

The Activity of Kinship on Seabird Island and Shxwohamil: A History of Two Roman Catholic Sto:lo Churches

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Ethnohistory Field School , 2009

Introduction

The Catholic churches at Seabird Island and Shxwohamil currently stand in disrepair; the foundation of the Immaculate Conception Church at Seabird Island is crumbling while St. Michael's church of Shxwohamil sustains a broken window and no longer in use. However, these churches on reserve land in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia are all but forgotten by the people who live there and play an important role in the history of their reserve. The churches are remembered by community members as a symbol of kinship and community. The histories of both churches show people, not only from their respective reserves but also from neighbouring ones, volunteering their time and money for the buildings. The community of Seabird Island and Shxwohamil enact kinship through the building/moving of their Roman Catholic Churches; kinship is enacted politically as a means of decolonization. Oral testimonies from various knowledgeable community members, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, religious and non-religious, will be examined. As well, Daniel Heath Justice's theory of kinship and community will be applied to the history of the churches. Regarding the histories of Seabird Island and Shxwohamil along-side the more general history of Roman Catholic Churches in British Columbia served to fill out some gaps that may have been missing from the smaller narratives. This paper endeavours to illustrate the history of the two churches spanning over a

hundred years to elucidate how a community expands Aboriginal kinship ties while still navigating a colonial structure.

“No ‘community’ in the sense of the word...”

Before delving into the history of the two churches, a clarification and explanation of the word “community” must be explored. Oxford English Dictionary defines community first very broadly as “a body of people or things viewed collectively.”¹ Subsequent definitions of the term add more specifications such as “a group of people who share the same interests, pursuits, or occupation” and “a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity.”² However, colonial powers have always been more eager to apply stricter definitions in regards to Aboriginal communities, for instance the blood quantum required to qualify as a Status or non-Status Indians. For colonial powers, the absolutes of black and white or clear boundaries are easier to navigate. Daniel Heath Justice, literary scholar and member of the Cherokee Nation, comments that the binaries of colonialism are beneficial only to the colonial power: “Empires can’t survive by acknowledging complexity, so whatever complications they can’t destroy or ignore are, if possible, commodified, co-opted, and turned back against themselves.”³ The tribal lines or community boundaries are often

¹ Oxford English Dictionary.

² Ibid.

³ Daniel Heath Justice, “‘Go Away Water!’ Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Process,” in *Reasoning Together*, edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 155.

blurred in Sto:lo history, therefore, it will be beneficial to examine a short history of community as it applies to Shxwohamil and Seabird Island.

The Aboriginal people living on the reserves at Shxwohamil and Seabird Island constitute respective communities with their own band offices. However, many ceremonies and events are shared by both communities. The First Salmon Ceremony in May 2009 at Seabird Island, for example, was attended by many members of the Shxwohamil reserve. Both communities have migration stories denoting how they came to live on that piece of land, thus differentiating themselves from the larger community of Sto:lo. Wilson Duff, an anthropologist, listed several different tribes within the Sto:lo peoples. The Teit held land from Seabird Island to Popkum and to the north near Spuzzum.⁴ Both Hilary Blair and Keith Carlson problematize Duff's assertions that the Teit tribe had no internal unity due to scattered settlements; they also problematize Duff's belief that the Teit did not have beliefs of descent from mythical ancestors as other Sto:lo peoples did.⁵ Carlson emphasizes many factors that contribute to the different "expressions" of Sto:lo identity such as migrations and class differentiations.⁶ Blair argues that the seven Teit tribes settled on Seabird Island demonstrate internal unity as a community in order to keep the rights their land.⁷ This paper, as well, will argue that the

⁴ Hilary Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources, and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve," MA thesis, (Simon Fraser University, 1999), 15.

⁵ Hilary Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources, and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve," MA thesis, (Simon Fraser University, 1999), 16. and Keith Thor Carlson, "The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: A Study of History and Aboriginal Collective Identity," PhD diss., (University of British Columbia, 2003), 182.

⁶ Keith Thor Carlson, "The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: A Study of History and Aboriginal Collective Identity," PhD diss., (University of British Columbia, 2003), 190.

⁷ Hilary Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources, and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve," MA thesis, (Simon Fraser University, 1999), 16.

community effort of building/moving their Catholic Church was an action of political motivation to promote kinship ties in the face of colonialism.

The population at Seabird Island was achieved from migrating Aboriginal groups. Seabird Island was found by a government agent, who deemed the land suitable for cultivation for the Yale Indians excluding Cheam.⁸ The site had not been occupied by Aboriginals in approximately 50 years.⁹ The Reserve Commissioner Gilbert M. Sprout designated the land as reserve in 1879, stating “if the Indians have not in 6 years from 13 June 1879 sufficiently used this land in the opinion of the Government of Canada the unused portion is to cease to be Indian land.”¹⁰ Despite inter-village links, the seven Teit bands functioned as a community on Seabird Island. However, some critics have gone as far as stating that there is no community on Seabird Island. Eleanor B. Leacock examines the physical and geographic location of Seabird Island and determines that it is isolated from other Aboriginal groups, therefore making it conducive to neighbourliness. Instead, she determines that the inhabitants at Seabird Island that neighbourliness is absent as the people have ties all up the Fraser River.¹¹ Leacock states,

On Seabird Reserve local contiguity over several generations has not furthered the conversion of formerly like interests into common interests, the process by which community is formed. Seabird has no

⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, “The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: A Study of History and Aboriginal Collective Identity,” PhD diss., (University of British Columbia, 2003), 188.

