

Ethnohistory Field School Report 2015

“I was born a logger”: Stó:lō Identities Forged in the Forest

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“Down here we say, Run or bleed.”¹ Those who did not run, did not last long. That was the story for Stó:lō loggers in the mid to late twentieth century. Stó:lō loggers ensured their place in British Columbia’s burgeoning forest industry by working hard, earning big, and staying alive. The woods was a dangerous place to work; the trees these men fell were not the skinny sticks you see on the trucks populating modern highways. They were big, heavy, unpredictable and unforgiving. Trees crashing to the forest floor meant cash in the bank and food on the table. But financial gain was not the only motivator that kept these men working in the woods. Something much bigger than a paycheque was being negotiated in these stories.

Stories have power. By definition, they inform and tell. By intention, they shape and create. Some stories do so by inspiring and enlightening, others by malice and misinformation. Many stories can, and should, exist on a single subject. In a TED talk, Chimamanda Adichie explains that “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”² The most valuable of these stories needs to be complex, inclusive, and respectful of the power and influence that they yield. As Thomas King reminds us, “stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous...So you have to be careful with the stories you tell.”³

The popular story told of logging in British Columbia has not created room to include Aboriginal people. Further, the stories told by non-Aboriginals of Aboriginal people often do not provide space to include Aboriginal loggers. As such, Aboriginal histories and Aboriginal people

¹ Albert Kelly, interviewed by Colin Osmond. June 2, 2015, Soowahlie, BC. Running, in the logging industry, is a reference to loggers who work as hard and as fast as they can to get as many logs in as possible in a day’s work.

² Chimamanda Ngozi Achidie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” filmed July 2009, *TED Global*: http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

³ Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 9-10.

are marginalized in the stories of western Canada. A new inclusive logging history would not merely add Aboriginal names and voices to the existing narrative, but rather provide a perspective that is sometimes oppositional and that would enrich Aboriginal history as much as it would the history of logging and wage labour. When I asked Stó:lō loggers about their stories, they often told me that nearly all of the men from their communities, both of their own, their father's, and grandfather's generations were loggers for at least some of their lives.⁴ Many of them spent nearly all of their lives working in the woods. Some logged at home on their Reserve, some plied their trade up and down the west coast in logging camps. Some did both. But the story of logging in British Columbia was written to purport tales of hard-work in an unforgiving and dangerous environment. When these stories were created, white academics and everyday people alike mostly accepted the myth that Aboriginal people were inherently lazy, and that labouring was not traditionally Aboriginal. They were incapable of any kind of labour- especially wage labour. These triumphant stories of pioneer settlers conquering a wilderness helped justify, whether intentionally or not, the appropriation of Aboriginal territories by white settlers.

The prominent belief of the colonial period was that Aboriginal people lived within- and often as part of- an untouched, pristine wilderness waiting for the civilizing influence of settler society. Racial and ecological notions were mutually reinforcing, and Aboriginal people were placed as part of these spaces- wild, savage, and in the way of progress. William Cronon argues that the marginalization of Aboriginal people from both space and stories was “a necessary requirement of the narrative.”⁵ Recognizing that Aboriginal people used, and worked, in these landscapes would have created a counter narrative that questioned the legitimacy of white

⁴ The interviews conducted for this paper were done so as part of the Stó:lō Ethnohistory Field School, 2015.

⁵ William Cronon, “A Place For Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *The Journal of American History* vol. 78, no. 4 (1992): 1365.

privilege over indigenous space. This meant that while Aboriginal people laboured in the many wage industries in British Columbia, they were marginalized by stories that required them to be seen as lazy, unindustrious, and a part of a dying culture. Working to counter this narrative, historian John S. Lutz describes how explorers and later settlers defined “the Indian as lazy and extended [the definition] into a dominant stereotype, despite the abundant evidence of Aboriginal people being productively occupied.”⁶ Lutz further contends that Aboriginal wage labourers were ignored in early works of British Columbian history because historians viewed ‘Indian’ and ‘work’ as oxymoronical terms.⁷ These stories created clear boundaries of what being ‘Traditionally’ Aboriginal meant; Aboriginal people did not work, and they were in-tune and part of nature. This allowed them to be ‘othered’ by white society. In these terms, many non-Aboriginal people viewed Aboriginal identity as locked in a vacuum, leaving little room for change.

Many historians have studied the impacts of wage labour on Aboriginal society and identity. The story of the inclusion of Aboriginal loggers in the historiography of British Columbian labour history began out of a contentious publication in 1972. Rolf Knight’s *Indians at Work* challenged historiographical orthodoxy by demonstrating that Aboriginal labourers remained an important component of British Columbia’s work force well into the twentieth century.⁸ Despite Knight’s findings, historians, such as Robin Fisher, continued to accept that Aboriginal people played a “peripheral role in British Columbia’s economy” after the decline of

⁶ John S. Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸ Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star, 1972), 11-12.

the fur trade.⁹ Regardless of the discourse shattering potential, Knight's argument remained on the margins of British Columbian labour history until modern treaty negotiations revealed that Aboriginal people sought much more than renegotiations of space; they sought the restoration of productive economical systems that would allow them to re-engage the employment market and escape welfare dependency.

