

Sto:lo Field school 2007

Community Profile of Lhileltalets:  
Spiritual Importance Amongst Human and Natural Forces

by

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Lhileltalets is a small island near the east bank of the Fraser River roughly two kilometers North of Hope, British Columbia. As a geographic location, for all intensive purposes, it has always existed. As the Cordilleran Ice sheet receded the melting waters converged and channeled down the canyon now known as Fraser, and probably separated Lhileltalets from the mainland somewhere between 11, and 10,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> The limited archeological remains recovered from the island and adjacent area place the human occupation of the island from 8 to 5,000 years before present.<sup>2</sup> There are numerous references to the island supporting a large and important village into the Colonial Period; although the occupation and importance of this site has now largely been forgotten.

This paper, along with presenting as full of a history as possible of the island and community, will examine how the potent spiritual aspect of the location mixed with human and natural forces and suggest why Lhileltalets was abandoned. Unfortunately the pressures of population loss, missionization, cultural reduction through residential schools, and the abandonment of the island and surrounding reserve; means that the long and undoubtedly rich oral history of the island has mostly been lost. Some pre and early contact narratives survive, but their limited breath, especially compared to the documentation in non-native sources, should not diminish the importance of the pre-European history of the location. The history that this paper presents is, compared to the thousands of years of human occupation on the island, extremely recent, and should not be considered whole or definitive. It is in a sense the last chapter of a novel that has been lost,

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Carlson, "Plate 4A, B, C" in *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Mohs, *Spiritual Sites, Ethnic Significance and Native Spirituality: The Heritage and Heritage Sites of the Sto:lo Indians of British Columbia*. MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1987, 101.

through it there will be vestiges of what the larger narrative of Lhileltalets entailed, and that I hope is enough.

The most important aspect of Lhileltalets is the channel running between it and the village site of Iwówes. During high water in the late spring and early summer, the Lhileltalets channel was considered the place to catch salmon, and especially Spring Salmon, whose run corresponds with the high water.<sup>3</sup> During low water Lhileltalets ceases to be an island, as the channel dries up; except for a large central pool, or “little lake,” fed from Iwówes creek.<sup>4</sup> The pool stands out as a blue-green pond amid the muddy brown cobbles of the channel bed.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that this pool has a tunnel that connects it with Kawkawa Lake, and that it was through this tunnel that Sxwó:xwey mask was bequeathed to the Sto:lo.<sup>6</sup>

There is evidence that Lhileltalets was an important spiritual site before the appearance of the Sxwó:xwey. Probably sometime after 1000 C.E. when warfare on the entire Northwest Coast expanded, Iwówes was the center for what is described as a “massacre”.<sup>7</sup> It is widely accepted that the Kwakwaka’wakw were regular raiders of Sto:lo territory; raids that included forays into the Fraser Canyon as far North as Yale.<sup>8</sup> According to Henery Pennier, on one such raid, the Kwakwaka’wakw took a few slaves, but mostly killed everyone at Iwówes except for a woman and her young son.<sup>9</sup> The mother

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon, Mohs “CN Rail twin tracking project impact assessment & descriptive information” in *British Columbia Archaeological Site Survey Form DiRi* 68. 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Mohs, *Spiritual Sites, Ethnic Significance*, 101.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, Dept. of Education, 1952, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Henery Pennier, *Chiefly Indian* Vancouver: Graydonald Graphics Ltd., 1972, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Angelbeck “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare, or Coast Salish Pacifism Reconsidered: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography” in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish* ed. Bruce Miller Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Pennier, *Chiefly Indian*, 18.

raised her son alone, and through the boy's hard work he became an "Indian doctor" or *Sí:yá:m*. The next time the Kwakwaka'wakw ascended the river the *Sí:yá:m* was waiting for them; from the bank of the channel he hypnotized the raiders with his acquired powers, and simply waded out to the canoes and clubbed them all (except for 2) to death.<sup>10</sup> The Iwówes *Sí:yá:m* then sent the remaining two survivors back down the river to warn their chief of what had happened. Pennier describes this action as a Native way of keeping history, with all groups always allowing two survivors (as exemplified in the above story) there was always someone to keep past histories alive and preserve the historical record.<sup>11</sup> The events of this story may be reflected in Boas' description of Iwówes in his 1894 *The Indian Tribes of the Lower Fraser*, which lists Iwówes as the only Sto:lo tribe/village without a founding ancestor.<sup>12</sup> There is no guarantee that the survivors of the massacre at Iwówes would have been from the descendents of the founding ancestor, as a result with no one to inherit the name it would have been lost, hence its omission from Boas' report.

Wilson Duff also recorded the story of a powerful *Sí:yá:m* from Lhileltalets who went down river to Stave Lake to bring a young woman aged 20-22 back from the dead. Duff recorded that the people of Stave Lake did not want this young woman to die, so they sent word up river asking if anyone had the power to bring her back to life.<sup>13</sup> After the woman was dead 4 days the Lhileltalets *Sí:yá:m* took a bowl full of water from Stave Lake and sprinkled it on her to bring her into his power.<sup>14</sup> After repeating the process 4 times, he placed a cedar hood over his eyes, and walked to a place 4 miles away with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Boas, "Indian Tribes of the Lower Fraser River" Ninth Report of the Committee...(1894)

<sup>13</sup> Wilson Duff, *Field notes Notebook 2*, 32. Sto:lo Nation Archive

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Stave Lake community following, and asked for the power to cure the woman.<sup>15</sup> The *Sí:yá:m* brought the power he received back with him and laid it on the woman and commanded her to get up. This she did, although she was somewhat ostracized from her community for the rest of her life: the people believing her as “sort of a ghost”.<sup>16</sup>

As Lhileltalets was such a spiritual location it is not surprising that it is one of the centers for the origin of the Sxw’ó:wey mask and dance. The Sxw’ó:xwey is a unique Sto:lo spiritual creation, that has prompted debates between scholars as to the artistic inspiration behind the mask. Indeed the Sxw’ó:wey is supposedly the only mask to originate out of the Coast Salish cultural region.<sup>17</sup> Two theories are that the first mask may have been made by a captured Kwakwaka’wakw slave, although the mask does not fit with Kwakwaka’wakw artistic style, or it could come from the ceremonial aspect of the Nuuchahnulth culture.<sup>18</sup> Both of these hypothesis are problematical as they deny any sort of individual inspiration or agency (barring of course the supernatural origin of the mask) that could have led to the creation of the mask. There is also the suggestion that the Iwówes Sxw’ó:wey is the fourth and most powerful incarnation of an image that was imbedded in a stone near Yale by Xexá:ls.<sup>19</sup> It has been suggested that there were four separate occasions where the Sxw’ó:wey was revealed to the Sto:lo. According to the Sto:lo Geographical Place Name File: “The first three came from places between Qiqemqemel and Iwówes. The last and most powerful one, the one that lasted, came from Iwówes”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Duff, *Upper Stalo Indians*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 125-6

<sup>19</sup> Mohs, *Spiritual Sites Ethnic Significance*, 104.

<sup>20</sup> SP and AD (informants) in *Sto:lo Geographical Place Name File 1977-79*. Sto:lo Nation Archive.

