.

Interdenominational Christian disputes were often more a vehicle for Indigenous politics than the causal factors Peytavin’s description suggests.

Archaeological research suggest that intense rivalries between families for community leadership had been a feature of *Stó:lō* society for at least the past 1400 years.<sup>20</sup> Today, as has been shown, families continue to compete for position within the social and political hierarchy of *Stó:lō* society. Yet, regardless of the true cause of such conflicts, it remains that the Christian Missionaries were accentuating, if not provoking, inter-community disputes in their efforts to control *Stó:lō* leadership.

### Government Activities: The “Civilization Act”

The colonial, and later provincial and federal governments did not leave the matter of assimilation to the missionaries alone. Specific legislation was also drafted to expedite the assimilation of Aboriginal leaders. This law was called the “Civilization Act.”<sup>21</sup> It defined “Indians” or Aboriginal people as wards of the government. They were not citizens, and therefore did not possess all the rights of Canadian citizenship. The government decided that full citizenship and integration into mainstream *Xwelítem* soci-

ety was the goal all Aboriginal people should aspire to.

The “Civilization Act” established a rigid criteria for Aboriginal people to fulfill before they could be “promoted” to full and equal citizenship and be recognized as “civilized.” They had to be able to read and write, be free of debt, and of good moral character. As long as they failed to meet any of these criteria, they were regarded as inferior to people of British descent – they were legally and socially “Indian.”

It is useful to consider the standards the government established for citizenship. In the nineteenth century most full Canadian citizens of British or European descent could not even meet all the citizenship requirements established for “Indians,” yet they were considered “civilized” from birth. Thus, to become a citizen and be considered equal, Aboriginal people were expected to become more “civilized” than Europeans.

### Able to Read and Write

For the *Stó:lō*, it was almost impossible to fulfill the government’s literacy requirements and still live within the framework of their traditional oral culture. In pre-contact times, the *Stó:lō* had not found it necessary to develop a written language to preserve their history.

Instead, they recorded important information in elaborate oral narratives (and sometimes in images they painted and carved into rocks and cedar houseposts). Such stories were passed from generation to generation in a carefully prescribed manner. One particularly well known *Stó:lō* oral narrative surrounds the transformer stone “*Xá:ytem*,” located in Mission. It relates how the transformers *XéXa:ls* punished three *sí:yá:m* for not adopting new ways to preserve and protect *Stó:lō* traditions and knowledge. For *Stó:lō* culture to survive the government’s assimilation policy, leaders

needed to heed the lessons of *Xá:ytem* and be innovative and adaptive. However, people who had been raised in an oral environment could not be expected to adapt to a written culture overnight. It took time.

### Free From Debt

The second criteria for citizenship under the “Civilization Act” was freedom from debt. Interestingly, many British-born Canadian citizens accumulated significant debts throughout their lives as they purchased land and built homes or businesses, yet they were not denied citizenship. For the *Stó:lō*, debt was a central facet of life. As explained, the *Stó:lō* accumulated wealth primarily to



*Xá:ytem*, a “transformer rock” located in Mission.





A nineteenth century potlatch ceremony in which a blanket is being thrown off a platform to the people below.

redistribute it at special feasts and potlatches. Whenever a major feast or potlatch was held the *siyá:m* hosting the event always borrowed from their relatives to ensure enough food was available. The hosts were expected to repay this favour with interest at a future potlatch. In other words, the hosts became indebted. In this way all who participated in *Stó:lō* potlatches (and everyone did) was by definition “in debt” and ineligible for Canadian citizenship.

### “Good Morals”

Morality, the third criteria of the “Civilization Act,” also impacted the *Stó:lō*. Morality is something that society is constantly redefining. It is also interpreted differently by various groups within society. People of different economic classes, ethnic backgrounds, religions, ages, and genders, often do not agree on a single definition of what is moral and immoral. For example, in the late-nineteenth century, upper class Americans felt it was immoral for a woman to reveal any portion of her leg in public. Observance of this definition of morality resulted in some people covering the legs of their pianos because they thought the graceful curved carvings too closely approximated the female figure. Currently, many young people enjoy watching music videos. They find them entertaining and harmless. Yet, other members of contemporary society (primarily conservative older people) view the content of many such videos as offensive and immoral.

Through the “Civilization Act” immorality was carefully interpreted using the value judgements of upper-class British Society. The Act defined slavery and polygamy (having more than one wife), as immoral.

Therefore, any Aboriginal person who owned slaves or had more than one wife was considered “uncivilized” and ineligible for “citizenship.” For nineteenth century *Stó:lō* people conforming to such definitions required fundamental readjustments of their social structures. As explained, *si:yá:m* were required to demonstrate their wealth. Slaves were not only symbols of wealth, they were wealth in themselves, for their labour contributed to their owner’s possessions and made his family’s life easier.

A census taken by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1839 indicates that 15% of the *Stó:lō* population were slaves.

It was also common for *Stó:lō si:yá:m* to have more than one wife. The main reason for this practice was to access new resources by forging new family alliances. Having more than one wife also indicated that a *siyá:m* was wealthy enough to support a large family. Often times, *si:yá:m* acquired slaves so their high status wives would not have to work too hard. Thus, for *si:yá:m* to meet the “citizenship” requirements of the Civilization Act meant abandoning certain important traditional activities and practises.