⁹ Ibid. Carlson notes that the previous Aboriginal settlement had abandoned that piece of land sometime between 1820-1845 due to Lilloet raids.

¹⁰ Gilbert M. Sprout qtd. in Blair, H. “Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources, and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve,” MA thesis, (Simon Fraser University, 1999) 1.

¹¹ Eleanor B Leacock, “The Seabird Community,” in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, edited by Marian W. Smith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949) 187.

'community' in this sense of the word. The people living near each other do not form a single unit, despite the pressure of outside forces in this direction.¹²

For Leacock, it is the absence of like interests which causes a lack of community at Seabird Island, not the different cultural groups of Aboriginal peoples who made up the reserve:

While aware of their different identities, the groups lack the opposition which would prevent the formation of a community. They are closely interrelated through marriage, since the Salish are exogamous, and the ties thus created are as important as the linguistic and cultural ties.¹³

Of course, the level of community is judged by European standards as Leacock looks for suburban values such as children "play[ing] with the children 'next-door'."¹⁴ The status of Seabird Island's "community" is complicated by geography, migrating groups, and perceived uncommon interests. In the case of Seabird Island then, does the term "community" solely refer to a common residing location?

Likewise, the reserve of Shxwohamil, or as it used to be called, Ohamil, was occupied by a migrating group of people from Alamex, known today as Agassiz. Alamex was abandoned in 1827.¹⁵ One account given describes one group's house post being moved while the other group kept moving it back. The peoples decided to split up instead of engaging in violence. Some of the peoples relocated to Shxwohamil, some moved to Cheam.¹⁶ Another version gives

¹² Ibid., 194.

¹³ Ibid., 192.

¹⁴ Ibid., 193.

¹⁵ Keith Thor Carlson, "The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: A Study of History and Aboriginal Collective Identity," PhD diss., (University of British Columbia, 2003), 167.

¹⁶ Ibid., 165.

more detail to the story, explaining that a very violent boy was the reason for the split from Alamex. Carlson suggests, “the abandonment, however, was not the result of disease of natural disaster, but the concerted efforts of people seeking to both socially and physically distance themselves from a psychopathic member of their community.”¹⁷ In this case, it appears that upon moving to Shxwohamil, the migrants transferred their identities to their new regions.¹⁸ As well, the community of Shxwohamil has stories that tell their ancestors are the sturgeon, which contradicts Duff’s statement about the Teit having no beliefs about mythical ancestors. Shxwohamil, like Seabird Island, is comprised of different groups of people who have come together in the same community. However, perhaps different from Seabird Island, for the residents of Shxwohamil people’s collective identity, “what matters is not so much the location of Ohamil, but that their ancestor was Sturgeon.”¹⁹

Justice offers an alternative, more encompassing, view of community and what it means to be a member of a community. He negates the view that community is static and exists outside of time. Employed instead, is a more accurate term Jace Weaver calls “communitism,” which is a combination of the words “community” and “activism,” emphasizing active participation.²⁰ Of “communitism,” Justice writes,

Community isn’t a stable or static group of people; rather, it’s an ever-adaptive state of being that requires its members to maintain it through their willingness to perform the necessary rituals – spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and

¹⁷ Ibid., 166-167.

¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹ Ibid., 171.

²⁰ Daniel Heath Justice, “‘Go Away Water!’ Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Process,” in *Reasoning Together*, edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 152.

familial – to keep the kinship network in balance with itself and the rest of creation. [...] A community – with all of its constituent members and social concerns, past and present – is alive, and the People are responsible for its survival through attention to their kinship rights and responsibilities and through their response to the continuity fuelled by the decolonization imperative.²¹

Emphasized in Justice's conception of community, is the necessity of an individual's participation. Justice dismisses the use of Eurowestern qualifications of race, such as blood quantum and phenotypes, which reflects the genocidal policies of the government.²² Instead of common interests or common tribal origins, Justice highlights the "willingness" of a community member as the key factor. This is not to say, of course, that common interests do not play a role in community bonding, however. But, common interests are susceptible to stagnation and are especially dangerous when evaluated by outsiders. Leacock, for example, when evaluating the community at Seabird Island, describes when the community was faced with losing its land. The land was possibly going to be reallocated to White farmers. Leacock states that "there is only one real farmer on the island" and the majority of Aboriginals just garden.²³ Instead of farming, the Aboriginals work on the Canadian Pacific Railroad, seasonal berry or hop pickers, or as loggers, which Leacock views as indifference at the potential loss of their land: "They mention the threatened loss of their reserve with some bitterness at the simple injustice of it, but they show none of the feeling of being wrested from their land which a European peasant

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 157.