But even Knight only tangentially discussed Aboriginal loggers. As have many of the historians who have discussed Aboriginal labour history since then. This is not a fault- the complex field of Aboriginal labour has many different facets and occupations to discuss. Any lack of discussion of Aboriginal logging is usually paralleled by equally valuable histories of Aboriginal labour in other occupations. But from my experience, many of the male members of Aboriginal communities were actively involved in logging for at least some of their lives. The time has come to tell their stories.

Recent scholarship has begun to address the holes in the historiography pertaining to Aboriginal wage labour in logging. Lutz's monograph *Makuk*, for example makes many important and original contributions. His theoretical framework of 'moditional economies,' (*modern* and *traditional*) a dynamic mixing of pre-contact economical and societal structures within the emerging capitalist economy, allows historians to consider the ways that Aboriginal people controlled how they accepted or rejected certain elements of western economics.¹⁰ Lutz contends that since at least the 1860s "Aboriginal people made up a significant part of the logging crews"¹¹ and that "the forest industry has continued to be a major employer of

⁹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 210.

¹⁰ Lutz, 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

Aboriginal people in the province, but it is difficult to chart changing patterns after 1954.”¹² The Stó:lō loggers interviewed for this study worked predominantly in the second half of the twentieth century. From their recollections, Aboriginal loggers made up a significant portion of the labour force right up until the industry’s decline in the late twentieth century. I intend to add their voices to the analysis started by Lutz that focused on an earlier era.

It is important to note, however, that I am not the first person to interview contemporary Stó:lō loggers about their experiences in the woods. Historical Geographer Amy O’Neill spent many hours sitting and listening to Stó:lō loggers in the mid-1990s. This led to the writing of her Master’s Thesis, *Identity, Culture, and the Forest: The Stó:lō*, a discussion of Stó:lō logger’s perceptions of conflict between ‘traditional’ Stó:lō values and forestry. For O’Neill, the world of commercial logging was purely economical, and was something that needed to be contrasted against Stó:lō spirituality and pre-contact societal customs. This bias, it appears, steered her analysis in a direction that precluded her from appreciating that logging was not necessarily (or even primarily) regarded by Stó:lō loggers as something that compromised their indigeneity. For in speaking to some of the same loggers O’Neil spoke with, and in reviewing the recordings she made two decades ago, it is apparent that it was not only through cultural assimilation and economic need that Stó:lō men found themselves working in the woods; nor did logging cause them to lose their culture and their ability to provide for themselves (which O’Neil attributes to having allowed them to work in the woods in spite of Stó:lō traditions and spiritual belief). After conducting my research, I am left with the conclusion that her analysis was shaped by the narratives that she wanted to hear, not by the stories that she was being told.

This is not to say that O’Neill does not make interesting insights. Indeed, some Stó:lō loggers clearly struggled with notions of spirituality and the destructive nature of logging. And

¹² Ibid., 215.

these voices deserve attention and analysis. But many other loggers became irritated with her line of questioning and her conclusions, and denied outright any connection, or disconnection, between their roles as loggers and Stó:lō spirituality. As one frustrated Stó:lō logger asserted, “Trees are alive, right...so now I have feelings for the tree right? But the only thing that I look at while doing my work is that, number one, we need money. We need a job.”¹³ O’Neill became trapped in a methodological feedback loop- she could not accept that a culturally informed indigenous person could participate in the commercial harvesting of trees, and as such she consistently tried to find reasons why these men could be so isolated from their “traditional” and “spiritual” identities as Stó:lō men. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz once warned about researchers getting too caught up in their interpretation and framework to adequately assess what was actually being negotiated: “A good interpretation of anything...takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us somewhere else...it is something else than what the task at hand...calls for.”¹⁴ O’Neill sought to find the continuity in change - the pre-contact and ‘traditional’ in modern. My analysis in this report is unconstrained by these binaries, and seeks to build upon Keith Carlson’s argument, that the more interesting objective is to look for change in continuity, and continuity in change.¹⁵

¹³ Jack Mussel, interviewed by Amy O’Neill, qtd. in Amy O’Neill, *Identity, Culture and the Forest: The Stó:lō* (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1999), 36.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 18.