### Gradual Enfranchisement Act

In 1869 the Canadian government passed another act which impacted upon Aboriginal people – the “Gradual Enfranchisement Act.” Like the “Civilization Act,” the “Gradual Enfranchisement Act” applied in British Columbia after Confederation in 1871. “Enfranchisement” refers to the ability to vote in an election. The Gradual Enfranchisement Act was part of the government’s “civilization” policy. It was intended to encourage Aboriginal communities to adopt British style elections. The Act also enabled government agents to remove traditional leaders and replace them with elected councils. As a result, traditional *si:yá:m* were replaced with “municipal style” councils, where “chiefs” were elected like “mayors” and “councillors” like “aldermen.” If elections were not held, the legislation gave the Indian Agent the authority to “appoint” Chiefs. Typically, the Indian Agent appointed people who had already been selected by the missionaries as “Church Chiefs” and “Watchmen.”

Not surprisingly many Aboriginal leaders opposed such changes. The government assured Aboriginal communities they would only use this law to remove



Aboriginal leaders who were unfit or unqualified to hold office. However, as we have seen, *Xwelítem* and Aboriginal definitions did not always correspond. A *siyá:m* who could not read or write was deemed incompetent and unfit by the government's standards. And a *siyá:m* who had more than one wife or owned slaves was considered by the government to be immoral and equally unfit for a position of authority.

### More "Indian Laws"

In 1880 and 1895, the Canadian government amended their "Indian Laws" once again. As with previous government initiatives, these changes were designed to intensify the assimilation process. Traditional leaders were now "prohibited from exercising any power unless they had been elected." Those communities that retained their traditional leadership structures discovered their *siyá:m* had less legal authority than those chiefs who had been "elected" or "appointed" under the new legislation. In fact, all Chiefs were now regarded as "appointees of the government," and therefore subject to removal by Indian agents.

### Anti-Potlatching Law

In 1884, the Indian Act was amended to include the infamous "anti-potlatch law." The Act now made it illegal for Aboriginal people to gather together in a ceremonial dance, funeral, marriage, naming ceremony, or any other kind of traditional event where gifts were given out. People who violated this law were "liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any gaol [jail] or other place of confinement."<sup>22</sup>

The main objective of this new law was to promote the assimilation of Aboriginal people by subverting one of their main economic and social institutions. Many missionaries and Indian agents who had observed these gatherings viewed them as "heathen," "immoral," and "communistic," because they allegedly appeared un-Christian and discouraged savings thereby making paupers out of rich people.

The first person to be arrested and convicted for violating the anti-potlatching law was a *Stó:lō* man from Chilliwack named Bill Uslick. In January 1896 Indian Agent Frank Delvin reported to the police that he had witnessed a potlatch ceremony where Mr. Uslick gave away almost all his wealth. In his report Delvin stated that he was convinced that:

*The Indian mentioned ... Bill Uslick ... is one of those Indians that is very hard to manage. He still wishes to keep up the old habits and customs, and would like to be a leader among the Indians of the neighbourhood. The Potlatch given by Bill Uslick was simply a Potlatch. I am not aware that any human, or animal bodies, were mutilated, or anything of that kind occurred. There certainly was a great waste. He practically left himself destitute, having*

*given everything away that he had in the world. I am of the opinion if he was brought before the Court and got a couple of months in prison, that it would have a good effect, and would deter others from following his example...<sup>23</sup>*

Uslick was arrested on February 1, 1896, and sentenced to two months in prison.

In the following years several other convictions occurred up and down the coast. To even more effectively undermine Aboriginal society, the anti-potlatching law was amended to prohibit "any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part."<sup>24</sup> This amendment was made to prohibit virtually any gathering of Aboriginal people, effectively eliminating their ability to legally practise their traditional spiritual or economic activities.

While some *Stó:lō* people complied with the anti-potlatching law, others moved the potlatch along with the winter ceremonials and other public gatherings underground. Public occasions such as weddings and funerals were held in various churches, although with a distinctly *Stó:lō* flavour. The clandestine efforts of *Stó:lō siyá:m* like Richard Malloway of Yakwekwioose in Sardis enabled the potlatch and the winter ceremonial to survive through the prohibition period and into the present.

### No Lawyers

In the early twentieth century the "Civilization Act," "Gradual Enfranchisement Act," and "Advancement Act" were unified into a single piece of legislation known as the "Indian Act." It retained all the essential elements of its predecessors and continued the policy of assimilation. In 1929, in order to stop Aboriginal people from taking legal action against the government, the Indian Act was again amended, making it illegal for any lawyer to work for an Aboriginal person or organization in a suit against the federal government. This ban remained in effect until 1951 when certain amendments were made to the Indian Act to remove the most offensive aspects of the legislation. While the Indian Act no longer prohibited the potlatch or prevented Aboriginal people from hiring lawyers, the changes did not affect the central assimilationist policy of the government's Indian policy. Rather, the changes simply provided greater administrative independence for those Aboriginal communities which had proven to be the most assimilated. Throughout the 1950's and 60's, most *Stó:lō* communities attempted to work within the parameters of the Indian Act. These communities functioned essentially as federal municipalities with elected mayors (chiefs) and councils.

The preceding discussion outlines the major government efforts to undermine the positions of Aboriginal leaders. To fully appreciate the government's assimilationist intentions it is also necessary to look at those policies which focussed on pediatric societal manipulation, or



the transformation of Aboriginal society through the acculturation of children.