Rather than quoting at length one of the numerous versions of the Sxw'ó:wey origin, I will present a narrative of my understanding of the creation of the mask; although this should not be considered definitive, or in any sense authentic. Rather it is an amalgamation of some of the narratives that exist surrounding the Lhileltalets/Iwówes origin of the Sxw'ó:wey.

At Lhileltalets there were two well to do brothers in their mid-twenties who were the head of their household as their father was dead, the eldest got a disease called “*qu'm*” which caused his skin to break open, rot, and stink. The young man spent all of his wealth trying to purchase cures for himself, but nothing worked. At length he built himself a tent or lodge made out of cedar mats and moved out of the house where his mother and sister lived. Still the rest of the community did not want him around, he heard comments such as “here comes that man who smells,” and “you stink, why don't you go some place and die?” These taunts, and possibly the pain of the disease, made the young man resolve to commit suicide. Early one morning he took the trail from Iwówes to Kawkawa lake where he made his way to the high bluff overlooking the lake. At the water's edge there was a fir tree that had fallen into the water. The young man decided to climb down to the tree, so that if he didn't sink when he jumped in, he could at least climb out again. As he was climbing down the cliff he fell into the lake, and let himself sink; losing consciousness and/or becoming conscious of other things. As he was sinking a S'ó:lmexw (water baby/person) grabbed hold of him and brought him to a house at the bottom of the lake. Inside the house the young man saw many people sick and in bed with sores all over their bodies. The S'ó:lmexw told the young man “you will cure these sick people”. But the young man said “I am also sick, if you cure me, then I will cure them”. So the S'ó:lmexw

took some shredded cedar bark and rubbed the young man's sores off his body. The young man now cured, noticed that the sores on the people in the lake were from spittle which floated down from the surface and stuck to the skin of the S'ó:lmexw. So he took shredded cedar bark and wiped down the bodies of those who were sick. Soon they were all up walking around again.

His host's asked him what he wanted as payment for healing them. At first they offered a blanket of Mountain goat wool, but that and other gifts were turned down until the young man from Lhileltalets asked for the Sxw'ó:wey. The S'ó:lmexw consented and promised to deliver the mask and costume to a certain place (the pool at Lhileltalets) in one month's time. There he was to cast in a line with basket and receive his payment. After 4 days (of real world time) the young man woke up on top of the bluff where he was going to kill himself. His sores were cured and he went home.

When he arrived back home the young man saw his sister and then mother, who both asked where he had been, and how he had been cured. He wouldn't tell them, only stating that they needed to make a big cedar bark basket and line, so that he could get paid his Sxw'ó:wey for curing the other people. His mother and sister didn't know what he was talking about, but they prepared the basket anyway.

Meanwhile the S'ó:lmexw instructed Beaver to dig a hole from the lake to the pool at Lhileltalets. The first hole that Beaver dug came out to high on the cliffs above the village (little caves), the second attempt ended in the deepest part of the pool.

At the appointed time the young man and his sister went down to the pool with the basket and line. The sister was instructed to cast the line and basket into the water, as if they were going to fish. Her brother told her not to be afraid of what she would see or

hear. After a while there were two or three jerks on the line and the siblings pulled up the line. Soon they heard noises getting louder and louder and then a man wearing a mask and costume and singing emerged dry from the water. It was the same man who had first encountered the young man when he fell into the lake. He showed them the songs and dances associated with the costume; along with its functions.

After this the young man went to his younger brother who still was a man of wealth, and told him that he had something for him, since the elder brother had no means, he gave it to his younger to use. He taught him the proper times to use the mask and costume, such as at funerals, marriages, the celebration of a woman's first menstrual period, and whenever something big happened.<sup>21</sup>

Wilson Duff recorded a detailed description of the mask, which gives an excellent mental picture of the mask and costume.

The costume had knee-length pants made of the skin of the swan with the feathers plucked out, leaving only the down. Below the knees were four strings of deer-hoofs on a buckskin fringe, one around the knee, one around the ankle. Over the back of the headband covering the shoulders and back down to the waist was a white cap woven of mountain goat wool. The false face (mask) was made of yellow cedar and worn on the top and front of the head. Its face was just like a human face, but the eyes stuck out. The nose was a human nose. The mouth was wide with no teeth showing, but the tongue stuck out and hung down over the lower lip... The mask was partly painted, the face red, eyeballs white, the eyebrows black, the tongue red. From the top of the mask protruded a fan shaped crown of many feathers, the large white-tipped feathers from the tail of the mountain eagle. Above this protruded four long thin reeds of ironwood, each with six white snowballs of swan's down attached, which got progressively smaller toward the ends of the reeds and vibrated when the mask was used.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Compiled from: Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians*, 123-4.; "field notes: notebook 2", 69-76. Mohs, *Spiritual Sites, Ethnic Significance*, 102. Marion Smith, "field notes" MS 5:5:40-3, MS 268:3:4 No. 23. Sto:lo Nation Archive.

<sup>22</sup> Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians*, 124.



The story of the Sxw'ó:wey does not end there. Copies were made, and at least one account notes that the young man who obtained the mask returned the original back to the pool and it's S'ó:lmexw owner.<sup>23</sup> Regardless, the mask and dance became property of the younger brother who had the means to promote and use it. In time he had a daughter who acquired the same name as the girl who had fished the original mask out of the pool. When she came of age she married a young man from Sumas, and brought a copy of the mask with her when she went home with him.<sup>24</sup> This woman had two daughters, one of whom married a Chilliwack man, and brought a new copy with of the mask with her when she moved in with him.<sup>25</sup> From Chilliwack the mask was copied by two men from Musqueam, and from there the mask diffused into the larger Georgia Strait region.<sup>26</sup> There are other versions of this story that involve the mask first going to Hope, and then diffusing down the Fraser.<sup>27</sup> As well, other villages claim to be the origin of the Sxw'ó:wey, including the Musqueam, Comox, Cowichan, Saanich and others.<sup>28</sup> Although no definitive answer of where the mask and songs originated from can probably ever be found, there is a good deal of evidence to support an origin at Lhileltalets.<sup>29</sup>

There is some debate over what the disease (q'um) mentioned in the narrative is. The early ethnographies suggest leprosy, while the descriptions of the disease and generational backtracking place the origin within the 1782 smallpox epidemic.<sup>30</sup> Mohs, using archaeological and genealogical material argues that the Sxw'ó:wey originated

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<sup>23</sup> Marion Smith "field notes," MS 268:5:5:43.

<sup>24</sup> Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians*, 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 123

<sup>29</sup> Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Plate 3" in *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. ed. Keith Carlson Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., and Smith, MS 268:5:5:40.

around 1680, which puts it out of the timeframe for smallpox.<sup>31</sup> This is somewhat problematical as the root of the word Sxw'ó:wey means “many people died at once,” which supports the 1782 smallpox origin.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of the time of origin, the Sxw'ó:wey legend helps re-enforce the spiritual significance of Lhileltalets, and its surrounding area.