¹⁵ In his book on Stó:lō social structures and identity, *The Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism*, Keith Carlson draws upon Marshall Sahlins’ complication of historical ‘event’ and ‘structure’ to explain that “historical events can become ethnographically intelligible through the study of change rather than stasis. Instead of looking for continuity in change [Sahlins] challenges us to seek change in continuity.” O’Neill fell into the pitfall of using the term ‘tradition’ with too tight of a lens. Being “traditionally Stó:lō” was something that had to reconcile directly with the Stó:lō world before the arrival of white people, a sort of pristine social and cultural construct that became increasingly diluted as white settlers populated British Columbia. O’Neill asked Stó:lō loggers about the way that they reconciled tradition with being a logger- she assumed that these Stó:lō men agreed, that the ways they lived and worked was somehow untraditional: “Having logged most of their lives, there was a sense that spiritual values, if taken ‘too far,’ would end up running against...work histories that provided the material basis for families, dignity, and pride.”¹⁵

Such a perspective need not lead one away from discussions about spirituality and cultural continuities in the face of colonial incursions. When I interviewed Stó:lō loggers in preparation for this paper, for example, I thought that it might be interesting to ask these men about how they felt about certain elements of Stó:lō spirituality. One oral tradition, about a generous man named Xepa:y, who in the distant past was transformed into the cedar tree upon his death so he could continue giving to Stó:lō people, sat prominently in my mind.¹⁶ I asked Stó:lō loggers about their opinions on spirituality and forest work, and like O'Neill, I received little response. But it soon became apparent that this did not mean these men saw themselves as being out of step with tradition - or any less Stó:lō - because of it. They simply had a different discourse surrounding tradition. An analysis emphasizing the disconnect between tradition and modernity might contend that Stó:lō men were “forced” into their careers as loggers, and cut down trees in spite of Stó:lō spirituality, which in turn resulted in “an unavoidable antagonism.”¹⁷ Yet, is it clear that loggers who did not reconcile spiritually need not be deemed to have viewed the forest and logging solely in economic terms.

The stories Stó:lō loggers told me bounded with tradition. For these men, tradition meant working hard and taking care of your family to the best of your ability, even if it meant long stints away from home in a dangerous environment. Because these men's work meant cutting down trees with modern machinery within a capitalist economy, they did not fit into a non-Aboriginal expectation and definition of mythic (and historically fictitious) indigenous tradition.

Some of her informants repeatedly told her that they did not reflect on their time in the woods as something that needed to be thought of through her lens of spirituality. The two sides of these conversations were left feeling frustrated. They were talking past each other.

¹⁶ Sonny McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything,” in *Be of Good Mind*, Bruce Miller, ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 104.

¹⁷ O'Neill, 111.

In this paper, I argue that the stories told to me by Stó:lō loggers are truly representative of how these men saw themselves as acting within a traditional framework. For them, logging was a point of pride, and a way to honour their ancestors (their fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers and uncles) by following in their footsteps, and using the forest to provide for their families.

Stó:lō loggers serve as excellent examples to highlight how stories can be used to inform historical analysis. Largely, it is because of the way that Stó:lō men talked about their time in the woods. All of the interviews I conducted were shaped chronologically and thematically like a story. When I sat down with Albert ‘Ab’ Kelly, a retired Stó:lō logger, Ab said to me, “So you want to know about logging? I’m your man, and I’ve got some stories for you.”¹⁸ Ab, and many of the other Stó:lō loggers I spoke with, described their histories as such. I have decided to embrace this structure as well. What follows is a discussion of the main elements of the stories told to me by these men. This story begins at the start of careers, as boys transitioning into the world of men, often following in their father’s and grandfather’s footsteps. It carries along through their rise into the logging camp hierarchy, the hard work in a physically demanding environment. Through hard work and mechanical ingenuity, these men turned limited opportunities into thriving and meaningful careers in the woods. Falling massive trees gave Stó:lō loggers a way to transcend social and racial stereotypes, so they could at least some of the time stand on equal, and sometimes even higher, footings than their white colleagues.¹⁹ These stories describe how logging became an integral part of the formation of identity for certain Stó:lō men.

¹⁸ Interview with Albert Kelly.

¹⁹ I do not mean to suggest that there was only Aboriginal and white loggers in the industry. Rather, I use the term ‘white’ to highlight the differences between Aboriginal and settler societies, which were the basis of racist and assimilative policies towards Aboriginal people. Interesting analysis could be done on the role of race within the logging camp in a much broader context. But for the purposes of this paper, I chose to simplify the racial diversity of the logging industry to highlight Aboriginal loggers.

Entering the Woods

Many of the Stó:lō loggers that I interviewed for this project started their careers in the woods at a young age. For some, it was an escape from Residential Schools and the oppressive system of cultural assimilation.²⁰ But this was not always the motivation. Some of the loggers I spoke with did not attend Residential Schools, rather they attended public schools in the Chilliwack area. And indeed, all of these loggers expressed the need to go to work to help lessen the financial burden on their families. They recognized a need to help out their parents, and many of them did so by following in the footsteps of their grandfathers, fathers, brothers, and/or uncles. Each of the people I interviewed had extensive familial ties to the logging industry, reaching back several generations. For these young boys, picking up a saw (whether a cross-cut operated by muscle or a chain driven by gasoline) was a way for them to ascend from childhood into adulthood. It was a way to provide for their families by using the forest and its resources. For some, it was a summer job that ended after graduation from high school. For others, it was the start of a long career, and the formation of a distinct Stó:lō identity.