### Residential Schools

Recently many of the more sinister aspects of residential school life have been documented and published. Numerous accounts of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by people who were responsible for children's care vividly illustrate the most personally tragic aspects of many Aboriginal student's residential schools experience. The role of residential schools in contributing to the haunting legacy of poverty, suicide, alcoholism, and loss of parenting skills among Aboriginal people may never be fully appreciated. The history of residential schools is more than the sum total of stories of personal tragedy, it also an aspect of the broader process of assimilation. It was part of a system that was designed to strip Aboriginal children of their traditional culture by removing them from the supposedly "harmful" influences of their parents and extended families.<sup>25</sup> As the educational historian Jean Barman has written, "while teachers and administrators of good will were able to ameliorate the worst aspects of the system for their pupils, all the individual good will in the world could not



Nineteenth century *Stó:lō* people participating in the Easter Passion Play at St. Mary's, Mission, organized by Catholic Missionaries.

have rescued a system that was fundamentally flawed."<sup>26</sup>

Indian residential schools were operated by both Catholic and Protestant Churches. Children were placed in residential schools because the *Xwelítem* believed it was in Aboriginal people's best interest to have their "character" redesigned after a European model. In *Stó:lō* territory there were two residential schools. The first, St. Mary's, was operated by the Catholic Church. Later the Methodists (now called the United Church of Canada)

Graduates of the Methodist residential school "Coqualeetza" in Sardis, BC, circa 1890.





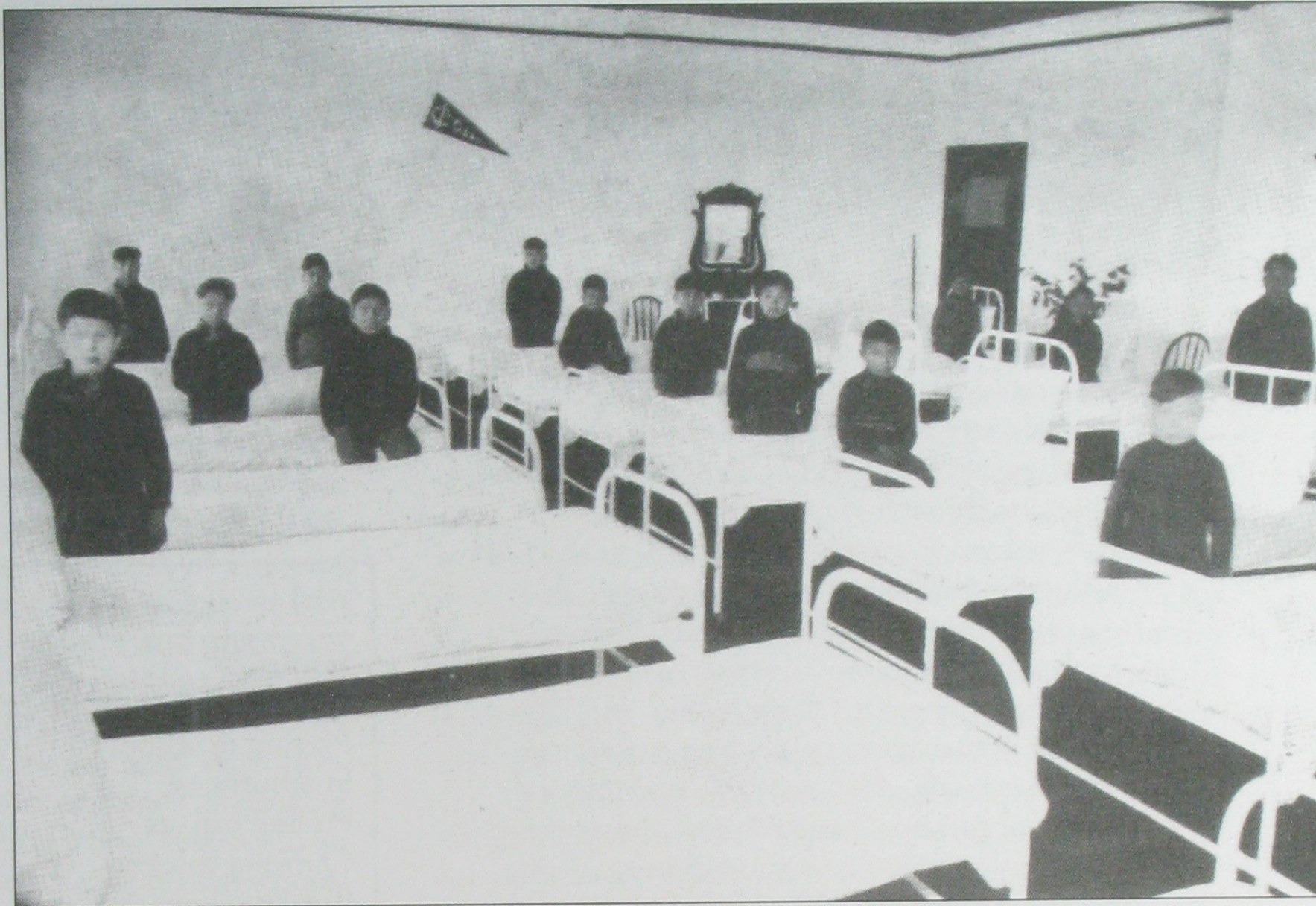
opened Coqualeetza residential school. Many *Stó:lō* children were also sent to other residential schools operating in places like Alberni, Kamloops, Kuper Island, Lytton and Sechelt.<sup>27</sup>

B.C.'s modern residential school history begins in 1863 when Father Florimond Gendre, a Roman Catholic Oblate priest, established St. Mary's residential school at Mission in the Fraser Valley. For the first years of its operations, St. Mary's only accepted male students but it did not take long for a second building to be constructed for girls. The girl's school was operated by the Sisters of St. Ann.<sup>28</sup> As previously mentioned, St. Mary's residential school was an extension of the earlier missionary activities of Father Leon Fouquet who had begun working among the *Stó:lō* in 1861. The Oblate priests modeled their activities after the efforts of seventeenth century Catholic Jesuit missionaries in Paraguay who had sought to establish "model Christian village communities." Graduates of the Jesuit's schools were encouraged to settle near the Catholic missions where, it was hoped, they would adopt a European lifestyle.