Despite the debate over when the Sxw'ó:wey originated, it can be safely said that the smallpox epidemic of 1782, was probably Lhileltalets' introduction to Europeans, even if they didn't see any face to face. The first instance of that would have happened 26 years later with the arrival of Simon Fraser. Fraser was traveling down the river that now bears his name from Fort George to see if he could find a navigable route to the ocean. On June 28th 1808, he spent the night in the vicinity of Lady Franklin Rock and the village of Xehálh.<sup>33</sup> The next morning, the 29th, he set out and passed Xehálh around 10 a.m. His journal then remarks that, “at 2 p.m. came to a camp on an Island containing about 125 souls. Here we had plenty of Salmon, oil, roots, and raspberries. The Natives amused us with dancing. Lost a couple of hours-.”<sup>34</sup> Although not positively identified as such, there is ample reason to suggest that this Island was Lhileltalets. Due to the time frame that Fraser gives, and distance that needed to be traveled, the island can only be Lhileltalets or Greenwood. The site of the longhouses on Lhileltalets was in a prominent location, versus the village on Greenwood that was located at the back of the island. Also as has been already stated, Lhileltalets was the best place to catch Spring Salmon, which were running

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<sup>31</sup> Mohs, *Spiritual Sites, Ethnic Significance*, 103-4.

<sup>32</sup> Keith Carlson ed. *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997, 38.

<sup>33</sup> W. Kaye Lamb ed. *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser 1806-1808* Toronto: Pioneer Books 1960, 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

when Fraser was descending the river. This is reflected in his statement that they were fed “plenty” of Salmon, along with oil and other foods. As has been established in the Sxw’ó:wey narrative, those who lived on Lhileltalets were well off and could have provided Fraser with such luxuries. There is also a strong possibility that the “singing and dancing” that “amused” Fraser and his companions may have been the Sxw’ó:wey. The visit of Fraser, who to the Sto:lo at that time may have been associated with Xexá:ls, certainly would have been a big enough occasion to warrant a Sxw’ó:wey performance.<sup>35</sup> This is especially true, if the approximate origin of the Sxw’ó:wey was 1780, then Fraser’s visit could have easily been in the lifetime of the original recipient. There is also Fraser’s comment from the night before that while at Xehálh that “four men went off in canoes to inform the people below of our visit and intentions”.<sup>36</sup> These men could have been going to, or at least passed by Lhileltalets, giving the community time to prepare the meal and dance for the visit of Fraser.

Fraser’s visit was the beginning of an expansion into Sto:lo territory by the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1827 Fort Langley was opened, followed some time later by Fort Hope. These establishments allowed the community at Lhileltalets to expand already established trade patterns, without causing any major disruptions in the community’s lifestyle or cultural practices.<sup>37</sup> Those disruptions would follow the invasion of gold seekers in 1858.

The invasion of mostly Californian gold seekers in 1858, was probably the greatest challenge to the community at Lhileltalets since the Kwakwaka’wakw had massacred the village. There is considerable evidence that first nations in the Fraser canyon were digging

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>37</sup> Carlson, *You are asked to Witness*, 51.

gold out of the sand bars prior to the outbreak of the rush.<sup>38</sup> The influx of over 30,000 miners into the territory of Lhileltalets and the surrounding Sto:lo villages was a major threat not only to the gold resource that the Sto:lo had been previously enjoying, but also to the salmon harvest, as placer mines took up fishing locations and ditch companies diverted streams.<sup>39</sup>

The tenuous position of the early mining arrivals was made clear at Hill's Bar, where the miners could not move the First Nations miners from the bar due to the fact that they could call up 500 of their number (possibly including members from the community at Lhileltalets) "in 5 minuets time".<sup>40</sup> When James Douglas made his first trip to the Fraser gold fields he arrived at Hill's Bar just in time to stop a group of well armed Sto:lo from "mak[ing] a clean sweep of the whole body of miners assembled there".<sup>41</sup> There is no doubt then that First Nations along the Fraser, including Lhileltalets, maintained their sovereignty into the early stages of the gold rush. Indeed some Sto:lo saw the miners as economic opportunities, hiring themselves as expert pilots of the Fraser, and charging tolls, or as the miners called it "blackmail," when foreigners were moving through their territory.<sup>42</sup>

Fort Hope was seen as the center of the gold rush, and witnessed a three pronged advance of miners into the surrounding region. The majority of the miners came by boat via Victoria, and then on to the Fraser. There were also the overland routes through the

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Marshall, *Claiming the Land: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to British Columbia*. Ph.D Dissertation, UBC, 2000. 79, 88.

<sup>39</sup> One company, the Santa Clara & American Bar Water Co. operated sluice ditches at 5 locations between Hope and Yale (American Bar Creek, Creek at head of American Bar, Douglas Creek, Lake at back of Puget Sound Bar, and Creek at Ft. Hope west side). 1859 B.C. Colony Lands and Works Dept. Ditch Co.'s. GR-1770. B.C. Archives. See also Marshall, *Claiming the Land*, 206.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall, *Claiming the Land*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 85, 87.

Columbia, Okanogan, and Thompson systems, and an attempt at a trail from Whatcom in Washington State.<sup>43</sup> All three routes were extremely arduous to travel without the threat of Native violence that made things even more difficult for the incoming American miners. Some miners after trekking into the gold fields arrived with “neither provisions or blankets, and their clothing all torn to shreds”.<sup>44</sup> Scenes like that led to the Sto:lo giving the name of Xwelítem to the white intruders; it means “starving,” which was the condition of most of the miners by the time they reached the gold fields.<sup>45</sup>

Despite their poor condition on arrival, as more and more miners reached the Fraser the balance of power began to shift away from First Nations towards the Californian population. The British presence in the gold fields was minimal other than at the mouth of the Fraser, and the common consensus was that the British “did not amount to anything”.<sup>46</sup> The incoming Californian population had extremely genocidal views of Native peoples. Between the discovery of gold in California in 1848 and 1870 it is estimated that 50,000 California Indians died of indirect and direct hostility towards them.<sup>47</sup> Outside of any governing body the miners regulated themselves under the idea of “popular sovereignty,” which is the idea that a person is the basis for any and all governance, and is in a sense a complicated name for mob rule.<sup>48</sup> This was the same mentality that gave legitimacy to the numerous militias who traveled to the gold fields under the direction of elected officers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 102, 113-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>45</sup> Carlson, *A Sto:lo Coast Historical Atlas*, 85.

<sup>46</sup> Marshall, *Claiming the Land*, 141.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 202

The majority of the miners who came to the Fraser in search of gold were veterans of the 'Indian wars' of the American west. A typical statement from a miner about his time fighting against Indians would be similar to this statement made by Billy Ballou, recalling his time in Idaho: "We had hand grenades, & one thing and another. . . We killed everything that looked like an Indian, dog, or anything else; young ones, by George-- shot them all. Col. Moore said 'kill them all, little as well as big; knits make lice'".<sup>50</sup> With events like the one described happening North and South of the 49 parallel, it is not surprising that native resistance erupted against the invaders.

The Sto:lo were the first to suffer violence at the hands of the incoming miners. Early in the rush on May 28th, a San Francisco reporter in the gold fields noted that a miner had shot a Fraser River Indian "for not offering to use his canoe at what he considered a fair rate of exchange".<sup>51</sup> The reporter warned that "one or two such acts of brutality. . . will raise such a burning hatred and spirit of revenge in the breast of the Indians, as will cause indiscriminate massacre of hundreds of innocent whites."<sup>52</sup> The *San Francisco Bulletin* warned outward goldseekers about the Sto:lo noting "powerful tribes of Indians own that country and will be jealous of its despoliation".<sup>53</sup> The growing threat and actual violence from the miners forced first nations to ignore traditional boundaries and unite against a common foe. In the early summer of 1858, there was a massive meeting at Spuzzum between the Sto:lo and Nlaka'pamux "evidently for no friendly purpose," that included over 2000 First Nations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 214.