The loggers I interviewed for this study started work at a time when logging was largely a mechanized industry. They worked with powerful chainsaws, complex rigging equipment, and heavy machinery. But it was still tough and demanding hard work. Before telling the stories of these loggers, it will first be helpful to briefly summarize the logging process in which these men worked.²¹ In the era under study here (roughly the 1950s-1980s) the first into the woods were the

²⁰ Several of the loggers interviewed for this paper attended Residential Schools, and found that working in a logging camp provided them with an alternative that allowed them to escape the oppressive nature of the schools, while also providing much needed income for their families. I have also listened to similar narratives while conducting ethnohistorical research with Tla'amin loggers (Sunshine Coast of BC, several miles north of Powell River), which will be included in my forthcoming Master's Thesis, *Giant Trees, Iron Men: Coast Salish Loggers, Identity, and Masculinity*.

²¹ For a more detailed description of how this logging system worked, please see Henry Pennier's *Call me Hank: A Stó:lō Man's Reflections on Logging, Living, and Growing Old*, eds. Keith Carlson and Kristina Fagan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 90-97.

fallers, the men responsible for cutting down the trees. These men often worked alone or in small teams. Buckers followed behind, limbing the trees and cutting them into uniform logs. Often, a faller would do both jobs. After the fallers and buckers finished in an area, in came the rigging crew. Either by using a sturdy ‘Spar’ tree, or a steel tower, these men rigged the equipment that would pull out the giant logs. The riggers worked as a crew: there was the rigging slinger, responsible for directing the rigging crew and maintaining safety; the high-rigger, the most senior rigger, who prepared the spar tree or rigging tower; chokermen, who attached, or set, rigging cables to the logs; the chasers, those who un-hooked the cables at the log-dump; and the hook-tender, or ‘hooker,’ the foreman of the entire crew, responsible for getting the logs from the forest to the loading area. Once the trees were off the mountain, the loaders placed the logs onto awaiting trucks. Sometimes logs were dumped directly into a body of water. Here the boom men and tug boat operators would congregate logs into ‘log booms’ and transport them to market.

Most Stó:lō loggers began their careers in the industry as chokermen. This was the ‘entry level’ position in the woods. Some stayed setting chokers for their entire careers, others ascended the logging camp hierarchy into better paying, and more prestigious positions. Many did most of the jobs at different points in their career. But a strong work ethic ensured that most of these Stó:lō men came to be considered by their peers as ‘High-Ballers,’ an industry term used for those who worked hard, fast, and therefore were the top financial earners .

Paris ‘Perry’ Casmir Peters’s logging experience started well before his first job in commercial logging in 1957.²² Perry grew up in the bush. By age nine, he was helping his grandfather, Arthur Peters log near their home on Seabird Island. Perry remembers the amount of large old-growth cedars that he and his grandfather removed from the reserve. In those days, the

²² Paris Peters, interviewed by Colin Osmond. June 2, 2015, Seabird Island, BC.

mill at Harrison Lake ran around the clock to try to keep up with the amount of wood supplied by people like Perry and his grandfather.

When young Perry was not busy toppling giant cedars with his grandfather, he worked independently cutting cedar bolts that sawmills would purchase and then cut into shakes and shingles. After about a month of work, Perry had enough bolts cut to fill a truck, which he would then take to the local mill to sell. The proceeds from Perry's labour went to his mother. From a young age, Perry learned that everyone had a responsibility to work hard and support family.

When Perry turned fifteen, he wanted to go work in a logging camp. In the 1960s it was not uncommon for boys as young as Perry, and often quite younger, to seek work in the woods. But Perry refused to lie about his age, and he was sent home after a few days. Undeterred, Perry dropped out of school and kept on going back, year after year, until they kept him on. Perry became the next in a long line of fallers; both his grandfather and his father had been fallers as well. This was the start of a long career in the woods, one that carried Perry all over the West Coast in search of adventure, and bigger trees.

Albert 'Ab' Kelly, an oft-described 'Legend in the Bush,' began his career in a similar way. Ab's father, Mike Kelly, was a logger who worked around the Chilliwack Lake area, and Ab realized that if he quit school and followed his father, he could help out with the household finances. Ab was fifteen years old. He made the decision to leave school and become a logger independent of his parents. In fact, when Ab went to find work, he went to where his father was logging. Ab worked for a few days before his father even realized that he was there: "He was sure surprised when he seen me!"²³ Ab came from a logging family. His father and many of his uncles worked in the camps around Chilliwack Lake, and throughout the Fraser Valley. Ab's

²³ Interview with Albert Kelly.

grandfather, Francis, never worked in the commercial logging industry, but he was a farmer who cleared his own land on the Soowahlie Reserve. Ab told me of how his grandfather taught him the importance of hard work and avoiding laziness:

My grandfather taught me... 'Don't be lazy, and don't dog around, because nobody likes anybody like that, you won't ever get another job...always stay on top of everything.' He was hard worker. You know, when I was growing up, I said I want to be a man just like him. Because I watched him work, man, there was no daylight under his boots, he would just give...he was a farmer...just down here [in Soowahlie]...Francis, my Dad's dad...cause he had cows and horses, and he had to get the hay in. And he was right on top of everything.²⁴

The Kelly family found their place in Stó:lō society through hard work and taking care of each other. And Ab realized this at a young age- a significant portion of every cheque he earned as a young logger went straight to his mother.