²³ Eleanor B Leacock, "The Seabird Community," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, edited by Marian W. Smith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 192.

or farmer would.”²⁴ Leacock paints a picture of a static group of Aboriginals who must always farm, not change jobs and adapt, even if a railroad runs right through the reserve. As if by not all uniting with a sudden interest in farming makes them desire their land less or makes them less of a community. Under Justice’s definition of community, however, a willingness and responsibility to the community demonstrates “community.”

An important note to add, is the allowance for, and importance of, different definitions of community. Justice comments on the inevitability of generalizations when dealing with large blanket terms such as “community”:

Of course, broad notions like ‘community,’ ‘people,’ and ‘nation’ are tricky to work with. We can’t very well use them without immediately qualifying them: Each community is different; no community is monolithic and without dissent or even conflicting ideas about what exactly constitutes the group; the principles underlying tribal nationhood aren’t necessarily those that give rise to the nationalism of industrialized nation-states; and so on. Yet we can still talk about ideals as functional principles without erasing the specific contexts in which those principles operate; though members of a group might differ in their understandings of that community’s composition, they nonetheless work to articulate the

²⁴ Ibid.

shifty, unstable, but ultimately embodied notion of purposeful collectivity.²⁵

Therefore, every member of a community does not need to have the same definition of community because the view of a static community is dismantled, regardless. Many voices have taken contribute to a definition instead of one solitary definition. This definition of community and use of the term kinship is an attempt for Aboriginals to provide more accurate self-definitions.

“A verb rather than a noun...”

At the centre of Daniel Heath Justice’s article, is kinship. For Justice, in thinking about an ethical Aboriginal criticism, it is “quite fruitful to reflect on community and kinship—both in their broadly theoretical forms and in their context-specific manifestations—as interpretive concepts in [our] analysis.”²⁶ This paper is an attempt at an ethical Aboriginal criticism, which emphasizes kinship through a context-specific history. Kinship is important because it is more encompassing than race. Kinship ties often refute claims made by the government about relations or status. Justice states, “Kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that’s done more than something

²⁵ Daniel Heath Justice, “‘Go Away Water!’ Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Process,” in *Reasoning Together*, edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

that simply is.”²⁷ The active and participatory quality of kinship will be examined along-side the histories of the church at Seabird Island and at Shxwohamil.

“A great many little wooden churches...”

By the late 1850’s, missionaries were coming to British Columbia in large numbers.²⁸ Representing many of the religious thoughts from Europe, the missionaries came to spread the word of God. One of the largest missionary congregations of the Roman Catholic Church, Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), was established in 1826 and began its first foreign mission to Canada in 1841.²⁹ This new order of the Catholic Church quickly became the major Roman Catholic mission in British Columbia.³⁰ The Oblates expanded from Esquimalt in the 1860’s across British Columbia, where Roman Catholic influence climaxed in the lower Frasier Valley.³¹ Believing that the Aboriginal people were being negatively affected by the white settlers who came for the gold rush, the Oblates founded Saint Mary’s mission in 1861 which comprised of a church and school.³² Over the years, more buildings were added to admit more students. Most of the students who attended St. Mary’s over the century it was operational were Sto:lo.³³ The school contributed to the wide acceptance of Catholicism in the area. In fact, by 1903, 2481

²⁷ Ibid., 150.

²⁸ Robin Fisher, “Missions to the Indians of British Columbia,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 116.

²⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [database online], ed. Nicholas Carr (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 2009, accessed 30 June 2009); available from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/367557/Oblates-of-Mary-Immaculate>; internet.

³⁰ Robin Fisher, “Missions to the Indians of British Columbia,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 117.

³¹ Ibid., 119.

³² *Fraser River Heritage Park*, available from <http://www.heritagepark-mission.ca/stmary.html>; internet.

³³ Jodi R. Woods, “St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Boarding School,” in *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 68.

Aboriginals in Fraser River Valley were Catholic out of the surveyed 2728, as reported by the Department of Indian Affairs.³⁴ Out of the remaining few hundred, 153 were declared Methodist, 52 were Anglican, and 52 were “pagan.”³⁵ The popularity of Catholicism was especially popular in the Fraser Valley compared to the rest of the province. The Department of Indian Affairs survey in 1900 shows 11846 Catholic Aboriginals out of the 24696 surveyed.³⁶ The Catholic presence in the Fraser Valley and among the Sto:lo people was overwhelming.

As well as St. Mary’s mission, many smaller Catholic churches were built on reserve land. The churches were constructed wherever a group of Aboriginals were “sufficiently Christianized.”³⁷ The construction of churches generally occurred years after initial contact was made by a missionary, but as Warren Sommer notes, some churches were built sooner and some were even built before the first visit.³⁸ Of course, by waiting to ensure that the Aboriginal followers were truly faithful before building the church saved time and money that may have been wasted. On other occasions, the churches were built at a distance from the encampments to create “model villages.” Rev. Thomas Crosby denotes a split between communities upon the construction of a church, which he calls “Heathen Street” and “Christian Street.” “Christian Street” was “whitewashed” and clean; as Aboriginals were converted, they moved from

³⁴ Christie Shaw, “Missionary Reports and Sto:lo Narratives: The Legacy of Missionization and Contemporary Native Women’s Relationships to Christianity,” (Sto:lo Nation Archives, 1998), 12.

