

In His Own Words: The Journals of Chief Billie Hall, Farmer

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Aboriginal agriculture in British Columbia has been little studied. In fact, *farming* and *First Nations* have often been seen as an oxymoronic combination of words. This is obvious when one looks at the modern treaty with the *Tsawwassen* First Nation, approved by band members in July 2007. The media coverage leading up to the vote demonstrated considerable apprehension on the part of non-Aboriginal Tsawwassen area residents regarding what might happen if farmland was ‘handed over’ to members of the First Nation, concerned that the land will cease to be protected and productive farm land.² Such fears can be attributed, in part, to academic ignorance of the agricultural history of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia’s First Nations. This paper proposes to suggest why this has been the case, and using the words of *Stó:lō* farmer Chief Billie Hall suggests that in examining agricultural history of the *Stó:lō* people, a new chapter in Aboriginal – Newcomer relations can be written. Chief Hall wrote several journals in which he recorded his experiences as a *Stó:lō* farmer in Chilliwack, BC in the 1920s. By exploring the relationships with both non-native and Aboriginal farmers, Hall’s journals outline a different kind of relationship than other Aboriginal – Newcomer scholarship has thus far produced. Research such as this may go a long way to creating an understanding of historic Aboriginal land use, which may in turn reduce fears like the ones expressed by the residents of Tsawwassen.

I first approached the study of *Stó:lō* farmers in general as part of my participation in the University of Victoria Ethnohistory field school in 2000. I chose the topic of *Stó:lō* agriculture from a list of research interests generated by *Stó:lō* Nation Aboriginal Rights

² See for example “Critics worry ALR [Agricultural Land Reserve] a treaty tool”, Richmond News, May 2, 2006, and “Sacrificing farmland for a treaty will be for the greater good”, Vancouver Sun, June 5, 2006.

and Title staff, who knew that *Stó:lō* had farmed in the past but those experiences had not yet been the specific subject of academic study. Where *Stó:lō* farmers had been included in academic works, they were little more than asides in studies of broader topics, such as Indian residential schools and assimilationist policies, and land use and title issues such as the draining of Sumas Lake.³ Proceeding with research on *Stó:lō* farmers, I found an academic ‘blank slate’ – nothing to rebut, challenge, or support. In the seven intervening years since that first research, academic research that examines the experience of *Stó:lō* farmers specifically has still not been produced.⁴ Why the topic of *Stó:lō* agricultural history remains uncovered can be explained by examining the biases of past and present academics who have written about *Stó:lō* people.

Current researchers may be forgiven for not realizing the full dimensions of *Stó:lō* agricultural history. A review of the ethnographic material collected about *Stó:lō* people includes little to no reference to farming. This bias against viewing the *Stó:lō* as farmers can be blamed on anthropologists and archaeologists who were focused on conducting salvage ethnography. From Marion Smith in the 1940s, to Oliver Wells in the 1950s, and to Reuban Ware and Albert Phillips in the 1970s, academics continued to focus on what was ‘traditional’ and ‘essential’ to the culture, seeking out the ‘basic facts’. Historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists who consult these ethnographic sources will not find much evidence of *Stó:lō* people as agriculturalists. Ethnographers weren’t the only

³ See for example Carlson, Keith Thor, “Early Nineteenth Century *Stó:lō* Social Structures and Government Assimilation Policy”, and Thom, Brian and Laura Cameron, “Changing Land Use in *Solh Temexw* (Our Land): Population, Transportation, Ecology, and Heritage”, both in Carlson , Keith Thor, ed. You Are Asked to Witness: The *Stó:lō* in Canada’s Pacific Coast History, 1997.

⁴ What has been produced since, relies upon my work in 2000, using it unchallenged. See for example Oliver, Jeff, A View From the Ground: Understanding the ‘Place’ of the Fraser Valley in the Changing Contexts of a Colonial World, 1792 – 1918 [PhD thesis], 2006, and Friesen, Darren, The Waterscape and Landscape of Sumas Lake: The Meeting of *Stó:lō* and Newcomer Uses of the Land in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, [Honours Thesis], 2002.

scholars who didn't view *Stó:lō* people as competent and interested agriculturalists.

Other scholars (and non-academics) didn't even view the *Stó:lō* as peoples who were using their land 'productively', as revealed by Alfred H. Siemens, a geographer, who in his 1966 survey of land use in the Lower Fraser Valley by ethnic populations devoted only two short paragraphs to Aboriginal land use.⁵ He doesn't appear to have been very impressed:

"... the unfortunate conditions on the reserves are widely known and decried, the problems of living with and helping the Indian widely appreciated. The use of reserve lands by the Indians [in the Lower Fraser Valley] themselves is generally lackadaisical. The farms and other enterprises the Indians do operate on the reserves are most often not imposing. Practically every one of the Indian bands in the Lower Fraser Valley has leased a part of its reserve's land for agriculture, lumbering, industry, commerce, or residential purposes. This brings an assured annual income, but perhaps not as ample an income as more direct involvement in production might bring."