Chris and Danny Francis, from Chehalis, both worked long careers as loggers. Danny, known widely for his mechanical prowess, began logging at fourteen in 1948. Chris followed shortly after at fifteen, in 1952. In fact, all of their brothers took up jobs in the industry. Chris and Danny both spoke of their father's, also named Danny, career as both a hand logger on the Chehalis reserve and as a commercial logger. Danny Sr. taught his children about logging at an early age, and they remember him using ancient Stó:lō methods for falling trees well into the twentieth century: "Our Dad, we had no power saw in those days, and our Dad put an undercut...and he stuffed it with pitch and lit it...during the day, by four o'clock in the morning...you heard it go down and hit the ground. The next day, he was out there bucking by hand!"²⁵ The Francis boys also remembered their father's success in the commercial logging industry. They remember their father, in the first year of The Great Depression, being one of few people in the Fraser Valley- Aboriginal or Non-Aboriginal- to purchase a brand new 1929 Ford

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Chris and Danny Francis, interviewed by Colin Osmond. May 22, 2015, Chehalis, BC.

car. Even more surprising when one considers that the only way to reach Chehalis at that time was by boat on the Harrison River.

The Francis' remember their father as being an excellent provider for his family, and he did so by going off to work in the forest. When it became time for Chris and Danny to work, their mother gave them some advice for surviving in the logging industry: "Just keep your hands out of your pockets and get in there and do the job and get out fast, and they'll like you." So that's what we did."²⁶ When they became of age, they followed their father's and brother's footsteps.

Grand Chief Ron John, of Chawathil started his logging career in 1947, at the age of twelve. Ron was introduced to logging as a young child by working with his grandfather, using a two-man cross-cut saw. Ron wanted to cut firewood on the reserve to make money, so he figured out an interesting way to work alone with the two-man equipment:

You usually had to have a partner at the other end of the saw, but a lot of times I didn't. But I was kind of inventive. There would be a little...tree on the other side, I'd hook a rope on there, and I'd pull it, and the tree would come this way, and then it would pull the saw back! That's how I worked it!²⁷

Ron's father's generation logged locally, primarily in and around their reserve, and almost always within Stó:lō traditional territory. When Ron was fed up with Residential School education because he did not like "the way they taught [and] treated First Nations people,"²⁸ he left to start working. After Ron left for a brief stint working in Washington, his father passed away, requiring him to "come home and be the man of the house."²⁹ He was working around his

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ron and Patricia John, interviewed by Keith Carlson, Michelle Brandsma, and Colin Osmond. May 21, 2015, Chawathil, BC.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

home on the reserve when a truck came by. The driver asked Ron if he wanted to be a logger, and twelve year old Ron said yes. He knew that logging could provide the income he was now expected to provide after the loss of his father. So, like his father, and his father before him, Ron went to work in the woods.

Some Stó:lō loggers started in logging not by leaving a school, Residential or otherwise, but by working during the summer months as a way to provide extra income around the house. Some, like Grand Chief Clarence ‘Kat’ Pennier, logged for a few summers before graduating from St. Mary’s Residential school and moving on to pursue his education in Vancouver. Kat remembers the commonality of bringing family members to work, stating that “My older brother wanted me to be a logger ...it was pretty common for them to bring their younger siblings out...cause they had an in with the company, and if they needed additional workers... they’d introduce them. Because that’s the way it was, you often had different brothers or cousins all working together.”³⁰ Kat stayed in school, and he remembers many of his colleagues that “got up and ran away to get to work and provide for themselves and their family.”³¹ Kat left the industry shortly after graduating school, partly because his father, a well-known high-rigger and faller, died in a tragic logging accident, leaving his mother to be the primary care-giver for the family.

While a tragic accident ended Kat’s career, some Stó:lō loggers stayed in the woods after they finished their education. Stan McKay, from Matsqui, began logging after his sister and brother-in-law insisted that he start pulling his weight by looking for a summer job: “When I was about 15, my brother-in-law...he said ‘I can get you on in the logging camp, want to go

³⁰ Clarence Pennier, interviewed by Colin Osmond. May 20, 2015. Sardis, BC.

³¹ Interview with Clarence Pennier.

logging?’ [I said] Sure!’³² After that first summer, Stan followed his family members to camps in the Fraser Valley, Washington State, and even up to Alaska.