³⁵ Ibid. As Shaw notes, these numbers may not be representational of the actual religious/spiritual practices of the Aboriginal peoples. It is likely that several traditions could have been practiced together, or that the Aboriginal peoples simply told the surveyors what they wanted to hear to avoid further conflict.

³⁶ Robin Fisher, “Missions to the Indians of British Columbia,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 125.

³⁷ Warren Sommer, “Mission Church Architecture on the Industrial Frontier,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 12 .

³⁸ Ibid.

“Heathen Street” to “Christian Street.”³⁹ This paints a picture of schisms throughout communities which certainly occurred, however, for many communities the church became part of a shared identity. Reverend Herbert H. Gowen comments that many Aboriginals initiated the construction of a church on their reserve: “The Chilliwack Indians want a little ‘Church house’ of their own, and there was a great deal of talk as to where it should be built and about the cost. The Bishop promised on his next visit to look at the site they propose.”⁴⁰ The missionaries usually chose to build churches on the outskirts of the winter traditional encampments of the “heathen” villages to encourage Aboriginals to build houses encircling it.⁴¹

The majority of churches in British Columbia were built after 1890 when Aboriginals were allied with a certain sect; also after 1890 the Canadian government provided funds for education to denominations that built churches in Aboriginal villages.⁴² The churches were modeled after buildings in Europe and eastern Canada.⁴³ As Robin Fisher states, “the churches expressed the missionaries’ overall intent to replace that which was Indian with that which was European.”⁴⁴ The majority of Roman Catholic Churches in the province share the same simple floor plan which originated in the Middle Ages and includes a western tower, a nave, a

³⁹ Rev. Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), 50.

Perhaps even more interesting, and very telling of his bias, is his chapter title: “Heathen Street Vs. Christian Street.”

⁴⁰ Rev. Herbert Gowen, *Church Work in British Columbia* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1899), 31-32.

⁴¹ Warren Sommer, “Mission Church Architecture on the Industrial Frontier,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12 .

⁴³ *Ibid.*,14.

⁴⁴ Robin Fisher, “Missions to the Indians of British Columbia,” in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 123.

sanctuary, and a sacristy.⁴⁵ The wood for the construction of the churches was easily obtained, however sawmills could be located further away. The railway or steamboats transported goods and materials across the province.⁴⁶ Since the churches needed to adhere to prescribed liturgical traditions, the missionaries participated in the construction of the buildings either by giving instructions or by providing labour.⁴⁷ The participation of Aboriginal community in the building of the churches was substantial. An observer wrote in 1896,

A great many little wooden churches, sometimes as far as fifty miles distant from any other town, spring up in the missions. The Indians support their own churches now, and take great delight in building them. They have been known to take such an active interest in the erection of a chapel that the hammers were heard pounding the whole night through, while the dedication of a bell in the little steeple and its first deep-toned tolling as it rung out in the keen, still atmosphere inspired by the natives with a mad revelry particular to the race and never to be forgotten.⁴⁸

While the observer's description is romantic and idealistic, the keen Aboriginal participation and initiative in the construction of the churches is undeniable. However, how does the general view of missionaries and churches throughout British Columbia hold with individual accounts from the community? And, how is kinship employed in the building/moving of the churches?

⁴⁵ Warren Sommer, "Mission Church Architecture on the Industrial Frontier," in *Early Indian Village Churches*, compiled by John Veillette and Gary White (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

“They had to because our people would go to their bingo...”

Around 1900, the original Church of the Immaculate Conception at Seabird Island was built.⁴⁹ It was located closer to the Maria Slough than the current church.⁵⁰ Archie Charles of Seabird states that the old church was so old that “you couldn’t drive a nail through it, it was so old. Hard, dry. [...] It was real old because I think I’ve still got some nails, those square nails, like horse, like horse-shoe nails.”⁵¹ The old building had to be torn down due to rot in the foundation, which caused a sagging roof.⁵² It was demolished sometime after 1961, since it was used as a cookhouse while the community was building the new church according to Charles.⁵³ The old church was torn down by Mennonites, who came to Seabird Island but had nowhere to stay. Charles states, “we got them to tear the old church down and they used that for [...] their tents.”⁵⁴

The current Church of the Immaculate Conception was built between the years 1961 and 1962.⁵⁵ It was blessed by Archbishop Martin Johnson of Vancouver in 1963.⁵⁶ The construction of the church cost about 7000 dollars and the some of the money was raised by

⁴⁹ Leo Casey O.M.I. “History of Immaculate Conception Church, Seabird Island and Our Lady of Fatima Church, Chehalis Reserve,” 10 November 1982, 4.
Pictures of the old church can be seen in John Veillette and Gary White, *Early Indian Village Churches* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

See Appendix 1 for a map showing Seabird Island reserve and the location of the old church.

⁵¹ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁵² John Veillette and Gary White, *Early Indian Village Churches* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977).