Soon after the Canyon erupted into violence. The Nlaka'pamux began killing and forcing the white miners out of their claims around the Thompson. Soon headless bodies of miners were seen floating down the river past Yale.<sup>55</sup> This violence was in turn reciprocated by a scorched earth policy by the miners, as Ovid Allard the Chief Trader at Fort Yale noted, “the irregular troops started for vengeance, in military formation, the stars and stripes at their head”.<sup>56</sup> The specter of fighting a war with first nations on their own territory was not a welcome idea to a number of miners, some were “frightened to death,” and another remarked “I do not think it much an honor to be shot by an Indian, but if stern necessity says so I am ready”.<sup>57</sup> The nature of the Fraser, and its currents meant that most of the dead (in most cases headless) bodies of miners were pulled out of the river at Union Bar, just North of Lhileltalets.<sup>58</sup> Such events caused the mining population around Fort Yale and Hope to react against the local Native populations. Once hostilities broke out the Native village at Yale was disarmed at gunpoint, and the HBC posts at those two locations were forcefully stripped of all their arms and ammunition.<sup>59</sup> It is easy to assume that similar scenes would have been carried out up and down the Fraser between Hope and Yale, where the miners were grouping for mutual protection. By October when James Douglas made his second trip to the gold fields, he had to meet with the Native population from the surrounding area of Fort Hope, who were “much incensed against the miners”.<sup>60</sup> Although the majority of the violence between miners and First Nations

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 239.

occurred in the region above Yale, Lhileltalets and other communities in the southern portions of the canyon also suffered from the violent and genocidal attitude of the miners.

To address some of these grievances Douglas laid out “Anticipatory reserves of land for the benefit and support of the Indian races”.<sup>61</sup> Which were to “avoid checking at a future day the progress of White Colonists.”<sup>62</sup> The reserves were only formed after the land had been checked for mineral wealth, when the colonial authorities were sure that there would be no immediate white (mining) use for the land, the reserve was laid out.<sup>63</sup> There is a devastating irony that the reserves in the Fraser, such as the one that includes Lhileltalets, were named after the Californian created landscape. Place names that had existed for thousands of years, were erased and supplanted by a population that resided in the territory (in most cases) for less than a year. As Dr. Marshall points out, “The erasure of Native sovereignty through use of California-like place-names not only disconnected Natives from the physical geography of the river, but perhaps, too, from the very soul of Native culture”.<sup>64</sup> The Fraser River gold rush and war was a pivotal point in the lives of the community at Lhileltalets. After resisting white encroachment into their territory and suffering untold hardships and violence at the hands of miners, the community was left with a completely reconstituted landscape; even though they had done their utmost to stop it.

After the tumultuous year of the gold rush, things settled back down to close to their pre-rush patterns. The *British Colonist* in Victoria reported on April 15th, 1861, that with the outbreak of the gold rush in the Caribou, there were only 50-60 white miners and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 286.



300 Chinese between Hope and Yale, with the majority at Prince Albert Flat, Union, and Texas Bar.<sup>65</sup> A few days later Lhileltalets would become the center of a terrible tragedy that would put it, and its community members, in the limelight of the British colonial public.

On the 18th of April 1861, the *British Colonist* reported the “Terrible Catastrophe!” of the “Explosion of Steamer ‘Fort Yale’”.<sup>66</sup> The steamer constructed in Victoria, and paid for by a consortium of merchants at Yale, had been in service less than 5 months, when, while passing Union Bar at 5pm on Sunday April 14, the boiler exploded. The first hand account of the explosion described it as:

The noise resembled along with the crash, a heavy blow upon a sharp-sounding Chinese gong. The cabin floor raised and then fell in, at the same time the hurricane roof fell upon us, cutting our heads more or less, and blocking up all means of escape forward of the dinner table. We quickly made for the windows and doors in the after-part of the cabin, and got on the roof of the hurricane house, and there beheld a scene that baffles all description, and such I trust I may never see again.

The boat, but a few seconds before nobly bucking against the swift current, was now a sinking mass of ruins from stem to stern -scarcely anything remaining in sight above water, but a small portion of her bow and the afterpart of her saloon, and those gradually disappearing below water. Firewood, trunks, barrels, boxes, and thousands of splinters from the wreck were floating on the water. Five or six human beings, their faces streaming with blood, and presenting an awful appearance, were struggling for life. Several jumped overboard, but on seeing the roof still afloat desired to be hauled on board again, and were got on by those of us still on the roof. . . all this time we were floating down the stream rapidly towards Hope.<sup>67</sup>

The reaction to the explosion at Lhileltalets was almost immediate. The narrative by H. Lee Alley who worked for Ballou’s (the Indian fighter) Express, continued, “about twenty minuets after the explosion several canoes, manned by Indians, were seen coming

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<sup>65</sup> *British Colonist*, April 15, 1861.

<sup>66</sup> *British Colonist*, April 18, 1861.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

from Union Bar and vicinity, and were soon along side, receiving the wounded and others who wished to go to shore”.<sup>68</sup> He then hired two Indians to take him by canoe to Yale to inform them of the disaster that had befallen their steamer, causing a “gloom over the whole town”.<sup>69</sup> In Alley’s opinion “the Indians deserve great credit for their prompt assistance in saving life and goods; and should receive a reward for their services”.<sup>70</sup> Four white colonists, and a uncounted number of First Nations, and Chinese were killed in the explosion of the ship, including one Native boy.<sup>71</sup>

The response of the community at Lhileltalets and surrounding area is interesting. The twenty minuets it took for the canoes to appear could be explained by a few things. The explosion happened just three years after the gold rush, so could the community be meeting to quickly debate weather they should help those that had caused them so much grief only a few years before? Possibly, but unlikely. There is the very good chance that the steamer was above the village (as technically Lhileltalets is South of the ‘real’ Union Bar), and it took that long for the steamer to float down river. An other likely possibility is that the response from Lhileltalets and it’s environs was more immediate than 20 minuets, but from the perspective of the survivors stranded on the roof a sinking steamer, waiting for help, no matter how long, would have seemed an eternity. Regardless, the response indicates an acceptance (but not submission) to the emerging colonial order, and in doing so endeared themselves to the colonial population, although it is not known if the community received the reward that Alley recommended.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

About the same time as the onset of colonialism on the B.C. mainland, a new and far more disruptive force than even the gold rush was moving into the region. In 1859, after being unable to stop the Indian wars South of the border; and unwilling to interfere in the one North of the 49th parallel, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate moved out of Oregon, and relocated to Esquimalt.<sup>72</sup> The nature of missionizing meant that neutrality for the Oblates in Native-Newcomer conflict was impossible, they were seen either as supporting the natives, and therefore resisting civilization, or seen as supporting Euro-American colonial interests against the natives. This is reflected that both American colonists, and First Nations in Oregon had independently attacked and burned Oblate missions in the later half of the 1850's.<sup>73</sup>