[emphasis mine]⁶

Despite these biases and discriminations against *Stó:lō* farmers by early ethnographers and academics, *Stó:lō* agricultural history *can be written*, as my research at present, and in 2000, demonstrates. Why it has remained unexplored has more to do with the biases of current academics towards different topics.

Academics researching *Stó:lō* history today, have in large part, continued to resist examining *Stó:lō* agricultural history, other than as part of a broader discussion about nineteenth century assimilationist policies and conflicts with Newcomers over land rights and use. *Stó:lō* historical research has often been undertaken by academics directly

⁵ Siemens discusses the development of the lower Fraser Valley without specific mention that the development was by a mainly white, Protestant, immigrant population. He does however, include land use by populations of specific ethnicities: Chinese, Japanese, Sikhs, French, Mennonites, Dutch, and Indians. Siemens, Alfred H. "The Process of Settlement in the Lower Fraser Valley – In Its Provincial Context", in Alfred H. Siemens, editor Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape, 1968, pg. 42-43.

⁶ He does, however, go on to praise the "relatively progressive" *Musqueam* band for being involved in the development of part of their reserve into "a quality residential area". Siemens, "The Process of Settlement", pg. 43.

associated with the *Stó:lō* Nation.⁷ Like the broader academic literature on Aboriginal people in BC generally, the direction of research has been guided or influenced by *Stó:lō* Nation staff towards issues of so called ‘traditional’ Aboriginal rights and title, leading to the production of research largely focused on the history of assimilation, and conflicts over land and resource use and exploitation.⁸ In this way, academics writing about the *Stó:lō* join a pantheon of academics studying Aboriginal culture and history who seek to explain the Aboriginal past in terms of *action* on the part of Aboriginals, mobilized to resist newcomer/colonialist society. Reacting to a wave of research that for years posed Aboriginals as passive victims of an unfair and unjust Colonial juggernaut, beginning in the 1990s, academics began writing history that ‘gave a voice’ to Aboriginal people. As a result, scholarship on Aboriginal history has become focused on three time frames: the contact era, the early colonial period (late 19th Century), and ‘activist’ period of the 1960s and beyond. These time frames are perhaps the simplest for exploring the easily explainable and understood issues of subjugation and confrontation, with such themes as assimilation and resistance often plainly stated in the materials available. This has left large portions, of what I describe as the ‘middle history’, roughly the 1920s to the 1950s inclusively in British Columbia, unexplored by academics studying Aboriginal history. The topic of *Stó:lō* farmers in the twentieth century provides a good example of why this ‘middle history’ has been left unexamined.

⁷ Included in this are publications by the *Stó:lō* Heritage Trust, as well as research produced by graduate students attending either an anthropology or ethnohistory field school hosted by the *Stó:lō* Nation.

⁸ This has produced research in favour of more overtly political issues such as fishing and land claims. See for example, Dianne Newell, Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada’s Pacific Coast Fisheries, (Toronto, 1993) and Paul Tenant, Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: the Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849 – 1989, (Vancouver, 1990).

There were many *Stó:lō* families engaged in agriculture the early to mid twentieth century. *Stó:lō* farmers appear to have been particularly successful at dairying; an informal conversation with a *Stó:lō* elder produced a long list of *Stó:lō* men he knew to have had dairy farms.⁹ And yet this success story appears to be unknown, both among academics and many of the current generations of *Stó:lō* people themselves. I suggest that *this is the result of the very success of those early Stó:lō dairy farmers*. Given the current academic popularity of narratives of Aboriginal resistance, the stories of *Stó:lō* people who successfully adopted such ‘white’ characteristics as farming do not fit either academic ‘model Indian’: victim of colonialism or activist/warrior. Appearing on the surface to have capitulated to the assimilationist policies and programs produced by colonial society, the history of *Stó:lō* farmers seem to run contrary to the contact/conflict narratives dominant in current Aboriginal historical scholarship. In conjunction with the unwillingness to tackle subjects that run counter to the ‘resistance’ theme of Aboriginal history, is what appears to be a genuine reluctance on the part of academics to reveal such success stories. This reluctance may be the result of concerns that to illustrate cases where Aboriginal people were ‘assimilated’, such a history would thus appear to support historic societal claims about the superiority and eventual supremacy of Western/European culture. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Robin Brownlie have charged that such a history, while recognizing Aboriginal agency, would use “Native resilience and strength to soften, and at times to deny, the impact of colonialism, and thus implicitly absolve its perpetrators”, thereby creating a “colonialist alibi” and assuage the guilt of

⁹ See also a list of dairy farmers mentioned by *Siyemches* in “Through the Eyes of *Siyemches te Yeqwyeqwi:ws*, “ in Keith Thor Carlson, ed., You Are Asked to Witness: The *Stó:lō* in Canada’s Pacific Coast History, 1997, pg. 23.

non-Native scholars.¹⁰ They suggest writing histories that illustrate Native agency may deny the full effects of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples, and thereby *depreciate* the very thing they were trying to highlight: the ability of First Nations to withstand the impacts of colonialism.¹¹ Finally, Brownlie and Kelm are also critical that academics who write such histories ignore the potential political impacts of their work.¹² Whether or not historians *should* write histories with an eye to potential political impacts is a separate debate, but nonetheless, their criticisms may well have contributed to a chill in academia to examine histories that cease to portray Aboriginals as victims. Relegated to an unexplored ‘middle history’ of ‘submission’ to colonialist aims by an academic culture biased toward stories of resistance and conflict, *Stó:lō* agricultural history has suffered from a serious case of neglect.