⁵³ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Appendix 2 for a picture of the invitation.

bingo fundraising ran by the church women, such as Mrs. Henry Pettis.⁵⁷ When asked if members from other communities attended the bingo fundraisers, Charles answers with a laugh, “Yes. [...] They had to because our people would go to their bingo.”⁵⁸ As well, a parish bazaar contributed fifty six dollars.⁵⁹ The planning, fundraising, and building of the new church took four years.⁶⁰ The new church was modeled after St. Anthony’s Church, which received the Massey Award in 1955 for best church building of its size.⁶¹

The credit was given to the O.M.I priests for the construction of the church. Mary Charles said, “Father Clarke was responsible for raising the money, Father Alex Morris for building the church, and Father Philip Power for looking after the finishing touches.”⁶² Father Leo Casey notes that the actual construction of the church was done by community members.⁶³ David Charles, Archie Charles’ father, was in charge of the planning and construction and Arthur Joe Peters split the shakes.⁶⁴ One man owned a gravel pit and used his truck to clear the land.⁶⁵ Others helped mix cement, lay shingles, and other labour jobs. Mary Charles, Sue Charles, Jean McIntyre, and Tiny Pettis cooked lunch for all the workers.⁶⁶ Charles recalls a funny anecdote that the steeple was struck by lightning one night as they were finishing the church. The church

⁵⁷ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Leo Casey O.M.I. “History of Immaculate Conception Church, Seabird Island and Our Lady of Fatima Church, Chehalis Reserve,” 10 November 1982, 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Appendix 3 for pictures

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁶⁶ Leo Casey O.M.I. “History of Immaculate Conception Church, Seabird Island and Our Lady of Fatima Church, Chehalis Reserve,” 10 November 1982, 5.

was fine and Charles jokes that maybe they had built it backwards!⁶⁷ Father Leo Casey states that more than twenty volunteers from Seabird Island families helped.⁶⁸ However, Charles notes that people from other communities helped as well. He remembers that a mill in Harrison donated supplies and some people from Hope donated cedar.⁶⁹ Ralph George from Shxwohamil also states that they donated cedar to the members of Seabird Island for the church.⁷⁰ When asked if anyone from Shxwohamil attended church at Seabird Island, George replies,

Yeah. Well, ones that were carpenters and all of that and doing their labour work and all of that. They participated in all of that. Yeah, we split the shakes and shingles and cut the wood for it and you know we brought the logs to the mill for them to cut the boards for the church. [...] But it was more or less a community thing. Everybody chipped in and helped.⁷¹

Charles states, “It was quite a bit, lot of help. Nowadays you can’t do that. Money comes first.”⁷²

It is in this history of the construction of the new Church of the Immaculate Conception that evidence of kinship as a verb can be found. An overwhelming majority of the community members of Seabird Island gave their time, supplies, and money regardless of which band or cultural group they belonged. The community unified over the common interest to rebuild

⁶⁷ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁶⁸ Leo Casey O.M.I. “History of Immaculate Conception Church, Seabird Island and Our Lady of Fatima Church, Chehalis Reserve,” 10 November 1982, 4.

⁶⁹ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁷⁰ Ralph George, interview by Amanda Fehr and Robyn Moore, 16 May 2009.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

their church. The efforts of the people refute Leacock's claims that "Seabird has no 'community' in this sense of the word. The people living near each other do not form a single unit, despite the pressure of outside forces in this direction."⁷³ And, interestingly, the construction of the new church occurred at the same time as "pressures of outside forces" in the form of the government, who was again attempting to take the land away from the Aboriginals at Seabird Island. Charles tells that the government wanted to take the land in 1961 because the community was apparently not using the land.⁷⁴ He suggests that the re-building of the church in the same year was an act of resistance and a way of using the land. Therefore, the enacting of kinship was realized through the rebuilding of the church. The community members, in their willingness to "to keep the kinship network in balance with itself,"⁷⁵ were motivated by decolonization and sought kinship as a facilitator.

Currently, attendance is low at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. However, Sister Therese asserts that among the few community members that do attend church, the faith is strong.⁷⁶ Despite their priest, Father Gary, being ill, there is mass every other Sunday and readings from the Gospel on the alternate Sundays. Community members volunteer to clean and take care of the church. Unfortunately, the foundation in the church is beginning to show signs of age. It floods in the spring, insects get through the holes, and the roof is aging. There are fundraisers to provide the churches upkeep, including a new building fund. The hall

⁷³ Eleanor B Leacock, "The Seabird Community," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, edited by Marian W. Smith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949) 187.

⁷⁴ Archie Charles, interview by Megan Harvey, Andre Boiselle, and Robyn Moore, 18 May 2009.

⁷⁵ Daniel Heath Justice, "'Go Away Water!' Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Process," in *Reasoning Together*, edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 152

⁷⁶ Sister Therese. Interview by Amanda Fehr and Robyn Moore. 18 May 2009.

next door is also rented out to Alcoholics Anonymous for contributions. There is an upcoming meeting with the Chief and band office to negotiate their contributions. Sister Therese also hopes for money from the Archdiocese from the big fundraiser Project Advance. She insists, however, that the church belongs to the people and it is their project to take leadership over the renovations.⁷⁷ The church still proves to be a powerful symbol to the community, whose motivations may have been political or spiritual, but nonetheless came together to build it. The extent of the damage is uncertain, but as many people are attached to the building and what it symbolizes, renovating is the first choice.