St. Mary's residential school was named after the biblical prostitute "Mary," who had been "saved" from a life of sin by Christ. The selection of this name provides insight into the way the *Xwelítem* viewed the *Stó:lō*. The Catholics had been invited to establish their residential school by the colonial government. The government hoped missionaries would be able to save the *Stó:lō* from "whiskey pedlars" and other unscrupulous *Xwelítem* who had followed the gold miners into *Stó:lō* territory during the 1858 gold rush. The *Stó:lō* were viewed as contemporary reflections of the Biblical St. Mary – an innocent woman who had been corrupted by immoral men. Provided with the opportunity to follow Christ and redeem herself, St. Mary had immediately reformed and became a model Christian citizen. Likewise, the *Stó:lō* were viewed as innocent children of the forest who had been debauched by the most despicable representatives of *Xwelítem* society. Missionaries anticipated that by removing *Stó:lō* children from their traditional "heathen" environment and the influence of the whiskey traders, they could "be saved" in Christ's faith. Once they had been saved from the *Xwelítem* whiskey pedlars the Catholic priests could direct their efforts toward replacing traditional *Stó:lō* spirituality and culture with Catholic religion and European society. Placing them in

residential schools appeared to provide the best means of accomplishing this.

The idea of having children raised by foreigners in an isolated residential school was distressing for the *Stó:lō*. Traditionally, child rearing had been the prerogative and



The Coqualeetza Residential School boys' dormitory in the 1920's, Sardis, B.C.

responsibility of grandparents, great aunts, and uncles. Initially, some *Stó:lō* parents (primarily ones from high status families) did not allow their children to attend. For this reason, in the early years (before the government made residential school attendance compulsory) a large proportion of *Stó:lō* children who were taken by missionaries to either St. Mary's or Coqualeetza were from low status families, orphans, or sick children.<sup>29</sup> By the time the government legislated mandatory school attendance in 1884, and began to strictly enforce it after 1920,<sup>30</sup> several *Stó:lō* children had already been admitted to public day schools where they could return home each night. Yet, many *Stó:lō* children were still taken from their communities and raised in institutions where they were deprived of their family's love and frequently subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

Isolation from family was central to the residential school philosophy, to prevent children from adopting the culture of their parents. However, the policy was severely misguided. Children raised in institutions were not provided with the opportunity to develop healthy family relationships. Even the kindest and best intentioned priest or nun could never replace the love and emotional connection provided by a parent. Because *Stó:lō* children in residential schools were never parented they never learned to become parents themselves:



I didn't even know my brothers and sisters were there. I didn't really have a close relationship with them. I never had a close relationship with my mother and I never developed a close relationships with any of my cousins either, whether they were at home or school or wherever, just because of the way we were raised. The residential school experience resulted in the total destruction of family structure... They basically took away the family experiences that I should have enjoyed and should have been able to pass on to my kids. I know that because of my experiences at residential school I didn't treat one of my older kids very well at all...

At residential school I was taught that punishment is supposed to make you do something and make you change. Because of learning these things I lost my traditional family values. Parents should be able to deal with their children in a better manner than how I was treated... When I became a parent I probably realized to a certain extent that I wasn't doing the right thing all the time. But it wasn't until after my older son moved out, and eventually died, that I thought about things, about how I was treated. It was then that I realized that you can't change what's done. My son was killed by a couple of people after he moved out of our house. To a certain extent, the way I treated him probably helped him to move away.<sup>31</sup> 🤔

It was this "destruction of family" which many *Stó:lō* people refer to as the most devastating legacy of Indian residential schools.

Part of the residential school assimilation process involved training *Stó:lō* children to become good agricultural farm hands and industrial labourers for the growing *Xwelítem* economy. This became especially true after the federal government assumed administrative responsibility for residential schools in 1884. With federal administration came federal funding. However, Ottawa supported Aboriginal students at a much lower rate than the province supported *Xwelítem* students.<sup>32</sup> For this reason Indian residential school had to generate much of their own operating costs. To do this they used their students as labourers (typically farming or taking in laundry) with the proceeds going to the school.

In addition to lower funding, residential schools also emphasized industrial training over academics because it was commonly thought that Aboriginal students were unsuited to intellectual life. Racist public attitudes prevented Aboriginal people from being seen as equals. They were regarded as members of an inferior race and as such the federal government was not prepared to waste money on educating Aboriginal children for

careers they would never be socially accepted into.

Finally, it was assumed that traditional Aboriginal work habits – centering on seasonal changes in the environment – made Aboriginal students unsuited to regulated industrial labour. As such, it was thought Aboriginal children needed to be indoctrinated into the European institutionalized and industrialized mind set. Deviation from the prescribed model was not tolerated. Lives were regimented around the clock to inculcate a healthy work ethic. To ingrain the European work ethic it was considered a better use of time to have Aboriginal children spend more of their day working in the fields or in the laundry room than to have them sitting behind a desk learning less practical skills that they would never be able to use in a prejudice filled society. Personnel files were kept for each pupil and "offenses" were greeted with strict "punishments." The fragmentary records of one turn-of-the-century British Columbia Oblate residential school paint a vivid picture of the disciplinary techniques of the supposed "civilizers":<sup>33</sup>

Offence	Punishment
Insolence	Writing 400 lines
Communicating with girls	Half hour of kneeling
Playing in school	Kneeling down
Stubbornness	Kneeling during breakfast
Pulling carrots	Kneeling during supper
Chewing tobacco	Kneeling during supper
Breaking bounds	Public Reprimands
Using tobacco	Public Reprimand
Late	Confinement
Talking Indian	Work during recess
Laziness	Work during recess
Fighting	Extra Work
Talking in Bed	Extra Work
Indian Dancing	Extra Work
Playing forbidden games	Extra Work
Stealing apples	One day's confinement
Truancy	Confinement and humiliation
Breaking plaster	Three lashes
Disturbance in dormitory	A few slaps
Runaway	Five strokes of the lash
Breaking into girl's dorm	Expulsion
Setting fire to boy's dorm	Expulsion

It is interesting to note how closely the government policies which sought to undermine the positions of traditional Aboriginal leaders fit with the policies directed toward assimilating children. The provisions of the "Civilization Act" which enabled Indian Agents to remove from power any *síyá:m* who had more than one wife, owned slaves or participated in potlatches, meant that the only people who were legally qualified to become Chiefs were residential school graduates. They could read and write English, and had not incurred a debt by potlatching, therefore were not considered incompetent. Because they had been educated as Christians and did not



own slaves or have more than one wife they were not considered immoral. In this way the Indian Agents replaced many traditional *siyá:m* with people who had been raised and trained in a completely non-traditional environment.