The value of studying this period in Aboriginal history is that such study can provide further knowledge of both the history before it, and the history afterwards, and point the way to a better ‘third option’. Instead of an Aboriginal history dichotomized into victim, or activist, versus oppressor, a study of this ‘middle history’, a study of *Stó:lō* farmers, may result in a more cohesive history. In order to test this hypothesis, I turn now to the story of a *Stó:lō* farming family, centered around the journals of Chief Billie Hall, and what an exploration of his written words can reveal about *Stó:lō* – Newcomer interactions in the ‘middle history’ of the early/mid-twentieth century.

¹⁰ Robin Brownlie and Mary-Ellen Kelm, “Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXV, 4, 1994, 543-556, pg. 545.

¹¹ Brownlie and Kelm, “Desperately Seeking Absolution”, pg. 552.

¹² See the opening and concluding paragraphs where the authors further outline their concerns. Brownlie and Kelm, “Desperately Seeking Absolution”, pg. 552.

Chief Billie Hall – The Journals, The Man

Chief William (Billie) Hall, from the community of *Tzeachten*, was a prolific writer. He kept a series of journals in which nearly every day had an entry. The *Coqualeetza* Archives, located within the *Coqualeetza* Cultural Education Centre, has five of Hall's journals: four covering the period from January 1, 1923 to May 14, 1926, and one chronicling the activities of the “Grass Reserve” [IR 17], a reserve held in common for the pasturing of livestock owned by members of four separate reserves.¹³ Clearly, this set of five journals is not the totality of his writings as both the first and last of his personal journals indicates that there was a preceding or subsequent journal. A detailed and meticulous writer, Hall wrote about a variety of topics, including but not limited to: births and deaths, work of any kind, the Indian Land Question, and interactions with other Aboriginals and many kinds of newcomers. Hall took particular pains to record numbers, especially money - how much things cost, money owed to or received by him, and money spent by him - but this also extended to the time: ie when trains arrived or left, how long journeys took, and the chronological order in which things happened. Chief Billie Hall also had a distinctive approach to his writings; entries seem to follow a formula. Beginning with a report of the “wether” [sic], the entry would be a chronological accounting of the day’s events, generally ending with a report of who came to visit the family that day. Hall’s characteristic style extends from the fashioning of the entries, to the writing itself. Surely, not unlike other non-professional writers of the time, Hall’s

¹³ The *Coqualeetza* Cultural Education Centre has the original copies of these journals, but for access purposes, has typewritten copies of all four of Hall’s personal journals, and a photocopy of the original “Grass Reserve” journal. For reference purposes, I will be referring to each journal by the years it covers: 1923, 1924, 1924-1925, and 1925-1926, and by the title and year of the Grass Reserve journal: “Grass Reserve” (1931).

technique of sentence structure made copious use of periods (usually in place of commas) and capitalization beyond proper nouns to include nouns of any kind. Finally, Hall's journals are also unique in that he carefully copied out many of the letters he sent to non-native persons, largely to the Indian Agent and other representatives of the Federal or Provincial governments. Being personal accounts, an examination of these journals reveals much about the concerns, actions, and lives of Chief Billie Hall and his family.

Having stumbled across the journals of Hall unexpectedly, I knew nothing about the man, or his place in the *Stó:lō* community.¹⁴ With information gleaned from his journals, and other sources uncovered since reviewing his writings, I have enough material to provide a brief biographical sketch of Hall, a few “facts” upon which to hang the history uncovered by his own words. Assuming he was at least 18 years of age upon the birth of his son John in 1896, William [Billie] Hall was born sometime before 1878, and would be in at least his 40s by the time he wrote the journals I was able to review.¹⁵ By the 1920s, Billie Hall was chief of the *Tzeachten* reserve, one of the reserves located on the former banks of the Chilliwack River that had made its way through what is now known as the Sardis area of municipality of Chilliwack. Hall had a reasonably sized mixed-farm located on reserve, raising cereal crops, maintaining a large orchard, and at some point, had enough milk-producing cows to ship milk to the Fraser Valley Milk Producers

¹⁴ I am most indebted to Shirley D. Leon, the former manager of the *Coqualeetza* Cultural Education Centre, who, when I mentioned I was interested in *Stó:lō* farmers, immediately thought of Hall's journals, evidence of her incredible knowledge of the holdings of the *Coqualeetza* Archives.

¹⁵ John Hall's date of birth is included in a biography of him written by his daughter and granddaughter, June Bonner and Sandra Pederson, “Chief John Hall”, in Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders: 25th Annual Gathering of First Nations Elders, Silver Anniversary Souvenir Book, Jo-ann Archibald, editor, *Coqualeetza* Cultural Education Centre, 2001, pg. 17.