The Oblates, although originally intended to minister to France's poor population, were in the "new" world to promote Christianity; under the belief that the second coming of Jesus could not happen until all the world was converted to Christianity, by force if necessary.<sup>74</sup> To gain some independence in the affairs of their ministries, the Oblates established two central mission centers one on Okanogan Lake, and the other at New Westminster, with outposts at Port Douglas, Hope, and Yale.<sup>75</sup> The community at Lhileltalets would have had their first encounters with the Oblates in the winter of 1860, when Father Grandidier and Brother Janin passed that season building a mission house at Hope.<sup>76</sup> Their first project was to undo the influence of the gold rush and the influx of non-natives into the traditional territory of the Sto:lo. The Oblates felt that "unprincipled

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<sup>72</sup> Vincent J. McNally *The Lord's Distant Vineyard: A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 2000, 48.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>76</sup> Kay Cronin, *Cross in the Wilderness* Vancouver: Mitchell Press 1960, 82-3.

white-men had degraded First Nations to a state worse than barbarism”, and that only a strong (but short lived) temperance campaign could right the wrongs of the colonial influx.<sup>77</sup> The ultimate goal of the Oblates was a complete reduction of Sto:lo and other First Nation’s culture. The principal of such a system is that villages would be converted to western Christianity and civilization, if they could be isolated from their former culture; and the European vices such as drinking that accompanied European expansion. In an extremely paternalistic system Native “children” were supposed to learn what was best from their Oblate Fathers.<sup>78</sup> The “model reduction” was accomplished through Catholic schooling of Native children, and a village watchman system that would report any lapses in prayers or other Christian codes to a priest during absences from the community.<sup>79</sup>

The reduction system was expanded by Bishop Durieu, who in the 1860’s implemented what has been called the “Durieu System” with the Sechelt, and expanded it into the Sto:lo territory in the 1890’s.<sup>80</sup> The Durieu system added elements to the basic reduction model, such as a “Indian court” that kept problems within the community and out of the colonial legal system, and a “Eucharistic Chief” for each village who was supposed to be the leader of the community, while the second chief for each village (as designated by an Indian Agent) was merely a figurehead.<sup>81</sup> The idea was to create “a peaceful atmosphere favorable to the practice of religion and piety”.<sup>82</sup> The mission was to keep Native communities “away from the contagion of the whites who are a shame to

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<sup>77</sup> McNally, *The Lord’s Distant Vineyard*, 50-51.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 58-9.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Cronin, *Cross in the Wilderness*, 162.

civilization and bequeath to the Indians only their vices, never their virtues”.<sup>83</sup> This was part of the hypocrisy in the system, the Catholic Fathers were trying to make First Nations civilized in a western sense, while at the same time decrying the presence of it as distracting and unwanted.

Lhileltalets began to feel the pressure of missionizing forces early on. In 1861, the first baptism was performed on the island on a two month old named Jean.<sup>84</sup> In 1864 under the “guidance” of Brother Janin, it was reported that Natives in and around Hope and Yale, had begun to build “white” houses.<sup>85</sup> Shortly after Easter 1867, Bishop Durieu undertook a steam-boat voyage to Yale to visit the European congregation there, and to bless the newly constructed Native churches along the way.<sup>86</sup> While en route, the explosion of the “Fort Yale” was mentioned in passing, the author noting, “only Indians inhabit these solitary places”.<sup>87</sup> This can be seen as a passive approval of the location of the Mission, without a large white population, there would be less of a corrupting force on the Indians.

The blessing of the Church on Lhileltalets was a momentous occasion for the community. Early in the morning they knocked at the door of the mission house at Hope to wake up Bishop Durieu. After arriving on the island,

The blessing ceremony began immediately and lasted several hours. After noon, a second meeting took place during which several Indians opened their hearts and publicly renounced the old dancing and witchcraft. We left those children of the woods well pleased with what they had seen and heard. . . The Ywawes’ church was placed under the patronage of St.

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<sup>83</sup> Julie da Silva, *Missions of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate: English Translations of Sections Discussing the Indigenous People of Puget Sound, Georgia Strait, Johnson Strait, The Lower Fraser River and certain other locations in British Columbia in the 1860s through 1880s*. Sto:lo Nation Archives 2003, Vol 1(1862). 40.

<sup>84</sup> Oblate Baptismal/Marriage/Burial Records. Sto:lo Nation Archive.

<sup>85</sup> Da Silva, *Missions of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Vol 3 (1864), 49.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol 7 (1867), 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Raphael. However the Indians were unhappy because the interior of their church was not finished. Father Durieu consoled them by promising to help decorate it. Soon, men, women, and children were hard at work decorating the church. They brought cotton fabrics, blankets and mats; a prie-dieu covered with a red carpet was placed before the altar and two enormous seats were prepared. Choirboys in surplices carried the mitre and cross; the Indians were speechless and stared at us. I believe they will have a lasting memory of that ceremony. . . . What followed was extremely moving. The chief's wife, who was about forty years old still had her father and mother. She wanted them to be baptized. She came, stood before me, and spoke on their behalf. "You see how old they are! Both have always had a good heart, we have never seen them fight or quarrel with one another or with others. I hope you will take pity by baptizing them. They could die any day. I do not want them to fall into the fire below!" . . . Her old father, who was blind but could hear a little, acknowledged everything she said by nodding his head. The poor man could no longer walk, so the Indians carried him into the church. Seeing his ardent desire of the two elderly Indians, I had them questioned to be sure that they knew the essential truths of salvation and I offered a well-earned compliment to their daughter, who had acted so admirably on behalf of her parents. I felt truly happy to baptize and marry this twice blessed couple. . . . I had to leave those noble people for other villages awaited us. A volley of gunfire marked our departure.<sup>88</sup>

There is more going on in this last except then is present in the text. Whether they were aware of it or not, the Oblates were following a pattern of missionization that had been established with the conquest of Mexico in the 15th and 16th centuries. Missions there were broken down into three types: missions of occupation, penetration, and liaison.<sup>89</sup> The mission church at Lhileltalets was a classic mission of occupation, which followed military conquest (the gold rush) and consolidated its victories.<sup>90</sup> The choice of the island of Lhileltalets is also interesting for its spiritual aspect. As this paper has demonstrated the island was a important spiritual center even before the emergence of the Sxw'ó:wey, and even possibly more so afterwards. In Mexico, as in British Columbia, the missions there could be "likened to a military conquest and occupation, is also like it in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An essay on the Apostolate and Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain: 1523-1572*, Berkley: University of California Press 1966, 77.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 78.

the care with which the religious destroyed all strongholds of native paganism and installed themselves in afterward. Many foundations, especially in the early course of the first years, were established in pre-Hispanic religious centers.”<sup>91</sup> There is also the question of the apparent enthusiasm that the inhabitants of Lhileltalets had for the ceremony. The oral history record is full of examples of why there was such apparent enthusiasm. People were afraid.

The implementation of the Durieu system preceded an expanded evangelical push and system of social control in Sto:lo communities. The Oblate records from the church at Lhileltalets demonstrate this. The years between 1888 and 1899 have more baptisms and other events at the church than at any time before or after.<sup>92</sup> When asked why people went along with the Durieu system Susan Peters and Amelia Douglas in 1977 responded that it was because “people were afraid. . . the [Eucharistic] Chief, Captain, and Watchmen took part in this against their people. They just did it. . . they controlled the people.”<sup>93</sup> Susan Peters gave one such example of why the people feared the church so much. Once while a priest was visiting a church a young woman was brought before him who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock. For her “sin” she was beaten severely, so severely in fact that she suffered a miscarriage and died along with the fetus. Apparently this caused a large enough controversy that the church was forced to respond. The priest was reprimanded, but continued to administer to Sto:lo villages.<sup>94</sup>

Oral history also records that it was the priests that were responsible for the destruction of Sto:lo cultural material. According to numerous informants, totem poles,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 78-9.