By the 1950's, after the Indian Act had been revised to allow Aboriginal people to hire lawyers and practise their traditional ceremonial and spiritual activities, Aboriginal people began to articulate their dissatisfaction with residential school education. While the *Xwelítem* government was not ready to abandon its policy of assimilating Aboriginal children, the general public was becoming more sensitive to the injustice of providing Aboriginal children with a second rate education. Studies showed that many residential school teachers had been rejected by the public school system. The obvious injustice of a system which claimed to prepare students for integration into mainstream society, but which had inferior academic training standards made it difficult for even the most dedicated supporter of the residential school system to defend its existence. As a result, the federal government began closing down Indian residential schools and integrating Aboriginal children into the public school system. In an odd way, the motivation for closing the residential schools stemmed not from an abandonment of the assimilation policy, but from a distorted perception that the assimilation process had been successfully completed.



Aboriginal girls working in the laundry of the Coqualeetza Residential School, Sardis, B.C.

By the late 1960's the illusion that the assimilation process had been successful was generally accepted by federal politicians and bureaucrats. In 1969, under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien, the government unveiled a major policy proposal – the infamous “White Paper.” This document proposed that within five years the entire Department of Indian Affairs would be dissolved and all Aboriginal rights abolished. Assimilation would be complete – Aboriginal culture was believed to be extinct.

The government genuinely appeared to have expected Aboriginal people to celebrate the supposed success of the assimilation policy, and the eradication of Aboriginal society and culture. Instead, Aboriginal people throughout Canada rejected the “White Paper” and what it stood for. The “White Paper” acted as a lightning rod, focus-

Class photo of the Coqualeetza Residential School Brass Band, which performed throughout the Fraser Valley.





ing Aboriginal resentment and providing an avenue and opportunity for the reassertion of Aboriginal distinctiveness and identity. Until this time, many Aboriginal people had felt overwhelmed by the assimilationist society around them. To succeed, even to get along, they tried to hide their Aboriginal ancestry and cultural identity. As Soowahlie Elder Wesley Sam explained, for the generation growing up in the pre-White Paper era “no one wanted to be a chief. It was bad enough having whites treat you differently because you were Indian. You didn’t want to make matters worse by being really Indian; by being Chief.”<sup>34</sup>

The “White Paper” made it clear to Aboriginal leaders that unless they vigorously asserted their Aboriginal rights and openly expressed their unique cultural identity, they could soon cease to be an identifiable people. The feelings of cultural inadequacy and personal shame experienced by many Aboriginal people as a result of residential school and government assimilation policy needed to be challenged and overturned. To accomplish this, a number of regional and national Aboriginal organizations were formed to advocate Aboriginal rights before provincial and federal authorities. One of these was the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. More locally, the Chilliwack Area Indian Council and the Vancouver Alliance Council were formed. Later, the Chilliwack Area Indian Council evolved into the *Stó:lō* Nation.

In the face of united Aboriginal opposition, the government reversed its “White Paper” policy proposals. They acknowledged that no one group of people have the right to impose their culture, values, and belief system onto another. The government publicly apologized for insulting and patronizing Aboriginal people, and took the first hesitant steps towards dismantling over a century of assimilation initiatives. Over the next three decades the federal and provincial governments recognized that Aboriginal people have the right to exist as self-governing, culturally unique entities within the Canadian fed-

eration. In British Columbia, where few treaties have been signed, formal negotiations are occurring between federal and provincial representatives and Aboriginal communities. This will allow BC Aboriginal people to receive compensation, as happened in all other parts of Canada, for the loss of their exclusive use of their traditional land and resources. It will also allow Aboriginal people to play a meaningful role in the management of the remaining natural resources within their territories, thereby ensuring that resources will be preserved for future generations, and Aboriginal communities will become economically self-sufficient.

Clearly, the government’s assimilation policies had a significant and devastating impact upon *Stó:lō* society. In many ways the position of the *sí:yá:m* were greatly undermined as non-Aboriginal Indian agents and missionaries assumed ever increasing responsibility for regulating the lives of Aboriginal people. Ironically, however, at the same time that the government was seeking to undermine and subjugate Aboriginal leadership, other factors were acting to enhance and institutionalize the position of the *sí:yá:m* vis a vis those people who had held positions of respect and leadership over other aspects of *Stó:lō* life. For example, by the end of the nineteenth century, the imposition of British/Canadian law had effectively ended Aboriginal inter-community wars and raids. *Stoméx*, the traditional leaders of raiding parties then ceased to have a purpose. Likewise, traditional *Stó:lō* doctors became somewhat discredited when they were unable to effectively treat introduced bacterial and viral infections. This loss of status was compounded by the growing influence of *Xwelítem* physicians.