Association.¹⁶ By this time Chief Billie Hall and his wife Katherine, known affectionately as Kate, were blessed with grandchildren from their five children. Billie and Kate's son John Hall, his wife Nellie, and eventually their eleven children, lived nearby on the reserve, and worked the farm alongside their father and grandfather. John clearly was an equal partner in the farm, having learned "every aspect of farming" from his father.¹⁷ Possibly Hall's love of the farm was even extended to at least one of his grandsons, Gordon Robert Hall, who, although it is stated that he learned to farm at Coqualeetza Indian Residential School (rather than from his father or grandfather), "loved farming".¹⁸ Chief Billie Hall must have retired from the farm, or at least from the more active running of the farm, moving down into the United States, apparently sometime in the late 1930s.¹⁹ It is unknown where Billie Hall, according to his granddaughter, a fluent *Halq'emeylem* speaker, learned to speak and write English.²⁰ Given that St. Mary's Indian Residential School was in operation by 1862, it's possible Hall attended there and learned not only English but farming as well, though this is speculation. Hall may also have easily obtained knowledge and skills in farming through employment opportunities with local non-Native farmers. Hall was also a religious man, and makes reference in his journals to reading the Bible, though it does not appear that he attended church, either regularly or irregularly. With this biographical sketch in mind, I

¹⁶ Bonner and Pederson, "Chief John Hall", in Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders, pg. 17. As will be mentioned elsewhere, Hall does not appear to be maintaining a dairy herd at the time of writing these journals; however, the biography of his son, Chief John Hall notes that he and his wife both helped with milking and shipping the milk to the Fraser Valley Milk Producers from his father's farm.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A note in Gordon's biography reads simply "A most memorable event was attending Coqualeetza Residential School where he learned how to farm. He loved farming." Author Unknown, "Gordon Robert Hall", in Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders, pg. 16.

¹⁹ Bonner and Pederson, "Chief John Hall", in Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders, pg. 17.

²⁰ Ibid.

turn now to exploring Hall's journals, and the picture of Aboriginal/Newcomer interrelations they illustrate.

Chief Billie Hall's journals are, to borrow a farming metaphor, a veritable cornucopia of information about his, and other Aboriginal peoples, interactions with each other and the Newcomer society that by the 1920s was fairly well established in Chilliwack and beyond. Given his position as chief, and personal interests as a farmer, Hall is able to exercise both systemic and conjunctural agency, something quite evident in an examination of his journals.

Kelm and Brownlie, myself, and others have looked to historic study to uncover Aboriginal agency in the histories that have shaped their lives today. In examining Chief Billie Hall's journals, I must consider what type of agency he is employing. Marshal Sahlins has outlined two types of individual agency that historic actors hold: systemic agency, and conjunctural agency.²¹ As chief, Hall held systemic agency, that is he was empowered by the cultural structure (ie his recognized role as leader in his community) under which he operated. As such, he may be what Aletta Biersack, in her discussion of Sahlins' work, describes as a 'social-historical' individual, and that the consequences of his actions "reverberate throughout the totality and are universalized"; his experiences and actions as chief impacted the broader *Stó:lō* farming experiences.²² Hall also held conjunctural agency, in that the particular circumstances unique to him (geography,

²¹ For a discussion on types of individual historical agency, please see Marshal Sahlins, [Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa](#), (Chicago: 2004), 155-159.

²² Aletta Biersack, "Introduction: History and Theory in Anthropology," in Aletta Biersack, ed., [Clio in Oceania: Toward a Historical Anthropology](#), 19.

relationship with government, his varied economic opportunities) that determined his particular agricultural experience, which in turn may have impacted the experiences of other *Stó:lō* dairy farmers.²³ Historical studies in general must look at the specifics of the subject under study through individuals, as it is individuals who leave behind evidence, not societies or cultures. Chief Hall's journals, then, are a particularly detailed set of personal evidence of his experience as an individual farmer.

Chief Billie Hall wrote a considerable amount about his farm, the activities that he and others undertook to keep it running, and presumably, reasonably successful. But what do the multiple volumes chronicling daily life on the farm, written by Hall, mean? Why and what people diarize is not something this paper proposes to tackle, but a short discussion of Hall's choice in topics to write about in his journal is worthwhile. It is evident from his journals that Hall had a sense of the momentous. Noticeably a man interested in the wider world, Hall was a subscriber to the *Vancouver Sun*, a newspaper from the metropolitan community at the mouth of the Fraser River.²⁴ Hall's journal is peppered with items surely gleaned from the pages of the Sun; noting, for example, in the entry for July 26th, 1923 "This is Presendent [sic] Harding[']s day at Vancouver". Did Hall have a sense that he himself was making 'capital H' history? This seems highly unlikely; however, given his role within the Aboriginal community as chief, and that he appears to be the point person for his community for government agents, it is evident that he was aware of his prominent position. I have also learned that Hall was not the only *Stó:lō*

²³ Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, 157-158.