“Because it’s important to our community members...”

As previously seen, cedar from the community members of Shxwohamil was donated to the building of the church at Seabird Island in an action of kinship. Similar narratives occur in the story of St. Michael’s at Shxwohamil, which was moved instead of being rebuilt. The community appears centred around the church for many years, as the church is moved to follow the community. Just as with Seabird Island, help was given from outside the border lines of their own reserve and from outside groups of people.

The community of Shxwohamil used to be located on the river, when the river was the main mode of transportation.⁷⁸ Likewise, the church, St. Michael’s, was first built at that location around 1907 on the river close to the Old Wagon Road.⁷⁹ It replaced an old chapel,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Appendix 4 for a map of Ohamil.

⁷⁹ Ralph George, interview by Amanda Fehr and Robyn Moore, 16 May 2009.

which was being outgrown by the community and was stated by Ralph George as being only sixteen feet wide by twenty feet long.⁸⁰ Local carpenters like Willy George and Harry Pierre built the church, but the whole community helped. Women from the community supplied food for the volunteers. St. Michael's was cleaned and looked after by women in Shxwohamil who volunteered: Arlena Lorngeti, then Ralph George's mother Lillian Pat.⁸¹ Attendance increased after the new building in 1907, and is estimated by George at about fifty people, not just from the Shxwohamil reserve. Perhaps one of the motivations for building the new church was to accommodate peoples from a larger area to promote kinship ties. The new and larger building would have attracted more people from surrounding areas to attend mass. George adds that Aboriginals were not the only group that attended church at St. Michael's: "And it wasn't just our Native side, it was quite a few of the other different populations. Orientals, ah... Italians, quite a few Italian people come from Hope down to here."⁸²

St. Michael's was built in the same spot as the old building, next to the river and the cemetery. There was also a small cabin there which was for the priests and brothers.⁸³ Until the late 1940's, sporting events such as canoe races and horseback races were held there. A canon six feet from the front of the church was used on the sports days to signal the beginnings of races.⁸⁴ The canon had come to Shxwohamil from a boat on the river and remained there until it was stolen by strawberry pickers. The whole area around St. Michaels' was a group gathering spot. However, when many of the houses were being built closer to Yale Road

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Highway, the church became harder to get to, especially in the winter when there was too much snow. Rain also made attending church harder: “And long time ago, when the, when they had the roads down there, when it was raining it was muddy roads and people was getting stuck and everything like that, you know.”⁸⁵ A decision was made to move the church closer to the houses, and St. Michael’s was moved in 1954 or 1955, according to Ralph George.⁸⁶ Moving the church was a big event for the community and people from surrounding areas. Many people from other reserves volunteered. Sixteen horses were used to transport it to its current location closer to the highway where it still stands today.

After the church was moved, attendance grew again due to its improved location.⁸⁷

Leona Kelly describes that the dirt road used to curve and cross over the present day highway to Laidlaw, which enabled the non-Aboriginal community members living there easy access to St. Michael’s.⁸⁸ However, the highway constructed in 1971 severed many ties between Shxwohamil and Laidlaw: “With the highways going through, it kind of broke the rest of the community away [...] It did break the Laidlaw and First Nations apart.”⁸⁹

Currently, there is no service at St. Michael’s due to many contributing factors. George blames an individual priest: “No, that priest, that priest doesn't want to come down here and say the masses because he says there's not enough attendance. But when the other priest was here there was a lot of attendance then but when ah this priest took over, he didn't want to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See Appendix 5 for a picture of St. Michael’s at its current location.

⁸⁸ Kelly, Leona. Interview by Amanda Fehr, Kate Martin, and Robyn Moore. 13 May 2009.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

come down here.”⁹⁰ Father John, who was the last priest to serve at Shxwohamil stated that attendance was consistent over the three years he came and was always weak:

And uh the church, the church attendance was consistent for the years that I was there, there were um a mother and her, and her two boys, and a grandmother and sometimes her grandchildren. And then occasionally there was the, maybe, two or three other people. So, it was small but we had, we had mass there every weekend, every weekend we'd have mass. And, uh, and I came consistently too, whatever the weather, whatever the conditions were and the people were always there. You know, there was always somebody there we'd never had a time when there was no mass.⁹¹

Speculations made by his part about the low attendance correspond with those of Sister Therese at Seabird Island. Both cite the residential schools as a reason why many people have fallen out with the church. They also suggest that there is a rise in Native spirituality, especially at Shxwohamil, speculates Father John, due to a Shaker Priest living there.⁹²

Regardless of some of the negative aspects associated with Catholic churches, St. Michael's remains an important part of the community:

Oh well, we're trying to find another priest to take over, so that, that a, you know, they can start attending service there again because it's important to our community members. And now, the, they should, ah there was some that wanted to have their first communion and now they can't, you know, there's

⁹⁰ Ralph George, interview by Amanda Fehr and Robyn Moore, 16 May 2009.