Despite the assimilationist policies, in many ways *sí:yá:m* were among the only traditional leaders to find a place in the new *Xwelítem* dominated society. And so while many *sí:yá:m* were pushed aside by government legislation, others, by converting to Christianity and becoming priest appointed “Church Chiefs” or attending residential school



11 BRITISH COLUMBIA CHIEFS CONFERENCE KAMLOOPS, B.C. NOV 18-22, 1969.

The Union Of British Columbia Indian Chiefs formed after the release of federal government’s “White Paper”.



and then being elected or appointed "chiefs" by the Indian agent, were able to accentuate the traditional responsibilities of the *si:yám* under the new and more institutionalized title of "Chief."

### 3 THE CONTEMPORARY STÓ:LŌ NATION - CREATING SELF-GOVERNMENT ■

Understanding some of the processes and historical events which shaped the way the *Stó:lō* have governed themselves, and been governed by others over the past 150 years, provides a context for appreciating the contemporary structure of the *Stó:lō* Nation. The Canadian Constitution recognizes that Aboriginal people have the right to be self-governing. This right is not based upon their "race," but, like all other Aboriginal rights, upon Aboriginal people's prior occupation of Canada. However, the Constitution does not define self-government. For the *Stó:lō*, self-government is something being achieved and implemented incrementally. As *Stó:lō* Elder, and Chief of the Yeqwyeqwi:ws community, Frank Malloway explains that

Self-government is controlling your own resources and being able to take control of your lives. It means being able to develop land the way you want, and to use money as you see fit. To be able to decide things without Ottawa having to check and then rubber stamp everything. ☺

Frank Malloway's sentiments are echoed in the words of *Stó:lō* Grand Chief Clarence Pennier, who is also the Executive Director of Aboriginal Rights and Title Department of the *Stó:lō* Nation. He explains that

We have to look at the past to see how things were organized and then look at today and ask how we want to change. We have to have more control over how land is developed and over how resources are extracted. We have to look after the environment for our children's children. Elders have to become more involved and have a larger role in the community.<sup>35</sup> ☺

Steven Point, Chief of the Skowkale Community and *Yewal Siyám* (Chief's Representative) for the entire *Stó:lō* Nation, discusses self-government in these terms:

We want to be self-governing. We believe that our rights to self-government, our sovereignty as a nation, has never been affected. Our rights have never been extinguished even though foreign countries have come here and established governments and taken our lands.

...re-asserting the right to hunt and fish and trap does not go far enough... If it is to become a reality, self-government must be a process, not a destination. There must be an internal change which transcends where we were as wards of the government, to political organizations pressuring government, to actually becoming self-governing.

Self-government is becoming a reality. We are taking on more jurisdiction, more responsibilities. We are becoming self-governing.<sup>36</sup> ☺

*Stó:lō* Chiefs at the *Stó:lō* Nation unity ceremony of 1994.





# Appendix: The Contemporary *Stó:lō* Nation

The following is a brief description of the *Stó:lō* Nation organization as it exists in 1996. If you require more detailed information, contact the *Stó:lō* Nation directly and request to speak with a representative for one of the departments.

## Political Arm

To facilitate the "process" of self-government, *Stó:lō* communities have organized themselves into the *Stó:lō* Nation, an umbrella organization which provides services to its 21 member communities. It is composed of a political arm and a bureaucratic arm, much the same way the federal provincial or municipal government is. The political arm, like the Canadian federal government, consists of three branches.

### i) *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám* ("House of Respected *Stó:lō* Leaders")

The first branch of the political arm of the *Stó:lō* Nation is the *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám*. It is based upon proportional representation. Each *Stó:lō* community has at least one representative and larger communities have up to three votes. It is in the *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám* that *Stó:lō* legislation and laws originate. This is the main political body of the *Stó:lō* Nation. The chiefs in the *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám* elect a five person cabinet called the "Special