²⁴ It is not known if he also subscribed to the local *Chilliwack Progress*; this newspaper is not mentioned in Hall's journals. He does however, renew his subscription to the *Vancouver Sun* on multiple occasions, see for example the entries in the 1923 journal.

person of his generation to keep a journal or diary. *Stó:lō* Nation staff have advised me of two other *Stó:lō* men who kept diaries, one of who's diary is also mentioned in the field notes kept by Reuben Ware and Albert Phillips.²⁵ This may be indicative of a broader trend of journal keeping by *Stó:lō* people which would make for a fascinating study in the future. What can be said of Hall's journal keeping is that he was very interested in documenting his, and others, labours, both on the farm and elsewhere. By virtue of the very fact he wrote about it, it is obvious that he felt the work to be important and something in which to take pride. This alone tells me that a study of Hall's journals, in spite of not stating directly his feelings towards his farm, will reveal just that and more.

If history is grounded in the evidence of past thought; then Hall's journals are the perfect vehicle for exploring and understanding 'past thought'. R.G. Collingwood stated in his concept of scientific history, the purpose of examining the past historically is to answer 'why' something has happened, and in the answering of *why*, the historian will also be able to state *what* happened.²⁶ Thus a Collingwood-esque scientific historian evaluates the evidence to determine not whether or not the evidence is 'true', but to determine what the evidence, and the existence, or non-existence of the evidence, *means*.²⁷ In order to determine the meaning of historical evidence, in this case, Hall's journals, the thoughts behind the writings must be re-created.²⁸ Collingwood's approach to determine the meaning of the evidence (or the meaning of the existence or non-existence of evidence) is

²⁵ Both of the diaries mentioned to me by *Stó:lō* Nation staff remain in private hands, and in the interests of maintaining privacy, I have chosen not to reveal the names of the men. One of the diaries mentioned to me by *Stó:lō* Nation staff is also referenced in Reuban Ware and Albert Phillips, *Stalo History Fieldnotes*, undated.

²⁶ Collingwood, R.G., "Epilogemia" in *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946, 214.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

to re-create the thoughts of the historical actors. These thoughts are reflective, in that they have intent, and this intent is discernable to the historian, through an analysis of evidence.²⁹ In order to analyze the evidence, that is, to recreate the thoughts of the historical actors in one's own mind, “the historian’s mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival”.³⁰ Accepting Collingwood’s notion of thoughts as intelligible through evidence, one can extend his philosophy to consider that thoughts are housed within cultural concepts of meaning. Thus, to apply Collingwood to the study of an Aboriginal past, requires that the historian “pre-adapt” his mind to host the Aboriginal thought. To this end, in order to study Hall’s journals, I am employing my knowledge of *Stó:lō* cultural concepts that I have gained in over ten years of studying *Stó:lō* culture through the disciplines of history and archaeology. With this in mind, I turn to exploring Hall’s writings in more detail.

Although it is not entirely natural to separate and categorize an examination of someone’s life, it is helpful as a means of analysis. As such, there are many broad categories of information that can be obtained from Hall’s journals, more than I can discuss here. For the purposes of this paper, I will examine his farm, his interactions with the Chinese settler community, and the ‘white’ settler community. The wealth of detailed information captured by Chief Billie Hall in his journals makes it possible to study these aspects of his life in significant depth.

Chief Billie Hall’s Farm

²⁹ Ibid., 309.

³⁰ Ibid., 304.

Harkening back to my research on *Stó:lō* farmers of a slightly earlier time, Hall's farm could rightly be considered a 'mixed' farm, with both livestock and crops raised.³¹ With the assistance of his extended family, Hall's farm included pigs, chickens, turkeys, cows, horses, and a "gentleman ox" named Stranger.³² All of the large livestock - horses, cattle, and ox - were given names that most likely were popular for such animals on both aboriginal and non-native farms: Beauty the heifer, Jerry and Sam the horses, and even "Jock the Turkey Gobbler" are all rather affectionately referred to by Hall in his journals.³³ More than just a means to an economic end, these animals were respected 'partners' in Hall's farm. By no means particular to Hall, or even *Stó:lō* farmers in general, this view of farm animals was likely held by non-native small farmers as well.³⁴ These large animals were generally not sold, or killed for meat, but rather used for their milk or as transportation and draught animals, though occasionally they were rented to other farmers for a variety of uses including reproduction and as draught animals. The smaller animals were all raised as food animals, and frequently traded or sold. Beyond animals, Hall also raised a number of cereal and fruit crops. Some of the cereals planted by Hall include mangels, and oats, and Hall also cut hay, burdock, and thistle. The farm also contained a "big" orchard that included apples, pears, plums, and cherries, the

³¹ Please see my previous field school paper, The Unique Experiences of *Stó:lō* Farmers: An Investigation into Native Agriculture in British Columbia, 1875-1916, 2000.

³² Hall, Chief Billie, '1923' Journal, entry for May 11th, 1923.

³³ See, for example, Hall's entry for April 19th, 1923: "Stranger [the ox] and the Black heifer were Married today."