Stan also spoke proudly of his father’s work in the logging industry. He described his father’s generation’s work as “bull work,” because of their lack of power saws and equipment. Stan remembers watching his father and other men from Matsqui use cross-cut saws and springboards (elevated planks that allowed the logger to avoid cutting through the massive butt, or bottom of the tree) to topple cedars that were twenty feet wide.³³ He also remembers how Matsqui loggers cut the trees up into bolts, threw them into the river, and how the children then would catch them downstream and bring them to shore, readying them for shipment to the mill. As one of these children, Stan learned the value of trees and hard work at a very young age.

Chester Douglas, a Stó:lō logger from Cheam, also began his career as a fourteen-year-old boy working during his summer and holiday vacations. But his experience with clearing trees began as a small child, when he helped his grandfather, Charlie Douglas, clear farm land around Cheam. Chester remembers his father, Albert Douglas, talking about his days working with steam-powered logging equipment, before moving into more modern machinery. After graduating from school, Chester went to Washington State to log with his brothers and other relatives before returning to the Chilliwack area. He remembers that logging was a mainstay for many Stó:lō men: “Oh yeah, I think that was what everybody...that was the main focus growing up, that you were going to go work with somebody that was already in the bush.”³⁴

While these men come from varied backgrounds and from different Stó:lō communities, they all expressed a certain pride that came from following in familial footsteps and working in

³² Stan McKay, interviewed by Noah Miller and Colin Osmond. May 19, 2015, Matsqui, BC.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Chester Douglas, interviewed by Davis Rogers and Colin Osmond. May 22, 2015, Cheam, BC.

the logging industry. For many of them, working with wood started at a very young age, and carried into an early career in logging camps. Each of these men's stories reflect the complex dynamic that had developed over several generations of Stó:lō men working in the forest. And while this type of forestry work may not resonate with some notions of Stó:lō spirituality and tradition, there was something inherently traditional about the decisions these men made to work as loggers. Following in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers provided them with a way to work in an industry that provided for their families, and work within a long tradition of Stó:lō men who had an association with the forest. They saw themselves as continuing a work ethic and an obligation to care for family that stretched back countless generations. Their motivations for telling these stories was how they articulated the traditionality of logging. For these men, no clear distinctions existed between Stó:lō 'tradition' and working in the woods as twentieth century loggers.

Negotiating the industry- Hard Work in a Dangerous Place

Making it in the logging industry was not an easy task, regardless of the family connections one might have had. Loggers were required to work hard, fast, and safely in an environment that often made it difficult to do so. For Stó:lō loggers, working hard and earning a reputation in the industry as a 'High-Baller' provided a way for them to not only ascend the logging industry hierarchy, but also for them to stand toe-to-toe with white loggers. Stó:lō logger Henry 'Hank' Pennier, Kat Pennier's uncle, noted in his 1972 memoirs that, logging was "a man's work and it is risky...an indian [sic] can feel as good as the next guy and from what I see

in a lot of whites these days, maybe even better.”³⁵ In a society that regarded Aboriginal people as both socially and economically sub-par, in need of assimilation, and as secondary citizens, logging provided an important way for Stó:lō men to ascend stereotypes and succeed not only financially and socially, but culturally. Economic gain only provides a partial explanation for why many Stó:lō men became successful in the logging industry. Sometimes, companies would pay based on how many logs you processed. But often, workers were paid a flat wage regardless of race, hard work, and amount of trees cut. Stó:lō men told stories of hard-work and success not always to highlight financial security. They often spoke of hard work and success as elements that set Stó:lō loggers apart from non-Aboriginal loggers. Through hard work, Stó:lō men became Stó:lō loggers.

Many of the Stó:lō loggers I interviewed highlighted the importance of working hard to build a reputation, regardless of the job they did in the industry. Danny Francis told me that “the faster you moved, the better they like you... If you didn’t run, you didn’t stay there.”³⁶ Chris Francis explained that the reason they were so well regarded in the industry was “because we use to run and do the job and get out of the way.”³⁷ Ab Kelly built a reputation on hard-work, and he was often called in to help companies increase their productivity. Herman Bob, a Stó:lō hook tender, was having a hard time meeting his bosses’ quotas at a logging camp in the Fraser Valley. When the boss asked him why, he said it was because of the crew. Ab recounted the story:

[The boss said] ‘I’m not doing too good with ya Herm, I’m only getting two loads a day and I’m getting a thousand dollars a load, and that’s not very good because I

³⁵ Pennier, 58-59.

³⁶ Interview with Chris and Danny Francis.

