

A Biographical Examination of Chief Emmitt Ligitum

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Ethnohistory Field School, 2009

British Columbia's Fraser Canyon is an example of a region that is rich in resources, culture, and heritage. It is very alive with significant and meaningful stories. For many centuries the Fraser Canyon has been the province's primary communication and transportation corridor. It was, and continues to be, a territory of amazing bio-diversity, with a vast network of lakes and rivers. These bodies of water provide spawning habitat to millions of salmon from all six Pacific Coast species: Spring, Cutthroat, Sockeye, Pink, Coho, and Chum. In fact, the Fraser Canyon produces more salmon than any other location on earth. Millions of salmon return each year to various parts of the Fraser River system and dozens of other species of fish also inhabit the region. In addition, the Fraser Canyon contains an abundance of geographical beauty, mystical supernatural elements, and strong human memories.¹ All of these things are deserving of preservation and study. In particular, the human memories and the oral and written testimony of Indigenous Peoples and their lives deserve examination and reflection. Therefore, a biographical study of the life of Chief Emmitt Liquitum is extremely useful, if not essential, due to his life heritage value for present and future generations. Such research will also serve as a tool for social justice, resource, and treaty claims in the contemporary political climate.

¹ Yale and Fraser Canyon Community Heritage Context Study and Heritage Strategic Plan, Fraser Valley Regional District: March 31 2009, 17.

Chief Liquitum also known as “he stamps on something”² is considered the last Grand Chief and a great leader of the British Columbian Fraser Canyon People. According to primary and secondary historical sources, including pictures that were considered portraits of Chief Liquitum, he was a stylish, fashionable, and charismatic Indigenous leader. Some of his distinctive markers included a ceramic pipe for smoking tobacco, a black top hat, and handsome and tidy clothing. He was a very important member of Sto:lo society before, during, and after the Fraser River gold rush of 1858. He was a key political, social, economic, and cultural figure in nineteenth century British Columbian native-newcomer relations. He was considered a Grand Chief because of the responsibility and authority that he held amongst both Indigenous People and people of European descent. He commanded the most intense attention and control over all Sto:lo people from the Lower Fraser Canyon to the Upper Fraser Canyon, including the Yale people, also known as the Tait people. The Fraser Canyon people were very diverse and held beliefs and practices that were heterogeneous. However, it is quite clear that they were all culturally similar as Sto:lo People.

According to research conducted by Irene Bierky, although there were dozens of individual Indigenous bands with their own tribal councils and a head chief, these head chiefs from each band all reported to Grand Chief Liquitum.³ She describes him as the leader among leaders of a centralized Indigenous Fraser Canyon political alliance that addressed seasonal, resource, and social concerns. Importantly, she argues that visiting Indigenous Peoples

2 Wilson Duff Field Notes, Books 1-4, 1950, Sto:lo Nation Archives, 48.

3 Irene Bierky, “Brief Overview: Chief Liquitum of Yale,” (Christmas, 2002) 1.

consulted Chief Liquitum when it came to permission to explore Sto:lo traditional lands and territory. They would consult him, Bierky reports, if they desired to harvest fish, berries, goat fur, deer, timber or other natural resources from the fertile and prosperous lands of the Fraser Canyon. Prominent and significant European leaders chose to engage and talk with Chief Liquitum when they wanted to work and deal with local Indigenous People. This in particular, elevated his status as an important leader of all Fraser Canyon Indigenous People.⁴ He was a middle man, a conduit, a consultant, a social broker, and a conflict resolutionist between the two very different societies of Natives and Newcomers.

According to historian Irene Bjerky, Chief Liquitum was recorded as Grand Chief of the Fraser Canyon in 1858, 1878 and 1888 census records, and most likely led his people for several years before and after those dates. Liquitum was in charge as a leader during decades of rapid change involving significant events, and during a time when Indigenous People constantly had to adapt to new ways of life and unfamiliar ways of knowing. At the time of Chief Liquitum's tenure, British Columbia had just recently joined the Canadian Confederation in July of 1871. The Canadian Pacific Railway was being constructed in the province to link trade and families from East to West in Canada. In addition, this was a period of "boom and bust" economically for British Columbia. The discovery of gold in the Fraser River in the spring and summer of 1858 brought mass migration from the United States in particular, California. At this time more than

⁴ Bjerky, "Brief Overview," 3.