³⁴ Hall was not the only *Stó:lō* farmer to feel this way about his livestock. *Siyemches* (Frank Malloway) eludes to a similar sentimentality held by his father Richard in respect to his dairy cows. See the section on "Old Nellie", in "Through the Eyes of *Siyemches*", in Carlson, ed., You Are Asked to Witness, 1997, pg. 24.

produce of which was often sold.³⁵ In addition to the farm and orchard operations, the Halls had a large garden, planting a variety of produce such as potatoes, carrots, beans, peas, and cabbage. The garden appears to have been solely for family use, with the exception of potatoes, which in 1923 were sold for \$1 a sack.³⁶

The farm, like all farms, had its own cyclical rhythm based on the seasons, a concept that probably was second nature to *Stó:lō* farmers such as Hall, whose ancestors, and probably parents, followed seasonal rounds. A review of his journals provides an overview of the year's activities. Hall and his family spent the early spring readying for the year's work ahead, building fences and removing stumps were key activities. Chief Hall also spent much of the first part of the year pruning and spraying the orchard. Later in the spring came the time to prepare the ground for planting, keeping Hall busy with plowing and harrowing; the animals were kept busy with many births. Planting soon followed, and the summer was spent weeding and tending the garden and fields, as well as picking ripe fruit. The fall was harvest time, potatoes were dug, hay cut, and apples picked. Finally, the winter arrived, but this was not a quiet time for Hall, who spent time pruning, digging out stumps, hauling manure, and planning for upcoming year.

Interspersed throughout these farming activities were a number of non-farming related tasks, often for direct economic gain. For Hall and other members of his family, this included, among other tasks, logging timber on the reserve and elsewhere, picking hops,

³⁵ Chief Billie Hall's granddaughter, and great-granddaughter provide a brief description of "Billy's big orchard" in the biography of son Chief John Hall. Bonner and Pederson, "Chief John Hall", in *Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders*, pg. 17

³⁶ Hall, '1923' Journal, entry for May 25th, 1923.

maintaining the hop camp buildings, fishing, berry picking, and spraying other “Indian orchards” for the Provincial government.³⁷ Hall’s enthusiastic reporting of money earned and spent is particularly helpful in analyzing the economic success of his farm. As mentioned above, much of the Hall’s activities on the farm were not money-making ventures. The large animals appear to be kept for functional, rather than economic reasons; their labour as draught animals was necessary for the running of the farm. A possible exception may be the milk cows. Hall’s journals do not reveal a single mention of selling milk, though there are plenty of instances of the cows escaping; however, the biography of his son John describes how John and his wife Nellie helped Billie run the farm: “they [John and Nellie] milked cows every day and shipped milk to the Fraser Valley Milk Producers.”³⁸ Given Hall’s careful accounting, it is extremely unlikely that he would not have made mention of this occurrence. An explanation may be simply that such activity did not occur within the time frame of the journals available. This seems particularly plausible given that there are several purchases of cows and calves mentioned in the entries for the last few months, April and May, of the 1926 journal. As a herd needs to be fairly sizable before producing enough milk to sell, it is possible that Hall only started building his herd at that time, and that his writings regarding his interaction with the F.V.M.P.A. is lost with the remainder of his journals post spring 1926. Hall was able to make money, however, by selling the smaller animals, renting out the use of his larger animals, and selling produce from his orchards and garden. It would appear,

³⁷ Hall seems to have been employed by the Provincial Government to inspect and spray orchards on several reserves in the Chilliwack area. In 1924, Hall was paid \$3 per day for this work. See Hall, ‘1924’ Journal, entry for Jun 1st.

³⁸ Unfortunately, no dates are associated with this activity. Bonner and Pederson, “Chief John Hall”, in Remembering the Sacred Time of Elders, pg. 17

however, that this income was not enough to support Hall and his family, who instead turned to activities such as logging, hop and berry picking, and wage labour such as spraying orchards and clearing land for others to support their comfortable lifestyle.³⁹

Hall's writing about his farm is not commensurate with the amount of money his agricultural activities brought in, revealing that he farmed for subsistence purposes, and quite possibly simply because he enjoyed the work, and not strictly for economic gain.

Relationships with the Newcomer Population

Many Chinese settlers moved into the area around the confluence of the Chilliwack and Fraser rivers following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the mid 1880s, thus the Chinese community that interacted with Hall in the 1920s was well established. Their settlement in the area is also not well known, often appearing in scholarship as a result of the building of the CPR and little more, and sometimes as a cheap competitor to Aboriginals for wage labour positions; Hall's journals reveal that the Chinese also had agricultural and commercial interests.⁴⁰ Chinese settlers often lived in shacks on 'white' farms, serving as farm labourers for several years, often doing the grunt work of clearing the land. Unlike Aboriginal wage labourers, the Chinese often accepted as payment the use of land for two or three years on which to grow potatoes.⁴¹ Chinese merchants and

³⁹ On at least one occasion, Hall and his son John pull stumps for a non-native woman. Money earned from these non-farming activities allowed Hall and his family to enjoy many leisure and luxury items such as remodeling their home, owning a car and a piano, attending "picture shows" on a semi-regular basis, and ordering items from the Eaton's catalogue. See Hall's journals, 1923 – 1926.

⁴⁰ Siemens includes a short history of the Chinese in the Fraser Valley in his article on early settlement, somewhat ironically focusing on instead on the urban population in Vancouver and the interior of the province, he makes no mention of their settlement in the Chilliwack area. Siemens, "The Process of Settlement", in Alfred H. Siemens, editor Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape, 1968, pg. 40.