<sup>92</sup> Oblate Baptismal/Marriage/Burial Records. Sto:lo Nation Archive.

<sup>93</sup> Ruben Ware and Albert Phillips, *Stalo History Fieldnotes*, November 4, 1977.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

house poles, masks (including Sxw'ó:wey), and regalia were all rounded up and burnt at each village.<sup>95</sup> Oliver Wells even recorded that this is the end that the original Sxw'ó:wey mask met. Bob Joe told him, "I never saw the original mask. They had one around here, they say. But when the Catholic religion came in, they forbid the Indians to use that or show it. Well the priest cameup (sic), they had a hole in the ground, and they hid that. They buried it. Well, as time went on the old priest got ahold of that mask."<sup>96</sup> The destruction of a mask or regalia could be extremely devastating for the owner. Susan Peters noted that at the burning of the regalia of one old man. As the regalia burned he began to shake all over, first his hands and then slowly the rest of his body. He shook all over as his things burned and then died shortly after.<sup>97</sup> Marion Smith recorded the resentment still present in the Sto:lo community over events such as this. "That was due to the Catholic priest who told them Indians the medicine men were devils and the Indians believed him. There used to be many old people but now there are few. It is as if the Catholic priest just took a knife and killed them all."<sup>98</sup> There is little need to say that the Catholic Church played the largest part in the cultural destruction of the Sto:lo and Lhileltalets.

The next transformative moment for the community at Lhileltalets was the reserve creation process, that in a legalistic sense finally alienated the community from their traditional ownership of the land. The reserve creation notes regarding the Aywawwis or Union Bar reserve are extremely sparse. Sproat simply gives a rough geographic outline,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Oliver Wells *Fieldnotes*, 321. Sto:lo Nation Archive.

<sup>97</sup> Ruben Ware and Albert Phillips, *Stalo History Fieldnotes*, November 4, 1977.

<sup>98</sup> Marion Smith, *Fieldnotes* 268:2 No. 20.



and notes that the reserve should not amount to more than 160 acres.<sup>99</sup> The little that was written in regards to Lhileltalets and Iwówes can be explained by Sproat's comment (in regards to First Nations around Hope) that "this place has always been considered a reserve by the white people".<sup>100</sup> Beginning with the gold rush the community at Lhileltalets and Iwówes had existed in a clearly defined native space as far as the colonial population was concerned. Turning an already defined space into a reserve was simpler than in other regions of the province where such definitions had not been made.

The final major event in the history of Lhileltalets was the Fraser River flood of 1894. The flood of 1894 was the highest level of water ever measured in the Fraser since the onset of settlement. Despite normally being well above the level of the Fraser, the village site is less than the 25.75 feet above normal that the Fraser reached.<sup>101</sup> A heavy snow pack and a heat wave in late May spurred a rapid melt that caused flooding all over the Fraser Valley and upriver points.<sup>102</sup> As early as May 29th, there were reports that upriver from Chilliwack "the desolation everywhere is heart-rendering".<sup>103</sup> Other Fraser River islands that are normally well above the water line suffered horribly, such as Nicomen Island.<sup>104</sup> Increasing the likelihood that Lhileltalets was also flooded. This can be confirmed as papers of the day noted that reserves, because of their positions in most cases along the river were the worst hit.<sup>105</sup> Chief Peter Ayessick of Hope, taken as an indicative example of all the First Nations in the area, complained that most of his gardens

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<sup>99</sup> Federal Minuets of Decision, Correspondence & Sketches. Vol. 18, 205-6. Copy held by Lands Registry, Department of Indian Affairs, Vancouver Regional Office. Copy Sto:lo Nation Archives.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Vol. 18, 294.

<sup>101</sup> K. Jane Watt, *High Water: Living with the Fraser Floods*, Chilliwack: Dairy Historical Society of B.C. 2006, 32.

<sup>102</sup> *Chilliwack Progress* May 30th, 1894.

<sup>103</sup> Watt, *High Water*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 54.

had been washed away, and that what remained was covered in two to three feet of mud.<sup>106</sup>

The Flood of 1894, was the reason for the abandonment of Lhileltalets. The height and pace of the water was “inundating the land and sweeping away everything in its course with relentless force”.<sup>107</sup> The destruction on Lhileltalets was documented by Mohs who noted, “both villages suffered considerable damage to structures and crops. Part of Lhileltalets washed away including some of the former pit houses. Damage to the community burial ground also was extensive and it was immediately moved to higher ground at Iwówes.”<sup>108</sup> This is further collaborated by The Department of Indian Affairs Annual report for 1894, in which Frank Devlin the Indian Agent states: “I regret to say that on most of these reserves all the crops planted by the Indians last spring were entirely destroyed by the floods, many of their farming implements and house-hold effects having been washed away and lost.”<sup>109</sup> Mohs places the year of abandonment in 1898, but as there was no significant flood that year, the four year discrepancy could have easily been a mistake by his informant.

Why then was this the moment that Lhileltalets was abandoned? After being in existence for so long, and surviving so many recent hardships, such as the disease, the gold rush and missionization, what was so significant about the flood to cause the complete abandonment of the island, save for the Catholic church. The reason may have been spiritual. The settlers certainly viewed the flood through a religious lens, as the article in the *Chilliwack Progress* entitled “The Flood of '94 as seen from the Pulpit”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> *Chilliwack Progress* May 30th, 1894.

<sup>108</sup> Mohs, *Spiritual Sites, Ethnic Significance*, 100.

<sup>109</sup> DOMINION OF CANADA ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30th JUNE 1894., 185.

demonstrates. The article links the flood with the Biblical story of Job, and reminds settlers that the floodwaters are the result of “providential action”.<sup>110</sup> It has been well established that the Sto:lo did not make firm distinctions between the spiritual and material realms. All of the other challenges that the community had faced had been the result of human actions, and could be understood and contextualized as such. The complete destruction of their gardens and “white” homes and possessions may have been interpreted as a rejection by the spiritual forces on the island of the new order of things. This may have been the first and only time the island had been flooded, and that may have been enough of a signal to the community members that things were not right. It may also have been a convenient excuse to move out of the controlling shadow of the church, and at least isolate the structure from the continuing community at Iwówes. The church continued as the solitary structure on the island until 1925, when it was abandoned.<sup>111</sup> It has since collapsed and is decomposing rapidly amongst the forest that has reclaimed the island.