30,000 Americans⁵ migrated to British Columbia's Fraser Canyon in hopes of striking lots of gold and becoming instantly rich and wealthy beyond their dreams.

In the book *Spuzzum* anthropologist Andrea Laforet mentions Chief Liquitum, but with a different spelling – Lekutum. She mentions him as the chief of Yale in the year 1888. According to her research, he was officially listed in the Indian censuses of Yale in both 1878 and 1888.⁶

According to historian Irene Bjerky and Sto:lo Nation archivist Tia Halstad few historical records remain describing Chief Liquitum's personal and intimate life. Interestingly, during an interview that I had with Sto:lo Nation genealogist Alice Marwood, a document was shared that indicated that his father's name was Sie'meiya and his mother's name was Titita. Also, the document revealed what is apparently well known in the community, that he had a plethora of wives and many children. He was officially married three times during his life and had offspring with each wife. Chief Liquitum first married a woman named Lucy Lawatsat. They had one son named James Maloyheq and one daughter named Emma. Next Chief Liquitum married a woman who went by the name of Suzanne. They had three children named Tom, Cecile, and Michel. Chief Liquitum's final marriage was on March 22nd 1888, in what is present day Hope, British Columbia, and at that time he married a woman named Marie Margarite. They had one son known as Isaac.⁷ In addition, anthropologist Wilson Duff recorded his 1950's field note correspondences that Chief Liquitum had over ten mistresses. He suggested that with each

5 Bjerky, "Brief Overview," 2.

6 Bjerky, "Brief Overview," 1.

7 Individual Report for Domonique (Chief Yale) Leakootum, Chilliwack, BC, May 4, 2009, 1.

mistress he had between half a dozen to ten children. The mistresses came from opposite ends of the chief's large territorial domain. Some were from Chilliwack, Spuzzum, Yale, Nicola, Spences Bridge, and even the coast.⁸ Consequently, he essentially had a small dynasty of descendants. The Hope family, residing in and around Yale, BC, have been genetically linked to the chief. Chief Liquitum's remains rest in a Yale Indigenous cemetery beside both marked and unmarked graves. Upon his grave plot there rests a rusted cross with his name across it, identifying him as Emmitt Liquitum. It was once a white painted cross, as there are remnants of white paint on it. It does not stand out in any way as being special when compared with the other grave markers. It presents as a rather humble resting space for such an influential and revered Indigenous leader of the Fraser Canyon.⁹

It appears that Chief Liquitum arranged for his chieftainship to be passed on hereditarily to one of his sons, who would succeed him and remain chief for a substantial amount of time, well into the turn of the twentieth century. This individual was known as Chief James of Yale. He was a very outspoken key figure in the realm of advocating for Indigenous rights. Unlike his father Chief James was inscribed and documented in a multiplicity of official and unofficial written sources of the time. He is mentioned most frequently in Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and Royal Commission records. Chief James of Yale was heavily involved with the Royal Commission of 1914. This commission began an investigation after a railway blasting for the CNR Company caused a rockslide at Hell's Gate. This environmental disaster blocked off the river

8 Wilson Duff Field Notes, 49.

9 Bjerky, "Brief Overview," 3.

in the area causing severe damage to important salmon runs. However, knowledge of Chief James' personal and family life remains sparse in historical sources, not unlike his father Chief Liquitum. But documents such as those of the British Columbia census records demonstrate that Chief James was chieftain in 1901. There were also many citations of him in the DIA records between the years 1897 through 1913. He passed away in Yale, British Columbia at age 91 in the year 1922.¹⁰ Importantly, although Chief James succeeded his father Chief Liquitum, he was not a grand chieftain. He appeared only to hold major influence in the region of Yale, not throughout the entire Fraser Canyon as his father had done. Thus, Chief Liquitum's leadership tenure marked the end of the "grand chief" era.