⁴¹ Several oral histories of early settlers in the Chilliwack area mention using Chinese labourers on the farms. Imbert Orchard, Floodland and Forest: Memories of the Chilliwack Valley, 1983, pg. 50-51.

non-farm labourers settled together in the city of Chilliwack, north of Sardis, as noted on a map produced by Hall's contemporary and fellow *Stó:lō* farmer *K'hhalserten* (Chief Billy Sepass) in 1918.⁴² Hall and his family interacted with both the farmer and merchant classes of Chinese settlers.

Hall's journals contain frequent references to interactions with the Chinese settlers, primarily related to the selling or trading of agricultural production, as farm labourers, the use of the farm land itself, and the rental of farm animals. It appears that the Halls both approached, and were approached by, Chinese men interested in purchasing or trading their small animals. In some instances, merchants purchased fowl for retail in their stores, including "Mr. Cam", who in March 1923, came all the way out from his store on Pender St. in Vancouver to purchase chickens raised by the Halls.⁴³ The Halls also traded and sold pigs, both to Chinese merchants, and to Chinese farmers, which could be lucrative: in 1925, pigs were "hauled to town [likely the City of Chilliwack] this morning and sold them to Sing for \$53.00 [for] 530 lbs."⁴⁴ Chinese farmers also traded "sow pigs" for Hall's "boar pigs."⁴⁵

Hall had other dealings with Chinese farmers. Only on one occasion does Hall mention using Chinese labour for his farm, when in the summer of 1923 he hires to men, Ah Lem

⁴² This and another of *K'hhalserten*'s maps is reproduced in "The Maps of *K'hhalserten* c. 1918", by David M. Schaepe, in Carlson, Keith Thor, ed. *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. 2001, pg. 126-127.

⁴³ "Mr. Cam a Chinaman came here to buy Chickens his Store is on Pender St. East 242." Hall, '1923 Journal', entry for March 14th. The Halls also supplied "Que" at the Chilliwack hotel with six Christmas turkeys in 1925, Hall, '1925-1926 Journal', entry for Dec. 17th, 1925.

⁴⁴ Hall, '1924-1925' Journal, entry for April 2nd, 1925. See also entries regarding the sale of pigs to Chinese farmers such as May 10th, 1923, and October 3, 1924.

⁴⁵ Hall, '1923' Journal, entry for May 10th, 1923.

and Ah Duck, to assist with “cocking” his hay.⁴⁶ Hall does not appear to make use of the ‘cheap’ labour offered by Chinese help, as his non-Aboriginal neighbors did. This may be explained by Hall’s use of his extended family members to run his farm; by employing the labour of his extended family, Hall was able to access a ‘cheaper’ form of help than his non-native neighbours, which may have provided him with a competitive edge.

Hall’s journals for this period also record one instance of a Chinese farmer seeking to use reserve land for agricultural purposes. By way of a *Stó:lō* man, Hall learns that “a chinaman [sic] wants to rent land to plant Potatoes. I said bring him along I will rent him 80 acres.”⁴⁷ Of all his Chinese neighbours, Chief Hall seemed to have a particular relationship with Ah Lem, who frequently appears in Hall’s journal entries. An occasion when Ah Lem rents Hall’s horse is especially revealing. In the spring of 1923, Ah Lem borrows Hall’s horse Jerry to cultivate potatoes, presumably on his own farm. This was a money making venture for Hall, who earned \$1.50 per day for the use of his horse. The horse rental incident provides a glimpse of how Hall viewed Chinese farmers in comparison to both ‘white’ and other Aboriginal farmers. Shortly after his horse is returned by Ah Lem, who paid \$10 for approximately six and a half days of use, Hall rents his horse out to Ed Thornton, a white farmer, for 15 cents per hour, which based on a 9 hour day, is about the same as he charged Ah Lem.⁴⁸ In writing about these interactions with the Chinese settlers, Hall reveals that, presumably unlike the non-Aboriginal farmers in the area, he did not view the Chinese as a minority group of which

⁴⁶ Hall, ‘1923’ Journal, entry for July 15, 1923.

⁴⁷ It is unclear where these 80 acres are located. Further journal entries suggest that this may have been on the common Grass Reserve, and that Hall did not have the authority to do so, though these further entries do not mention the Chinese farmer specifically. See Hall, ‘1925-1926’ Journal, entries for Dec. 7th, 9th, 13th, and 14th, 1925,

⁴⁸ The price charged to Ed. Thornton works out to approximately \$1.35 for a nine hour day. See Hall, ‘1923’ Journal, entries for May 16th, May 22nd, and June 18th, 1923.

it was easy to take advantage, but rather as peers with which to make fair deals in which both sides prospered. This attitude, one of working with, rather than against, his fellow farmers, is also understood through Hall's dealings with both 'white' and Aboriginal farmers.