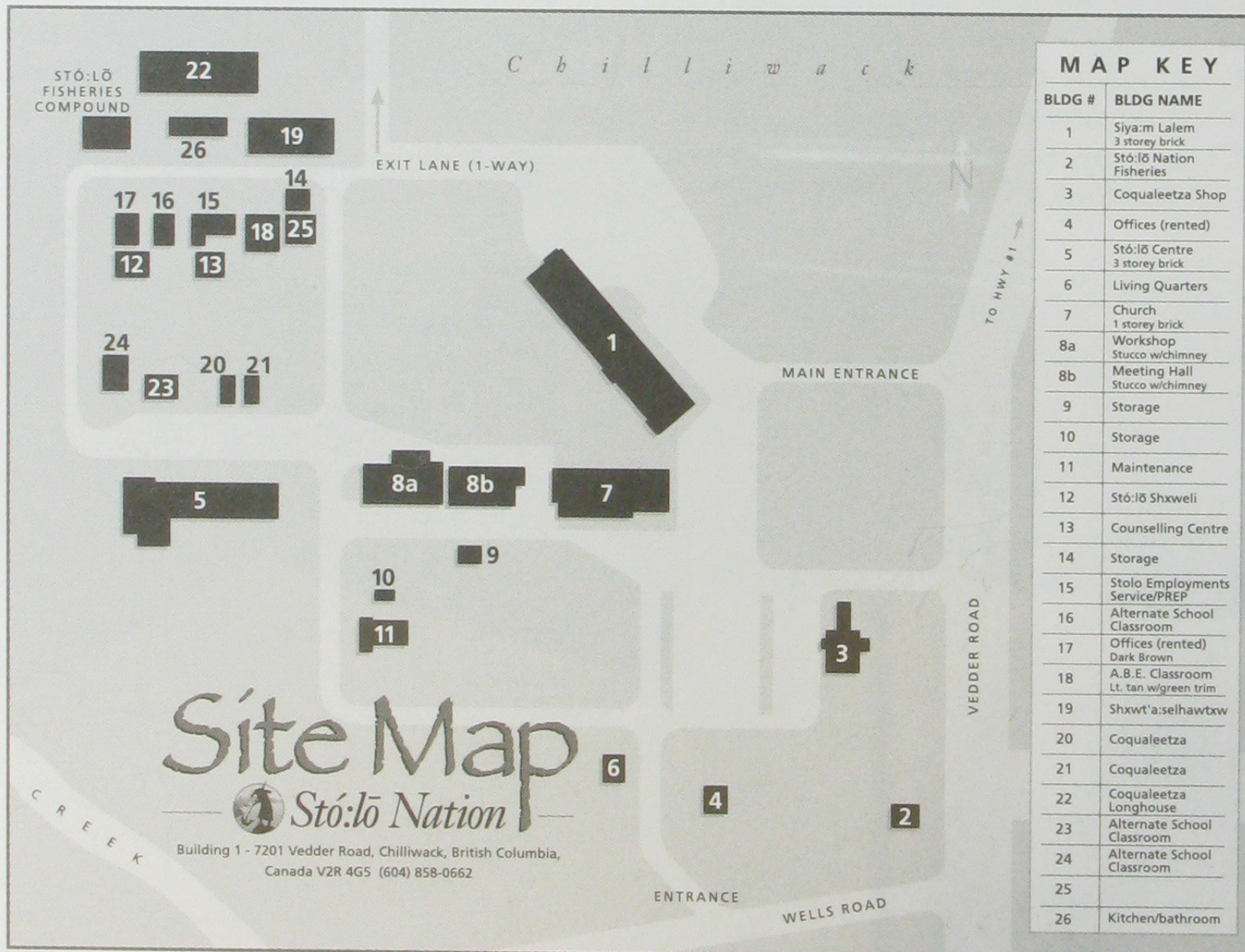
Chiefs' Council" (SCC). It consists of one representative for each bureaucratic department of the *Stó:lō* Nation. These representatives are "Portfolio Chiefs," who oversee the bureaucratic or business operations of the *Stó:lō* Nation and report back to the *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám*. The SCC is chaired by the *Stó:lō* Nation Chief's Representative. This person is the primary political spokesperson for the *Stó:lō* Nation, and directly accountable to the *Stó:lō* chiefs.

### ii) *Lálém Te Sí:yelyó:lexwa* ("House of Elders")

The second branch of the political arm of the *Stó:lō* Nation is the *Lálém Te Sí:yelyó:lexwa*. At least one Elder from every *Stó:lō* community sits on this council. It functions in a manner similar to the way the Canadian Senate was designed to operate. The *Lálém Te Stó:lō Sí:yám* is also responsible for overseeing all matters pertaining to culture and tradition.

### iii) House of Justice

The final branch of *Stó:lō* Nation's political arm is the "House of Justice." This body is not yet fully functional, but will deal with justice issues of particular concern to *Stó:lō* people. *Stó:lō* concepts of justice emphasize "rehabilitation." Many non-Aboriginal people find the thought of a separate justice system for the *Stó:lō* disconcerting. *Stó:lō* leaders assure people that they have nothing to fear from a parallel *Stó:lō* justice system. One important function of the "House of Justice" will be to deal with justice issues that are Aboriginal in nature. For the *Stó:lō*, certain songs and stories are "owned" by particular individuals or



Partial map of the Coqualeetza grounds showing the *Stó:lō* Nation.



families. If a *Stó:lō* person were to go to a provincial court house and ask a judge to adjudicate who had a right to sing a song or tell a story, the judge would be at a loss as how to proceed. Similarly, *Stó:lō* families “own” specific fishing sites along the Fraser River. These rights are based upon complex family laws and customs which the mainstream legal system is unfamiliar with. Such matters are very serious to *Stó:lō* people. Through the *Stó:lō* “House of Justice,” these and other culturally specific justice matters could be dealt with by *Stó:lō* people within a *Stó:lō* justice setting.

Similarly, other justice and legal matters may one day also be dealt with by the *Stó:lō* “House of Justice.” Property crimes and violent crimes between *Stó:lō* people may be handled more effectively within the context of *Stó:lō* justice system.



*Stó:lō* Nation Special Chiefs' Council, 1995.

### Administrative/Business Arm

The administrative arm of the *Stó:lō* Nation is divided into five departments:

- 1) Health and Social Services;
- 2) Community Development and Education;
- 3) Aboriginal Rights and Title;
- 4) *Xolbmi:lb* (Child Welfare); and
- 5) Finance.

Each department is headed by an executive director. Together the directors are in charge of the “business” of the *Stó:lō* Nation.

#### i) Health and Social Development

The Health and Social Development Department is the largest of the *Stó:lō* bureaucracies in terms of staff. Their full time employees include nurses, psychologists, addictions counsellors, social workers, community support workers, and cultural support workers.

#### ii) Community Development and Education

The Community Development and Education Department is the largest department, with regards to the programs they run. Their staff deal with job training, life skill training, economic and human development, adult education, school based education initiatives, community planning, and housing development.

#### iii) Aboriginal Rights & Title

The Aboriginal Rights & Title department is concerned with issues of heritage management, treaty negotiations, archaeology, history, justice, language revival, fisheries, and some education and cross-cultural awareness matters. Much of their time is spent dealing with issues

such as urban expansion, and heritage overviews for proposed development sites.

#### iv) *Xolbmi:lb* (Child Welfare)

Until recently Aboriginal children were the victims of federal and provincial jurisdictional disputes. The Canadian Constitution defines child welfare as a provincial responsibility. However, all matters dealing with

Aboriginal people fall under federal jurisdiction.