⁹¹ Father John Tritschler, interview by Carolyn Bartlett and Robyn Moore, 15 May 2009.

⁹² Ibid. The Shaker priest is the brother of Leona Kelly, Mike.

nobody here and there's nobody here to say catechism and, you know, to look after that.⁹³

Along with a new priest, the church also needs some repairs and a new window. Leona Kelly still looks after the church, keeping it clean.

Conclusion

The histories of the two Roman Catholic Churches at Seabird Island and Shxwohamil demonstrate the ways in which kinship can be enacted to de-standardize static definitions of community created by outsiders as a means of decolonization. Both communities extended kinship ties outside the boundary lines of their reserve, their band, their nation, and their race to participate in the construction/moving of a building, despite their differing religious or political motivations. After both events, a huge feast was shared with all the participants signifying their hard work and the appreciation of the community members on the reserve. In all of the interviews conducted for this paper, the topic of residential schools was brought up by the interviewee. Although there is still a lot of pain associated with the Catholic Church, there is also the determination not to forget. Some of the interviewees suffered greatly at residential school, while still emphasizing while they are no longer Catholic, the church on their reserve is meaningful and important for many of the community members. As well, some of the interviewees had good experiences at residential schools where Catholicism was introduced and still plays an important role in their lives. The small churches have played big roles in the communities of Seabird Island and Shxwohamil.

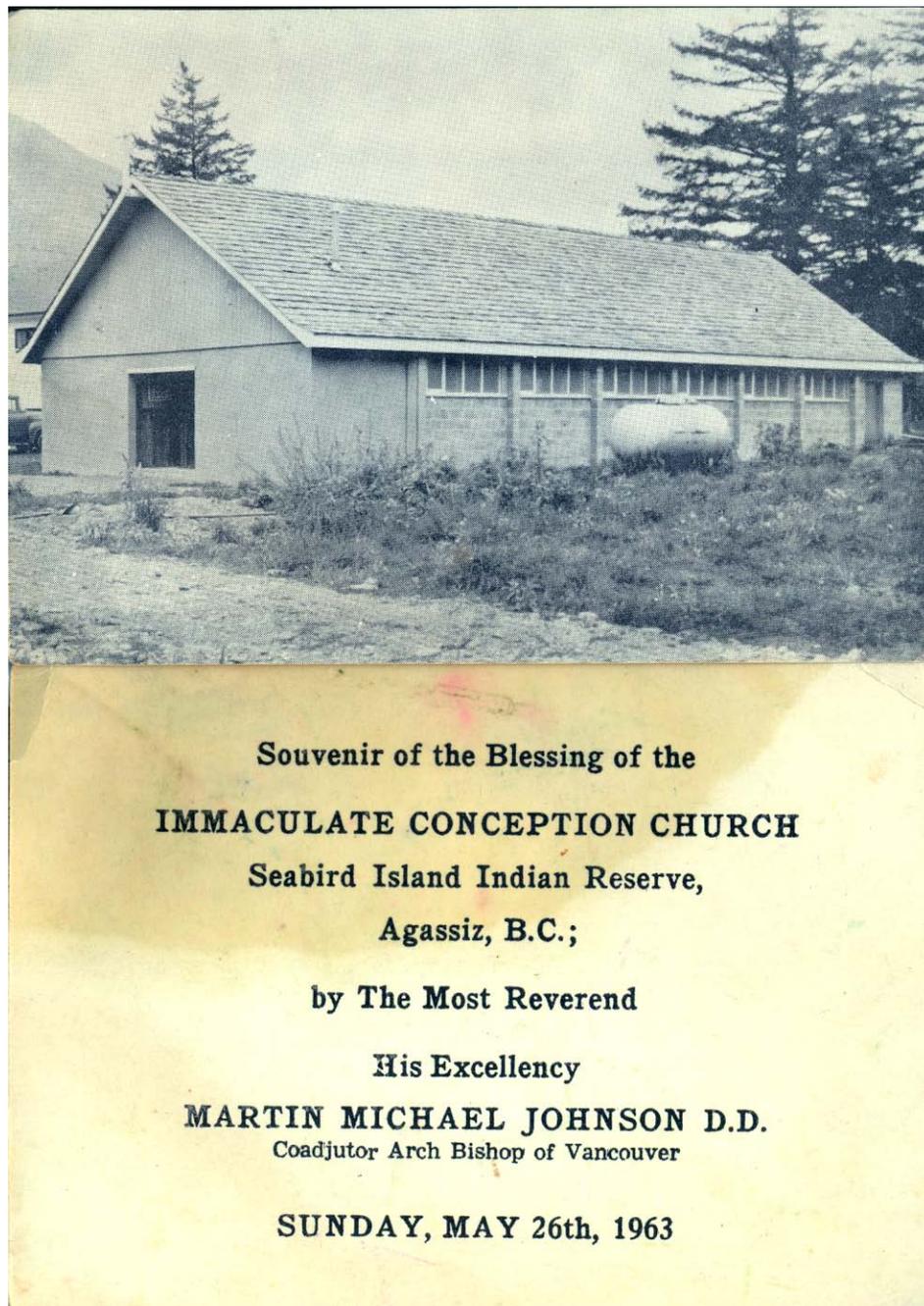
⁹³ Ralph George, interview by Amanda Fehr and Robyn Moore, 16 May 2009.