Hall had many occasions to interact with 'white' farmers, much like he did with the Chinese farmers that settled in the Chilliwack area. His journals reveal that for the most part he enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with the 'white' farmers. These farmers had resources that could be paid or traded for, and who in turn paid or traded with Hall for his agricultural implements and produce. On several occasions, Hall was able to purchase necessary farming supplies from his 'white' neighbours, including hay and piglets.⁴⁹ White farmers purchased a variety of agricultural produce from Hall and his family, particularly the small fruit grown in his orchard.⁵⁰ Livestock and agricultural implements were traded and loaned between Hall and 'white farmers', handled by Hall in the same manner as he did with the Chinese farmers. Most of Hall's transactions with the 'white' farming community dealt with the Grass Reserve, held in common for four separate reserves, but throughout the 1920s and 1930s was frequently home to "white man's stock", a subject that unfortunately time did not allow to be covered in this paper; however, I hope to return to examine the events around the Grass Reserve in my upcoming M.A. thesis.

Conclusion – What Hall's Journals Reveal About "Middle History"

⁴⁹ See entries for example, Feb. 2nd, 1923, June 22nd, 1923,

⁵⁰ See entries, for example, July 5, 1923, August 10, 1923, and Sept. 25th and 26th, 1924, in Hall, Journals.

Chief Billie Hall's journals from the mid 1920s, expose a story of positive Aboriginal – Newcomer relationships. While on the surface this may appear as an example of a successful ‘assimilation’, I argue that instead this demonstrates how many of the ideas espoused by the agrarian Newcomer population had equivalent ideals in *Stó:lō* culture. These shared notions of how to work and live, allowed reasonably harmonious relationships to develop between Chief Hall and his non-native neighbours, a story that runs contrary to scholarship that emphasizes conflict.

Setting aside the Chinese settlers for a moment, the ideals of the dominant ‘white’ farmers that settled in the Chilliwack area brought to their communities ideas about working and living that had congruent ideals in Hall’s *Stó:lō* worldview. It needs to be noted here that Hall was also a Christian, and thus his worldview was not a solely or particularly a ‘traditional *Stó:lō*’ one, though I feel that an argument can be made that many of the Christian ideals were also similar enough to *Stó:lō* ones, though this paper does not contemplate making that argument here. The mainly Methodist settler population brought with them, tied in with their Christianity, the agricultural ideal of ‘agrarianism’ which in turn supported a broader “Country Life movement”⁵¹. Agrarianism, the view that the independent, family run farm was the economic ideal, would certainly have fit with Hall’s *Stó:lō* definition of economic success achieved through the harnessing of one’s family or kinship unit.⁵² Although the definition of

⁵¹ For a general discussion of the impact of the Methodists in shaping the settler community in Chilliwack, see Oliver, A View From the Ground, pg. 277-283.

⁵² Friesen discusses the application of agrarianism and the Country Life Movement in the Sumas area in Friesen, The Waterscape and Landscape of Sumas Lake, pg. 32.

‘family’ may have differed, between the nuclear family of the Methodists, and the extended kinship network that Hall would have recognized as close family, the basic premise of the ideal is the same. Associated with this ideal of a closely tied family working the land together, is the “Country Life” ideology, which by the 1920s had gained considerable popularity.⁵³ This ideology placed urban living in counter position to rural agrarian life. Life in the country on the farm, it was argued, was healthier, moral, and peaceful, while city life was described as “unproductive, parasitic, [the] source of dissipation, sham, and unfulfillment”.⁵⁴ Hall, if he had encountered such a definition, would, I think, have agreed with this statement. As a *Stó:lō* person, it is possible that Hall would have a similar view of metropolitan life, with its’ paved streets, covered streams, and destruction of trees and other places that provided *Stó:lō* with a sense of belonging, place, and identity. As many *Stó:lō* today believe that one cannot be *Stó:lō* without a connection to *solh temexw* (“our land”), and that many urban Aboriginals have problems with substance abuse as a result of that loss of connection, it’s plausible to think that Hall would share the same view.⁵⁵ Viewed in this way, rather than assimilating within the newcomer society, Hall was able to employ similar concepts within the *Stó:lō* culture to successfully engage with the non-native community around him, something only an examination of his thoughts can achieve.

⁵³ For a discussion of this, see for example Cecilia Danysk, “‘A Bachelor’s Paradise’: Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1880-1930” in Cavanaugh, Catherine and Jeremy Mouat, editors, Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement, 1996, pg 171-172.

⁵⁴ David C. Jones, quoted in Danysk, “A Bachelor’s Paradise”, in Cavanaugh and Mouat, editors, Making Western Canada, pg. 171.

⁵⁵ As revealed in personal communication with Keith Thor Carlson, June 2007.

Using the words of Chief Billie Hall, a detailed and ‘new’ picture emerges of Aboriginal – Newcomer relations in the early to mid twentieth century. His journals reveal great detail about the workings of a *Stó:lō* agricultural family, his interactions with multiple sectors of the non-Aboriginal settler community, and other *Stó:lō* farmers alike. What emerges is a tale from the little explored ‘middle history’ of the Native-Newcomer story. By exploring this history, it is hoped that a less adversarial narrative of Native-Newcomer relations is uncovered. Further exploration of this subject and time period will see if this hope is borne out.

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