Archaeologist David Schaepe argues in a similar way to Irene Bjerky regarding Chief Liquitum. He suggests that this great man was vital to socio-political organizations, political economies, social networks, and the cultural identity of all Fraser Canyon Indigenous Peoples. No other chief in the vicinity of the upper and lower Fraser River commanded such respect and traditional centralized leadership. Schaepe points out that prior to the smallpox epidemic of 1782, Sto:lo Peoples population levels were abundant and healthy, with both young and elderly, but that after the disease epidemic and contact with Europeans it was decimated and reduced to the mere hundreds. As a consequence of this tragedy, David Schaepe suggests that rarely did "chiefdom-level authority extend beyond the household and across local villages."¹¹ Therefore, it

¹⁰ Bjerky, "Brief Overview," 12.

¹¹ David M. Schaepe, "Rock Fortifications: Archaeological Insights Into Pre-Contact Warfare And Sociopolitical Organization Among The Sto:lo Of The Lower Fraser River Canyon, B.C.," Society for American Archaeology 71 (2006) 672.

demonstrates yet another obstacle that the future Chief Lquitum would have overcome only a few decades later.

Importantly, Chief Lquitum not only held the support of the upper caste elite Indigenous Peoples, he was also popular and was supported by the warrior and military class, who were of critical strategic importance when diplomacy failed or when coastal raiders such as the Haida or Cowichan Peoples attacked. The issue of the importance of the warrior class to Chief Lquitum has been a point of historical discussion. For example, cultural liaison for the Sto:lo Nation, Albert Sonny McHalsie, suggests that the Fraser Canyon People were not known for their military prowess, and gave higher status to knowledge and teaching. In contrast, Dr. Daniel Marshall of the University of Victoria has argued that Upper Fraser Canyon People such as the Thompson and Yale were instrumental in the Fraser River War of 1858. He has asserted that had it not been for the support of the Indigenous population, then American “manifest destiny” and its 30,000 migrant gold miners would have usurped British Columbia and altered geographical boundaries between Canada and the United States dramatically. Regardless of Sonny McHalsie and Dr. Daniel Marshall’s differing interpretations there certainly was a warrior culture in existence among the Fraser Canyon People, and their support of the leadership was essential. The Sto:lo word for warrior is Sto:mex. However it is a complicated word because it has a variety of meanings and connotations. It could mean a “hot-headed” and impulsive man or a “war leader.” As a result, the socio-political standing of warrior and military men could range from low to medium to high status. Significantly, their status in society depended upon

their personal characteristics such as their actions, spirit power, and their given genealogical name.¹²

In light of this information, it is important to note that Chief Liquitum was a master diplomat not averse to engaging in Machiavellian tactics. He took it upon himself to maintain peace, harmony, and balance amongst his own people at all cost. Putting to death a high status leader or their relative(s) who were deviant was rare, however it did occasionally occur in the nineteenth century. For example, Chief Liquitum did have two brothers who were perpetual “trouble-makers” and who had tense relations with other Indigenous Peoples. There are several such documented accounts of him conspiring in political assassination, in order to maintain diplomatic harmony, in the Sto:lo history book entitled, *You Are Asked To Witness*, edited by Dr. Keith Thor Carlson of the University of Saskatchewan. Apparently, in the first high tension scenario, one of Chief Liquitum’s brothers shot at fisherman from a nearby village who was peacefully attempting to load up his dried salmon stocks into his canoe from his fishing plot. Liquitum’s brother missed and the fisherman shot back killing him instantly. Once Chief Liquitum got news of how and why his brother died, he was accepting of the fact that his brother had been silenced via violent force. In another account, two of Liquitum’s brothers had been raiding and stealing things up and down the Fraser Canyon. This upset a large number of villages in the Canyon. Consequently, Chief Liquitum arranged for an ambush assassination of his only remaining living brother, who had survived the multiple raids. He was terminated by a sharp-shooter from Hope while canoeing down an unspecified lake.¹³

¹² David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 678.