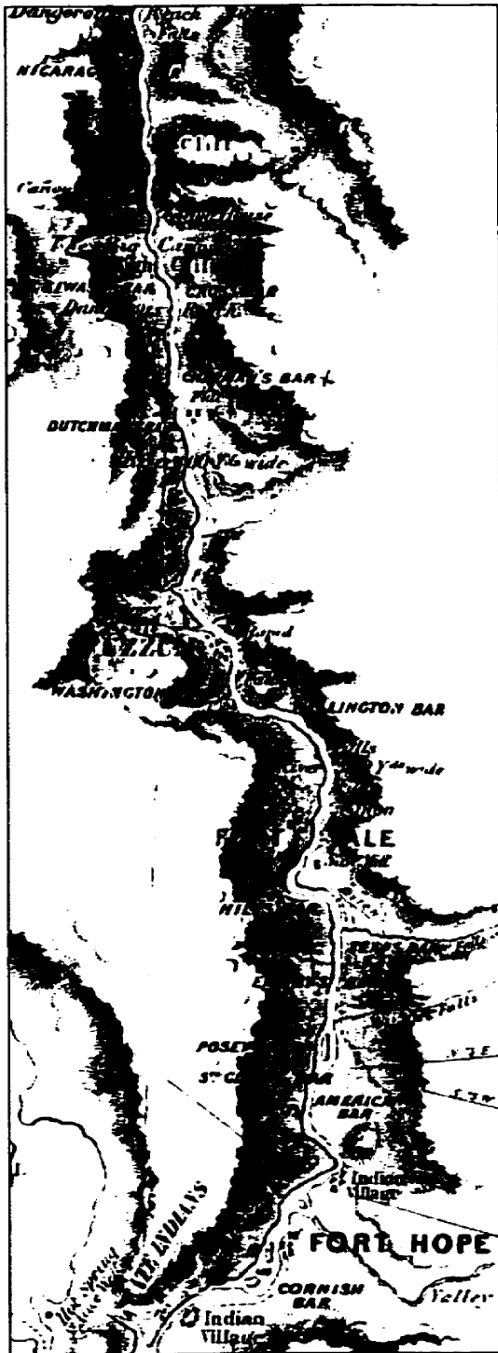
No matter the reasons for abandonment, Lhileltalets exists now, as it always has, as a geographic place. The human forces that shaped it for uncountable years are slowly being scoured away by the forces of nature, and the evolution of memory. This paper has attempted to show, despite the human actions on and around the island, Lhileltalets always has been, and will always remain, a potent spiritual location.

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<sup>110</sup> *Chilliwack Progress* June 6th, 1894.

<sup>111</sup> Personal Interview with Jack Lawrence, Hope B.C. June 2007. Confirmed by Oblate records that cease at Iwówes on 8/30/1925.

Appendix of Visual Material:



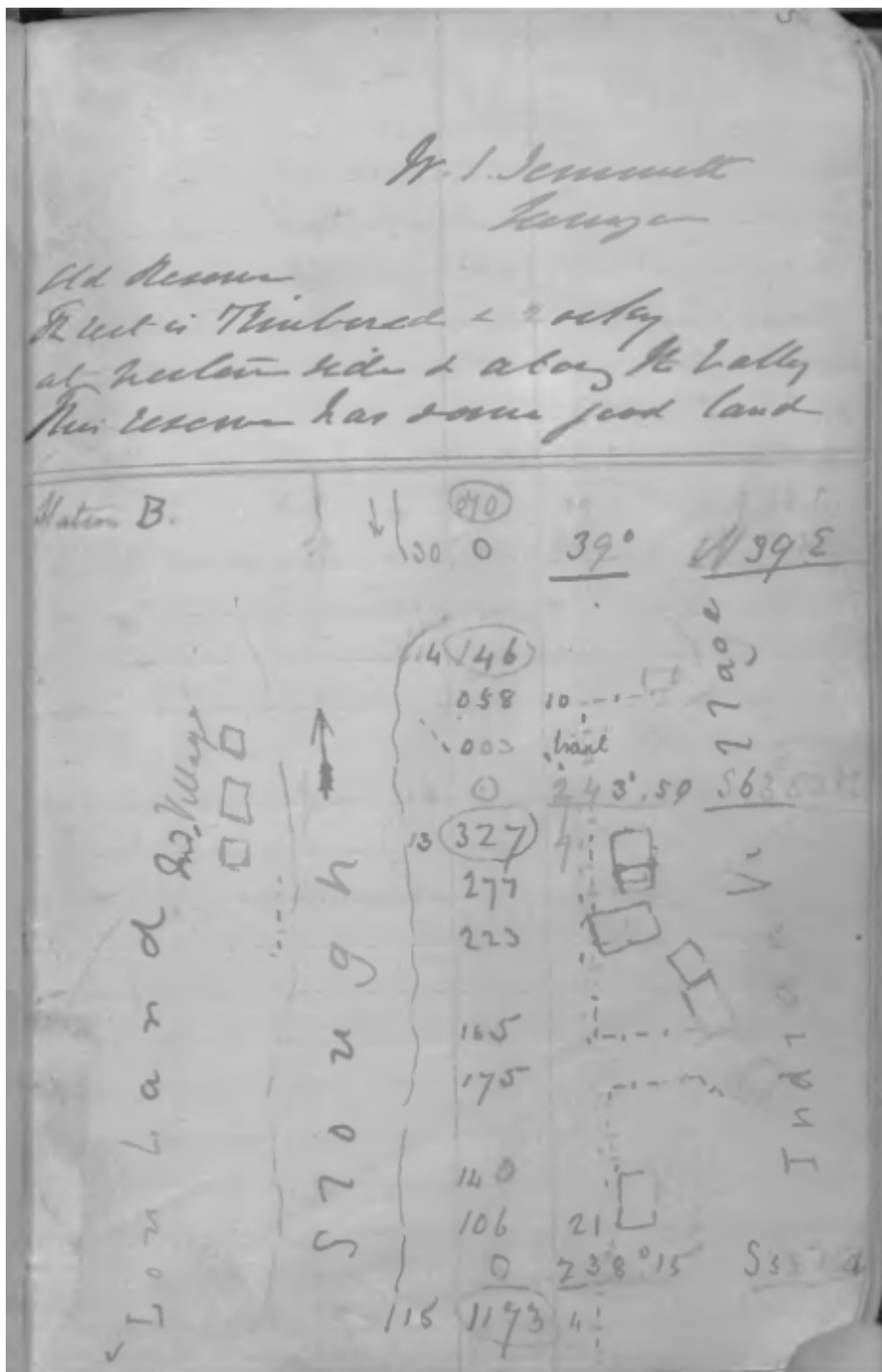
**Figure 22.** "Sketch of Part of British Columbia" by Lieutenant R.C. Mayne, R.N. of HMS *Plumper*. War Office 1859. Surveyor-General's Office. Victoria.

Iwówes is clearly defined as a native space (the "Indian Village" just North of Hope) amongst the gold rush bars from Hope to Yale. Image from Marshall, *Claiming the Land*, 122.