³⁷ Ibid.

got to pay my crew eh. And [Herm] says ‘you’re not gonna get ‘em [the logs] with these guys. You get my slinger from Chilliwack, Ab Kelly... get ‘em up here, and we’ll show ‘em how to log.’ He went into the lunchroom and all his brothers were there... [Herm said] ‘Anyone of you know Ab Kelly?’ [they said] ‘Oh yeah, Chilliwack Ab? Yeah he’s a logger all right’... So [Herm] phoned his wife, said ‘tell Ab to come up.’ The plane was waiting for me... I got up there and I started pulling rigging. We upped it from 2 loads to eleven and thirteen!’³⁸

Chester Douglas remembers how important it was for a young logger to form a good reputation as a hard worker in the industry: “You would go to the marshaling area and...stand in what they called a Bullpen. If one of the crews needed a chokerman...they’d go and they would size you up out there. I guess like a workhorse! Then... they’d send you out. And if you were any good, you stayed.”³⁹

For Perry Peters, being a good logger meant providing your employer with an honest day’s work: “You wanted to put in a good day’s work...you always wanted to put down enough timber to pay for your wages...didn’t want to be known as a slacker...doing a good job was always a priority.”⁴⁰ Perry’s commitment to hard work resulted in a quick rise up the company pay-grade, and in the logging camp hierarchy.⁴¹ Similarly, Ron John explained that hard work and doing a good job allowed him to quickly move past chokerman, in only a few days on the job: “A few jobs I had...they always advanced me up the ladder so soon because they could see how experienced and fast I was. See, I wasn’t a slow worker, I was what you call a high-baller...a lot of people didn’t even get past chokerman.”⁴²

³⁸ Interview with Albert Kelly.

³⁹ Interview with Chester Douglas.

⁴⁰ Interview with Paris Peters.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview with Ron and Patricia John.

Working hard and earning a reputation was an important aspect of their work experience for any logger, Stó:lō or not. But for Aboriginal loggers, hard work and skill was a way to rise above stereotypes and claim an identity that was not just about being a logger, but being an Aboriginal logger. Stan McKay explained that most logging camps were made up of loggers from various backgrounds and ethnicities. But when asked about Aboriginal people's place in the logging camp, he told me that, "Guys from all over...Natives, non-Natives, a mixture...most of the time the guys used to tell us, that they always got the First Nations because we had good balance...they'd rather have a First Nation guy."⁴³ Ab Kelly also explained that he tried to form an all-Aboriginal logging crew to show the bosses the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal loggers.⁴⁴ Both Ab and Stan set aside hard work and ability as key attributes to a Stó:lō loggers identity, and pride.

While it was important for Stó:lō loggers to forge distinct identities within the industry, this did not lead to racial divisions within the logging crews. One might expect that such competitive attitudes in a workplace would result in animosity, especially considering that these men often lived, slept, ate, and worked closely for long stretches of time in isolated logging camps. However, that is not how Stó:lō loggers remember things. When asked about camp life, these men explained that there were few problems that resulted from living in racially mixed camps. Chris and Danny Francis remember that there were "No fights," between loggers that were based on race.⁴⁵ For Ab Kelly and Kat Pennier, the dangerous nature of logging made it

⁴³ Interview with Stan McKay.

⁴⁴ Interview with Albert Kelly.

⁴⁵ Interview with Chris and Danny Francis.

crucial that everyone got along, because they had to be able to trust that other people would look out for them in dangerous situations:

Kat: It was mixed...when I was with my brother in the gypo⁴⁶ outfit it was mostly Indians from a couple of our communities...Well I didn't face any discrimination myself, but I guess people had to get along because they had to look after each other up there, you know, when you were in the camps and you were doing your various jobs, you had to make sure that safety was paramount, because in those days logging was a dangerous job.⁴⁷

Ab: Everybody got along. They didn't tolerate it if there was anybody like that. Because we had to get along, you know. If we worked with a guy, we had to look after him... protect them with your life. That was my job, eh?⁴⁸

A sense of camaraderie developed between loggers that allowed the social and racial elements of life outside of the logging camp to disappear. For Stó:lō loggers, it was an opportunity to develop unique identities within a structure that cared little if you were Aboriginal or not, as long as you could do your job efficiently and safely. This facilitated the formation of identities that could be both Aboriginal and occupational. Stó:lō men ascended logging company hierarchies not because they were Aboriginal, or in spite of their Aboriginal identities- but because they valued hard work as something inherently important about being a Stó:lō logger.

⁴⁶ The term 'gypo' refers to a small logging outfit, as opposed to a large corporation. Gypo outfits were usually short-term contract logging jobs.

⁴⁷ Interview with Clarence Pennier.

⁴⁸ Interview with Albert Kelly.

Reflections on Life in the Woods

In this paper, I have suggested that Stó:lō loggers negotiated their identities, by defining logging as something that was traditional and therefore consistent with being Aboriginal. I have argued that these men felt that by taking up the occupations of their ancestors, working hard, and by using the forest to provide for their families, they were not necessarily working in ways that were in opposition with Stó:lō tradition and spirituality. Further, working in an industry where Aboriginal men were often viewed as highly skilled allowed them to form an occupational identity that broke down social stereotypes. In making this argument, I am breaking away from an earlier historical interpretation that tried to fit contemporary Stó:lō people into categories based on an assumed, and historically fictional, unified Stó:lō traditional and spiritual identity. Focusing on tradition with too tight of a lens potentially creates a framework that marginalizes people that do not fit into these rigid categories. To be clear, I am not arguing that clear-cut logging is a traditional Stó:lō activity. But, using trees to increase societal power, and provide for families is very much a part of both ancient and modern Stó:lō people's identities. Moreover, within Stó:lō society people consider ancestors' decisions to have been informed and therefore worthy of contemplation and replication. The fact that the loggers I interviewed had fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers who logged helped them understand logging as an acceptable traditional activity that had been endorsed by their ancestors.