If indeed there was a centralized political leadership under Grand Chief Liquitum, the effective supervision and running of a canyon wide military defensive protection network must have been complex. It would have required a level of licence and collective governance beyond that generally found among Northwest Coast Indigenous communities. David Schaepe argues that Sto:lo oral history provides some support for the existence of a broad-based system of leadership in this region. This has been determined via past and present oral interviews with Indigenous people like Sonny McHalsie, Patrick Charlie, and Mary Charles.¹⁴ Like Irene Bjerky demonstrates, these people have indicated that Chief Liquitum was the name of the main “head-man” of the Fraser Canyon People who lived in the mid to late nineteenth century. In other words, evidence suggested that:

Liquitem lived in a village near Yale that was considered the main headquarters from here to Maria Slough in the Central Fraser Valley, coincident with the *Teit* tribal area. In each tribe, [there was] one main leader. Head governor of that tribe. Also [a] village headman. Whatever happened there was reported to [the] main leader...Liquitem was headman over 60 years. The old chief at Yale was the boss of the whole river and there were subsidiary chiefs all along the Fraser.¹⁵

Liquitum was a famous chief by historical standards. It is known that his cousin was chief before him, but that he was not nearly as influential and charismatic. According to interview

13 Keith Thor Carlson, *You Are Asked To Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack, BC: Sto:lo Heritage Trust, 1997), 94.

14 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 700.

15 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 701.

transcripts with Patrick Charlie via anthropologist Wilson Duff, Indigenous people went to Chief Lquitum whenever there were concerns with colonial governor James Douglas. When it came to serious military matters and the defending of resources, such as wind dried salmon stocks from Coastal Salish Peoples, Chief Lquitum could always call on volunteers and reserves of men from neighbouring villages or down and up river to take up arms. The chieftain level governance, with Grand Chief Lquitum at the top of the bureaucracy, likely operated on a priority or seasonal basis and was more active at some points and less active at others. For example, it was likely more influential and utilized during times of higher instances of raiding and skirmishing activity for food stuffs and slaves.¹⁶

It is important to note that there were both s'mela:th (high status communities) and s'texem (low class communities) that Chief Lquitum directed and governed. The s'mela:th villages were fundamental to the political economy and strategic protection of the Fraser Canyon People. There was also much interconnectedness with other villages and bands via blood and marriage relationships. The s'texem communities were often social units that were unattached and more isolated from the centre of Sto:lo politics, resources, economy, and culture. They often had a higher concentration of foreigners and enslaved people.¹⁷

During this time of rapid social change, flux, and raiding, the Fraser Canyon Peoples also had to contend with colonialism that had the most profound impact on their societies. Together, both Western forms of state and religion engaged in the “peaceful” subordination of Indigenous societies. They tried to promote the dissolution of long-standing Indigenous institutions that

16 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 700.

17 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 700.

had been around since the dawn of time. The hegemonic and coercive state was placing Fraser Canyon People onto “increasingly small and foreign social and geopolitical landscapes.”¹⁸ For example, they tried to create divisions and in-fighting between Fraser Canyon People by dividing them into over two dozen¹⁹ separate and isolated bands on separate plotted reserves.

Mrs Lena Hope of Yale provided some crucial oral testimony to past researcher Oliver Wells in the fall of 1967 regarding Chief Liquitum. She referred to the chief with an alternate spelling; Loyoxweten. She suggested in her interview that Liquitum had lived to a very old age, being a centurion, and that he died peacefully of natural causes. Importantly, and similar to Irene Bjerky, she mentioned that one of his signature features was the utilization of a “long ceramic tobacco pipe” and that he had long hair that was almost completely white. Lena Hope recalled assisting the old chief with daily care when she was around the ages of eight and nine. She would give him food and drink, fill his pipe with tobacco, and watch over him when he was sickly. Unfortunately, although she had asserted that he was a centurion, she could not remember on what day, month and year he passed away.²⁰ In addition, Lena Hope provided evidence that a plethora of Fraser Canyon People were intimately connected as one via travel, marriage, and offspring. She explained to Oliver Wells that, “Some of them I guess go somewhere – get married and go where their husbands are or something.”²¹ She asserted that these inter-village and geopolitical marriages were of the utmost importance to Fraser Canyon

18 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 700.