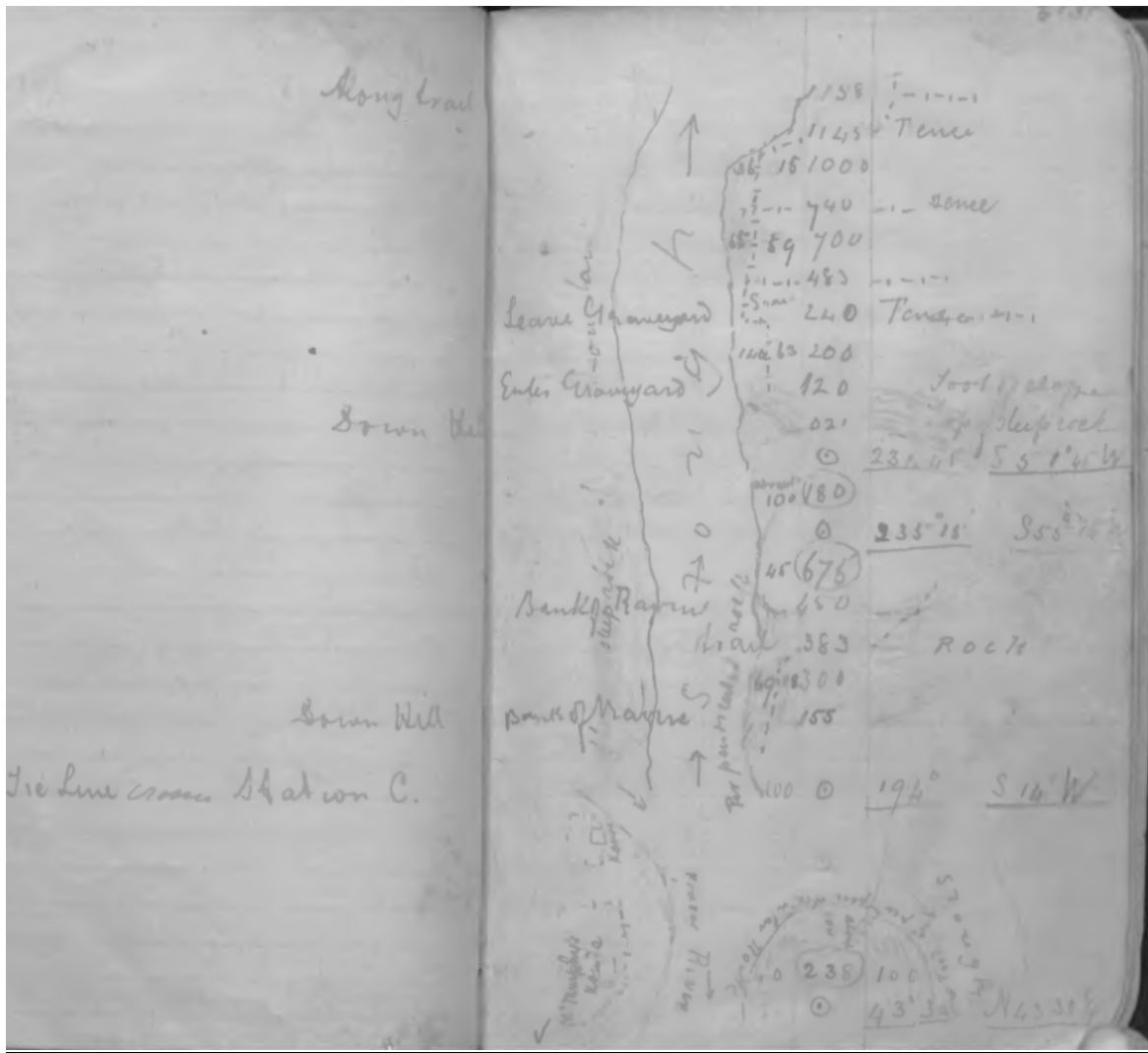


**Figure 36.** Fort Hope & District. From "Copy of Reconnaissance Sketch of the Fraser River between Fort Hope and Fort Yale" by R.C. Mayne, Commander, Royal Navy, September 1858. Surveyor-General's Vault, Victoria, B.C.

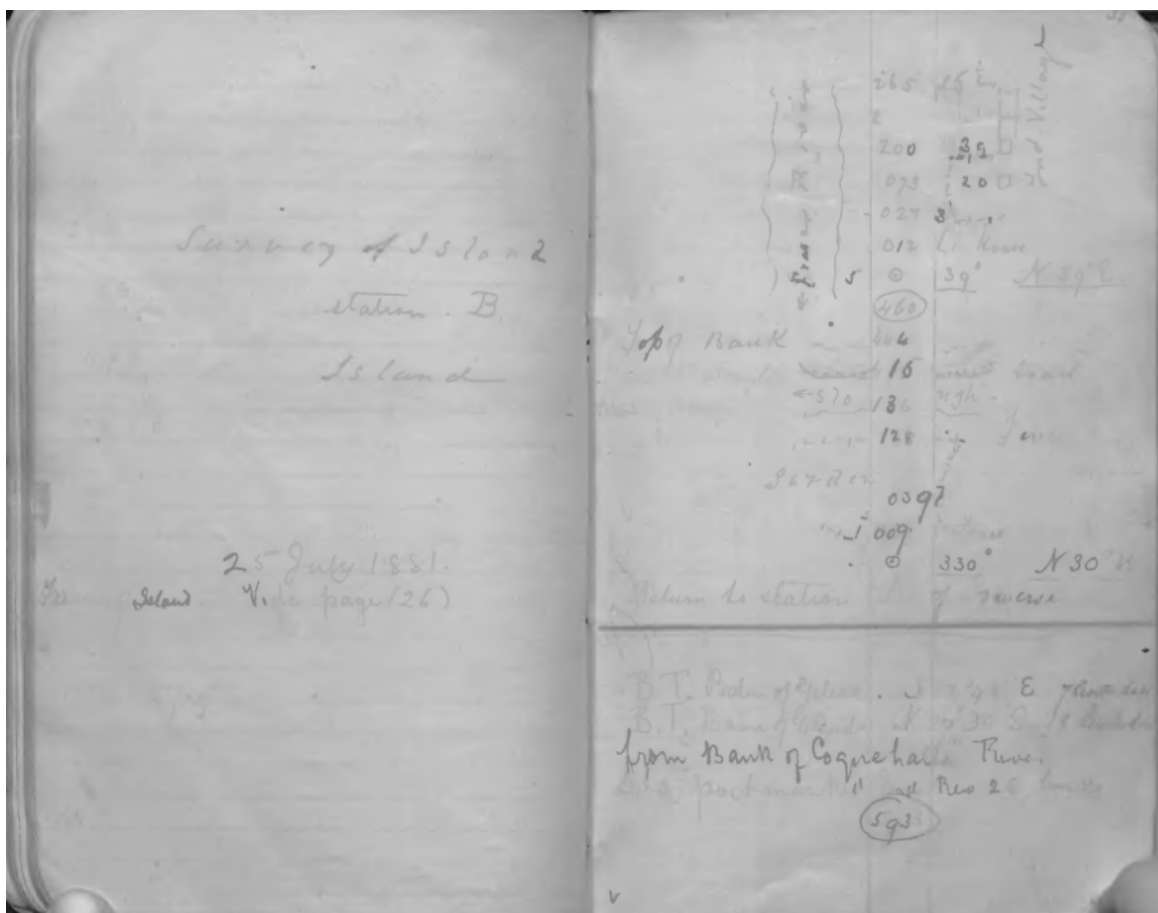
Iwówes again clearly defined the gold context. Image from Marshall, *Claiming the Land*, 220.



page 30 from Jemmet's 1881 notebook showing Lhiletalets village, note the clusters of western style houses.



Another view of the village with the outlines of the gardens marked out.



Jemmet's 1881 map of Lhileltalets. I am unsure if the houses pictured are the ones along the channel or others along the main part of the Fraser.





Jack Lawrence and brother Charles "Shorty" Lawrence on the steeple of the Lhileltalets church Oct. 28th, 1936.



View of Kawkawa lake from bluffs.



The only land access to the reserve.





The sacred pool between Lhileltalets and the shore at high water.



The channel leading into the sacred pool.



The channel looking upstream.

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