One does not need to look far to find out how materially and socially important trees are to Stó:lō culture and identity. Earlier in this paper, I mentioned Xepa:y, the Stó:lō man who was turned into a cedar tree when he died, so he could continue to give to the Stó:lō people. Stó:lō people used trees for housing, transportation, clothing, baskets, ropes, tools, and weapons, just to

name a few.⁴⁹ Some of these uses did not require cutting down a tree. Many of them did. Turning trees into social power is something traditionally Stó:lō. Ethnographer Homer Barnett, in his search to document the pre-contact practices of coastal Aboriginal people, noted that

Everybody knew something of woodworking...it required considerable training and some men found it convenient and profitable to devote more than a common amount of time to it. Just as a good hunter could achieve prominence and material gain by supplying meat for feasts (either his own or those of others), so the expert woodworker could expect to reap social and material rewards from the product of his industry.⁵⁰

Barnett also pointed out that most of the goods produced and valued by Aboriginal people “consisted of such directly utilizable items as boards, canoes, household utensils, weapons, [and] wearing apparel.”⁵¹ Stó:lō people have been using and profiting from trees within their own society prior to, and independently of, wage labour in commercial logging.

Obviously, the clear-cut method of modern commercial logging cannot directly be compared with the ways that Stó:lō loggers processed and consumed wood before the commercial logging industry. But we also have to remember that the modern forestry crises developed out of the mechanical ability to process trees in a largely unsustainable way. For many modern Stó:lō loggers, the destruction of forests was not something that they considered during their logging careers. Chester Douglas said that taking too many trees “was never a concern. It was just a general attitude that the resource was there and it would never go away.”⁵² Chester believed that it was international demand, not domestic and local consumption that provided the

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of how Coast Salish people used cedar trees, please see: Hilary Stewart, *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984).

⁵⁰ Homer Barnett, *The Coast Salish Indians of British Columbia* (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1955), 107.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Interview with Chester Douglas.

market for overconsumption.⁵³ Chris Francis stated that he “Never thought of it” and that “there is still enough timber out there...and they are replanting every summer.”⁵⁴ For Perry Peters, it was not the act of logging, it was the modern method: “I don’t like clear cuts. It’s better to take a patch and leave the rest...Those big trees will always come back again...Mother Nature, she knows what she is doing.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Ron John believes that it was a lack of planning that resulted in overconsumption, and advocates the tactic of cutting in logging strips rather than clear-cutting.⁵⁶

These loggers’ reflections show that during their careers, it was unfathomable that the forestry industry would reach a point where it was unsustainable. We need to remember that it has not been that long since loggers used axes, saws, and muscle to extract timber from the forest. And while it may have been obvious to some, it is not hard to imagine that a logger in the mid-twentieth century, deep in an isolated forest surrounded by trees, would have a difficult time doing so. Much like it is important to realize that comparing an assumed pre-contact Stó:lō traditional identity to modern Stó:lō people is problematic, we need to imagine a mid-twentieth century logger’s perspective without our current knowledge of the degradation caused by commercial logging. If not, we risk not seeing the forest for the trees.

One story, told to me by Stan McKay, has sinews, which weave a common thread between what many of these Stó:lō men told me. Cutting down trees, for them, was a way of life, and a way to provide their families with better lives. Rather than explain what I think Stan McKay’s message was, from my perspective as an outsider, I will give him the final word:

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Interview with Chris and Danny Francis.

⁵⁵ Interview with Paris Peters.

⁵⁶ Interview with Ron and Patricia John.

It is a sacred wood, cedar, to the First Nations people. They used it...our ancestors used the bark, the wood, they built canoes, they made bows, they made bowls...lots of carvers made big bowls. They used cedars. Any of our carvings are in cedar, usually red or yellow... It gave us life. And I work in cedar every day, and I think that's why I feel good too. At the age I am, I hear everybody complaining down there. They don't understand that we are all connected to the world. Whatever is around us, we are connected to, wherever we are. Whether if we are breathing the same air, drinking the same water, or whether we are working with the same sacred wood. You know, I feel that the wood I work with is sacred because it has given me the life that I have been looking for, in order to raise my family. If it wasn't for the cedar, I wouldn't have a job, I wouldn't have brought up my children, watch my children bring up their children. Some of my kids worked down there, you know. Now we are into the great-grandchildren, and they are just little, but it's up to them to understand the way we talk about cedar. Understand that it was our lifeline at one time.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Interview with Stan McKay.

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