19 David M. Schaepe “Rock Fortifications,” 700.

20 Lena Hope, Interview with Oliver Wells, 28 September 1967, 661.

21 Lena Hope, Interview, 663 .

People. So much so that grooms would try to cement a marriage and impress the bride's family via a large and handsome dowry.²²

As mentioned earlier Chief Liquitum was grand chief during turbulent and changing times. British Columbia was "boom and bust" economically via the Fraser River gold rush that also culminated into the Fraser River War in the spring and summer of 1858. This conflict over resources, mining sites, settlement, trade, and small business was one of the longest and most violent in Canadian history. In addition, it occurred right in the territory that Chief Liquitum was a main leader and stakeholder. Unfortunately, the vast majority of primary and secondary sources on this topic have glorified and over-emphasized the role of Chief Spintlum of Lytton, while neglecting the role of Chief Liquitum (chief of Yale) in this dramatic and historic event.²³

Over the course of 1858 approximately 30,000 American miners, as well as European and Chinese miners, converged on the Fraser River with a strong desire and yearning for the discovery of gold. However, shortly after their arrival, some miners violated and raped Indigenous women. In retaliation, Indigenous warriors surprise attacked several American and French miners and killed them. To cause further agitation and rift with non-Indigenous miners they decapitated their victims and tossed their bloody remains into the Fraser River. As a result, Native-Newcomer violence escalated to the point that both parties attacked each other's settlements and homes. Mortuary sites were burned and defiled. In the absence of British colonial authority, the Fraser Canyon territories more closely resembled the American Western

22 Lena Hope, Interview, 664.

23 Lewis J. Swindle, The Fraser River Gold Rush of 1858: As Reported by the California Newspapers of 1858 (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2001), 289.

Frontier than the rest of British North America. The expansive numbers of foreign miners had effectively taken to vigilante and “eye for an eye” justice.²⁴

A primary source colonial correspondence written by Captain H.M. Snyder to Governor James Douglas during the Fraser River War of 1858 in the month of August, gave a Eurocentric view of the conflict. Importantly, Captain Snyder provided possible admissible evidence that may be a description of Chief Liquitum during his campaign. Captain Snyder was a democratically elected militia captain of a company of about six dozen militant European descent miners from various nations. Over the course of the latter half of August his company attempted to make peace with various Indigenous chiefs and tribal councils along the Fraser River. Although the exact date was unknown, at one point Captain Snyder made reference to a very cool and calculating Indigenous chief that seemed to hold the attention of mass audiences with the words he had spoken; a great chief of peace and a respected leader among his people. Captain Snyder went on to say that, “Here in the presence of them, we made a treaty of peace with them and after stating our object they appeared to be highly delighted with what we had proposed to them. The chief sent his son with us and two other Indians.”²⁵ Interestingly, if this was indeed Chief Liquitum, he probably agreed to a treaty because not abiding to Captain Snyder’s terms likely would have meant major bloodshed and the loss of many of his people. Ironically, while Captain Snyder boastfully suggested in his correspondence that he had achieved peace without killing, he forgot to mention that he did use intimidation and force to make the

24 Daniel P. Marshall, “The Fraser War: H.M. Snyder, Captain of the Pike Guards and Commander of Company, to James Douglas, Governor of Vancouver Island, 28 August 1858,” [Native Studies Review](#) (Summer 1996) 1.

25 Daniel P. Marshall, “The Fraser War,” 2.

Indigenous People concede to his terms. For example, his militia was highly armed with muskets and other projectiles and his militia was reinforced by an Austrian Militia Company as well as by other angry and armed miners.

In comparison to other militias, Captain Snyder's militia was more balanced and less aggressive. The Austrian militia Company wanted to kill every child, woman, and man that had Indigenous blood, whether full or partial. Fortunately, in his letter, Captain Snyder demonstrated emotions of compassion and a strong desire not to engage in genocide and the killing of innocent Indigenous Peoples.²⁶ Lastly, and importantly, it was not only miners of European descent who were negatively affecting Chief Liquitum, Chief Spintlum, and other Indigenous societies in the Fraser Canyon. The Chinese too were "suspected of being partly the means of difficulty with the Indians."²⁷ Many poor Chinese migrated from Southern China directly to British Columbia to work, or came to British Columbia via California, and in particular from San Francisco, to find their fortune in gold or work on the rail lines and in other resource and service sectors.