Appendix 1

Sketch plan showing farms, buildings and location of Indian cemetery on Seabird or Maria Island [map]. 1917.

Library and Archives Canada. <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/indian-reserves/001004-119.01-e.php?&isn_id_nbr=336&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=128hlpc48bf6gl71qb5q9ft822>

Picture courtesy of Archie Charles



Appendix 3

Pictures courtesy of Archie Charles

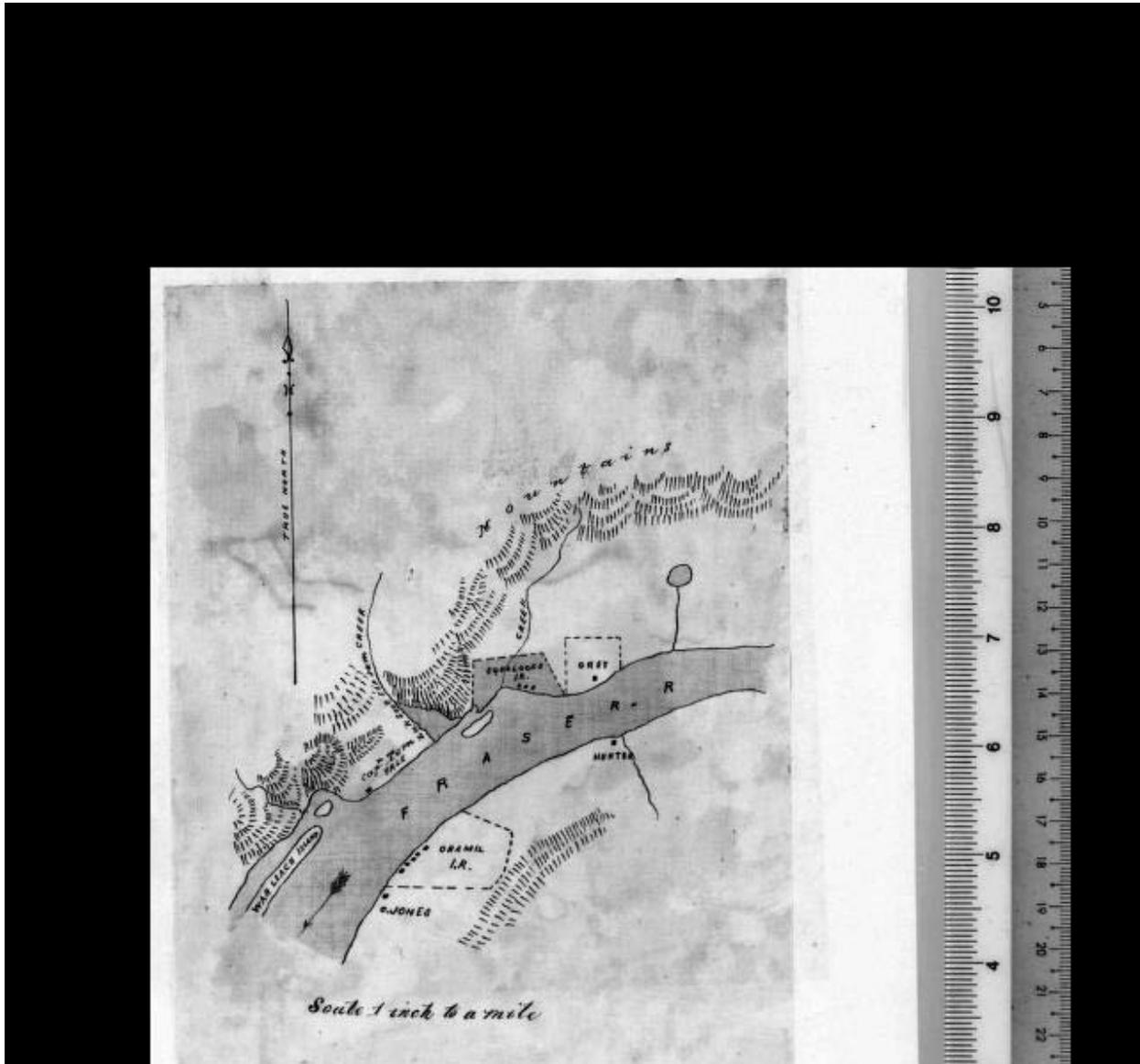




Appendix 4

Sketch showing Ohamil Reserve No. 1, Skawahlook Reserve No. 1 and part of Wahleach Island [map]. 1879.

Library and Archive Canada. <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/indian-reserves/001004-119.01-e.php?&isn_id_nbr=544&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=hcfcg4dv5ijmk0pjbm7uo8b12o3>



Appendix 5



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