Aboriginal children therefore “fell between the cracks.” As part of the self-government process, responsibility for child welfare has been transferred directly to the *Stó:lō* Nation. The *Xolbmi:lb* program combines traditional *Stó:lō* child care techniques with social work to help recreate healthy families.

#### v) Finance

The *Stó:lō* Nation Finance Department provides financial support to all other departments.

### Indian Bands

There are currently of 24 *Stó:lō* villages. These village communities are referred to as “Indian bands,” a legal description created by the Canadian government. Villages were arranged into administrative units by the federal government to better regulate finances and services. Indian bands within *Stó:lō* territory have the option of formally joining the *Stó:lō* Nation or remaining “independent.” There are 24 *Stó:lō* bands between the Fraser Canyon and Langley, three of these were “independent” at the time this chapter was written in 1996. All *Stó:lō* communities communicate and share resources regardless of their affiliation with *Stó:lō* Nation.

### Recommended Further Readings:

- Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stó:lō Indians*, 1952.  
 Wayne Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays*, 1990.  
 Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal People and Politics*, 1990.  
 Cecilia Haig Brown, *Resistance and Renewal*, 1988.

### Footnotes

- 1 Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*, (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1952), pp. 90-91.
- 2 Wayne Suttles, “Private knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish,” in Wayne Suttles, ed., *Coast Salish Essays*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), p.6.
- 3 Duff, p.82.



- 4 Wayne Suttles, "The Central Coast Salish," in Wayne Suttles, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7, The Northwest Coast*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), p. 465.
- 5 Ibid, p.465.
- 6 Dr. Brent Galloway, personal communication. November 27, 1995.
- 7 Duff, p.81.
- 8 Duff, p.81.
- 9 Dr. Michael Kew, personal communication, November 27, 1995.
- 10 Charles Hill-Tout, *The Salish People* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), p.358. Moreover, as previously explained, special doctors, or "spiritual leaders" assumed principal responsibility for the emotional and spiritual well being of *Stó:lō* communities, and other men were responsible for raiding and counter raiding enemies in other villages.
- 11 Duff, p.89.
- 12 See Wayne Suttles, "The Plateau Prophet Dance Among the Coast Salish," in Wayne Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), pp.152-198. The lack of missionary activity should not be taken as an indication that Christian influences did not reach the Fraser Valley.
- 13 "Records of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," Letter of July, 16, 1862, (copy at SNA).
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 *Sb̓xw'ōwhamel* Elder Ralph George, personal communication. Discussing the news media coverage of his fight against drugs. September 27, 1996.
- 16 James W. Redford, *Attendance at Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia, 1890-1920*, (M.A. Dept. of History, U.B.C., 1978), p.32.
- 17 "Records of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," Letter from R.P. Marshal to R.P. Durieu, February 12, 1871, Photocopy in SNA.
- 18 Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums; or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast*, (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), p.189.
- 19 "Records of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," by Ed. Peytavin, OMI, "Report on the Activities of 1886, Photocopy on file, SNA.
- 20 See Brian Thom *The Living and the Dead*. (MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology, U.B.C. 1995), Photocopy on file at SNA.
- 21 The Civilization Act's full name was "An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indians of this Province, and to Amend the Laws Respecting Indians, S.P.C. 1857."
- 22 Section 140 of the Indian Act.
- 23 Letter from Delvin to Vowell, 1896; Cited in Forest E. LaViolette, *The Struggle for Survival: Indian Cultures and the Protestant Ethic in British Columbia*, (Toronto: UofT Press, 1973), p. 70.
- 24 Cited in Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1990), p.101.
- 25 See Cecelia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Tillicum Library, 1988).
- 26 Jean Barman, "Schooled for Inequality: The Education of British Columbia Aboriginal Children," in Jean Barman et al. ed., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995).
- 27 It is interesting to note that nearly a century before the 1858 gold rush, Spanish friars at Nootka Sound had developed similar strategies for acculturating the Aboriginal population of the West Coast of Vancouver Island. The Spanish determined that to expedite the adoption of Spanish culture Nuuchah-nulth children had to be removed from the influences of their families. To facilitate this, the Friars transported a number of children south to San Diego, California and placed them in special residential schools. However, when European geopolitical power brokering resulted in Spain "ceding" the Northwest Coast to Britain in 1792, these children became forgotten tragedies of colonialism. Their fate remains a mystery to this day. John Kendrick, *The Men with Wooden Feet*. (Toronto: NC Press Ltd., 1985), Chapter 7.
- 28 St. Mary's was also the last residential school to close, graduating its last class in 1968. The school's dormitory housed *Stó:lō* children from rural communities who attended Mission High School until 1984.
- 29 Jacqueline Gresko, "Creating Little Dominions Within the Dominion: Early Catholic Indian Schools in Saskatchewan and British Columbia," in Jean Barman, et al., *Indian Education in Canada, Vol. 1: The Legacy*. p.98.
- 30 Redford, pp. 15, 30, 38-41.
- 31 Anonymous Elder interviewed by Kun-Hui Ku, May 25, 1995. Transcript on file at SNA.
- 32 Jean Barman, "Schooled for Inequality: The Education of British Columbia Aboriginal Children," in Jean Barman, et al., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*. (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995).
- 33 "Cowichan Agency at Industrial School at Kuper Island. 1895-1897." Manuscript on file at British Columbia Archives and Records Service.
- 34 Wes Sam in conversation with Keith Thor Carlson, August 3, 1992.
- 35 Clarence Pennier (Chief of Scowlitz) in conversation with Gloria Morgan, December 22, 1994. transcript on file at *Stó:lō* Nation Archives.
- 36 Steven Point, (Chief of Skowkale, *Stó:lō* Nation Chief's Representative) in conversation with Gloria Morgan, December 22, 1994. Transcript on File at SNA.