The conflict of the Fraser River War had a fundamentally harmful impact on Chief Liquitum's People and their way of life. The Fraser Canyon People were a fisher people relying heavily on natural resources from rivers, streams, and the ocean. The Native-Newcomer conflict would have played havoc with the salmon fishing that year. The spring and summer months, in particular August (when Captain Snyder's correspondence was written) and September were typically crucial months for spearing and netting fish. Instead, in 1858, those months were spent

²⁶ Daniel P. Marshall, "The Fraser War," 3.

²⁷ Daniel P. Marshall, "The Fraser War," 4.

skirmishing or peace negotiating with angry and militant gold crazed miners. In addition, the fighting that occurred prior to peace-making resulted in the destruction of Indigenous wind dried salmon stocks, their fishing sites, and their own huts and village communities. Even though Yale was the site of a large summer fishery, all the turmoil would have resulted in little time to replace lost stores of wind dried salmon and other food stuffs.²⁸

Fortunately, due to the hard work and diplomatic efforts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders like Captain H.M. Snyder and Chief Liquitum, permanent disaster and war were halted. For example:

Significantly though, the cross-racial peace treaties that were subsequently negotiated between some of the more judicious miners like Captain H.M. Snyder, and more accommodating Aboriginal leaders like Liquitum of Yale and Spintlum of Lytton, were settled and implemented without external colonial government intervention...the Nlaka'pamux Palek (Thompson River People), and the Sto:lo Slumack, still echo in the Fraser Canyon today as people today discuss this tumultuous period in history.²⁹

Ironically, had it not been for the agency of Indigenous Peoples in the first place, the European miners would not have been able to extract gold from the Fraser River. This was because Indigenous men and women acted as guides, packers of freight, miners, and rescuers of foreign miners in canoeing accidents. The American miners heavily relied on Chief Liquitum's

28 Andrea Lynne Laforet, "Folk History in a Small Canadian Community" (M.A. thesis., University of British Columbia, 1974), 81.

29 Yale and Fraser Canyon Community Heritage Context Study and Heritage Strategic Plan, 19.

Indigenous People to help them reach and properly exploit the gold resources in the Fraser River region.³⁰

Chief Lquitum was a great leader and diplomat. He was involved in many political, economic, social, cultural, and strategic issues that affected the Fraser Canyon People in his territorial domain. He was not hesitant to deal with White politicians like James Douglas or more common men like groups of foreign miner militia companies like the one under the command of Captain H.M. Snyder. He exercised rational, intuitive, and sincere power and decision making. According to anthropologist Wilson Duff he even petitioned the “Great White Mother” in England when his concerns were not being addressed locally. “Lye’kwetem was a famous Yale chief that went to see King George III.”³¹ According to Sto:lo Nation cultural liaison Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Chief Lquitum was instrumental in the treaty and land process. He helped to get the Seabird Island Reserve for many of his displaced upriver Fraser Canyon People who had been marginalized to the periphery by discriminatory state policies.³²

Today the Fraser Canyon People are divided into over two dozen fragmentary bands. While there are five independent bands, including the Yale Band, the vast majority belong to one of two political alliances; either Sto:lo Nation or Sto:lo Tribal Council. They are in difference of opinion over how to go about the treaty process, as well as who has rights and ownership to various natural resources whether they be salmon fisheries, logging rights, or berry patches.

30 Laforet, “Folk History in a Small Canadian Community,” 82.

31 Wilson Duff Field Notes, 47.

32 Albert Sonny McHalsie, personal interview, 19 May 2009, 2.

The study of Chief Liquitum is important and relevant because it demonstrates a time when all Fraser Canyon People were somewhat united as one and at least made attempts at communal and collective decision making both socially and economically. Although destructive government policies pit differing Indigenous bands against one another and harmed their social fabric, now is the time for healing and peace-making among Fraser Canyon People themselves. They must engage in the same sort of diplomacy and goals that Chief Liquitum had in mind for his people less than two-hundred years ago.

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