

# Ethnohistory Field School Report 2011

## Foxtrots and Friendships: The Jazz Bands and the Stó:lō Community, 1940-1960

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The Ethnohistory Field School is a collaboration of the  
Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Stó:lō Nation & Stó:lō Tribal Council, and the  
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*I'll be down to get you in a taxi, Honey  
Better be ready 'round half past eight  
Now baby don't be late, I want to be there when the band starts playin'*

*Just remember when we get there, Honey  
Two steps we gonna have a ball  
Gonna dance right outta my shoes when they play them Jelly Roll Blues  
Tomorrow night at the Darktown Strutter's Ball*

When Charlie Prest and his wife went dancing, as soon as they entered the hall the jazz band stopped whatever they were playing and struck up the old standard “The Darktown Strutter’s Ball” for the couple who had met at the hop yards on a taxi ride. For at least twenty years, the jazz band held dances that celebrated the end of the week, the beginning of the year, the start of a marriage, or the end of the hop picking season—dances accented the life of the Stó:lō community. The dances were important venues for building community and identity in a period when it was illegal to hold traditional celebrations, but there is also a legacy of coercion and anti-culture in the adoption of Western standards of ‘fun.’ This project will explore the layered meanings of the dances through the stories and memories of family members and dancers.

The starting point of this project was the saxophone of Bob Dennis Peters; it is a physical connection for Albert “Sonny” McHalsie and his family to their grandfather and his life and legacy as a leader in the community. The saxophone is an alto Martin Handcraft, which is a professional horn from a well-respected company. Martin saxophones are known for their full sound and versatility, and they are still actively used by professional musicians who prefer vintage instruments. The serial number on Bob Dennis Peters’ saxophone indicates that the instrument was likely made in 1928, in the last phase of the ‘original’ Handcraft model series.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Martin saxophones, [www.saxgourmet.com](http://www.saxgourmet.com) and [www.themartinstory.net](http://www.themartinstory.net) are good resources written by musicians and amateur enthusiasts.

One of the features of this saxophone is its ‘laugh,’ which is a special sound created by an extra key that is no longer a standard feature of contemporary alto saxophones.<sup>2</sup> Upon repairing the instrument in the 1990s, Sonny McHalsie was told that the instrument had likely cost \$200 when it was new, but could be valued today at \$1800. It is a beautiful instrument, silver-plated with intricate engravings of the Martin branding over the bell, and carefully maintained in its original case, rendering it visually stunning as well as a valuable antique.<sup>3</sup>

The monetary value associated with this instrument is only a small fraction of its real worth for Sonny and his family. Sonny became the caretaker of the instrument after paying over \$300 to have the instrument repaired, but these improvements were not for preparing the instrument for sale. He has been interested in learning to play the saxophone himself, and in maintaining familial links to actively playing the saxophone.

My grand-niece, April, she’s supposed to know the saxophone. And, there’s a couple times now where we try to get her to play, but she’s too shy, she wouldn’t play. And I think my cousins, Rose, and I think the one of her kids [is] supposed to learn to play the saxophone too. So, they’d be in line to play it as well right, ‘cause it’s their great grandfather.<sup>4</sup>

These family members are ‘in line to *play*’ the saxophone, not in line for the ownership of a valuable antique. The saxophone acts as an active link for Sonny and his family to Bob Dennis Peters. The family almost lost the instrument in the early 80s when Sonny’s father, suffering from a drinking problem after the death of his wife, promised the saxophone to a neighbour for 75 dollars.<sup>5</sup> The potential loss of the saxophone would have been much greater than the 1700 dollar deficit that that exchange would have entailed. For Sonny, knowing that his grandfather played music at dances influenced his decision to become a DJ for local community events; in

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<sup>2</sup> Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, May 2, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3, Photos

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, May 2, 2011.

this way, he provides entertainment and charges a lower price than other DJs, in part by investing in his own equipment, which allows community groups who hire him to more effectively fundraise.<sup>6</sup>

Chief Rhoda Peters, Sonny's eldest sister, remembers the saxophone from her childhood, growing up with her grandparents. The saxophone evokes vivid memories of her grandfather and his tenderness as a parent.

I remember him bringing out this big beautiful, flashy, instrument, and there would be the reed he would have, and he would say 'Ta!' He said 'You're turn,' and I'd get it, and then you know how you spit on it, wet it, and I'd give it to him! [Laughs] And then he slides it in, and then 'Boy what a good job! Boy that sounds good!' Because it was my spit, I don't know!...And sometimes I'd get mad because he already did it, like I'd come and say 'Aw!' and I'd have to wait for the next one. And he would play, he would practice at the house. And it just looked so big to me! Because I was small, it just looked so big.<sup>7</sup>

For Rhoda, the saxophone is a connection to those memories of someone who had a profound impact on her life. She remembers her grandfather as a man who loved to travel, who loved his wife, who worked hard, who was loved in the community, and who believed in her and encouraged her to go to school.<sup>8</sup> Rhoda's happy memories lead her to sometimes wish she had been born earlier; it seems to her that her grandfather's time was a golden age of community and friendship that has since been lost.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Dennis was born in 1900, only later adding 'Peters' to reflect his father's and grandfather's name. It is unclear where he learned to read and write; Rhoda was told he had escaped residential schooling by posing as a woman working in the field when the Indian Agent came to round up the children, but, as she has remarked, it is apparent from his script that he was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Rhoda Peters, interviewed by Caitlin Copage and John Lutz, May 13, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1, "My Grandfather's Words" by Rhoda Peters

<sup>9</sup> Rhoda Peters, interviewed by Caitlin Copage and John Lutz, May 13, 2011

highly literate.<sup>10</sup> His use of transposed music sheets indicates that he had learned to read music as well. He was married to Elizabeth (Lizzie) Johnny in 1926, in the first marriage in the church on the Chawathil grounds, and in that year the couple welcomed their first child, Edith Peters, Sonny and Rhoda's mother.<sup>11</sup> Bob Dennis worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway, [CPR] and often lived in section houses, which meant that his family moved frequently. He began as a section man, then became a foreman, and retired as a patrolman, and though this career meant family sacrifices—for example, Rhoda had to be sent to residential school when her grandmother became ill and could no longer care for her—his work for the CPR gave him access to free train travel, allowing him to maintain strong links in the family and within the community. He died of a stroke in 1964 while working as a patrolman at this job, but he is remembered as a talented saxophonist and as a wonderful grandfather.

Although there are no known recordings of his band, one of the most impressive testaments to the band's prowess and popularity are the dance lists salvaged by Sonny from his grandfather's home after it was abandoned. These lists are presumably composed of the repertoire of the band, and in total, each of the remaining sheets combined amount to over 250 separate songs over the course of the band's musical career. This figure cannot be presumed to be exhaustive—they likely represent only a sample of what was a complex and varied song list that changed with ever-shifting membership in the band over its 20+ year existence in the 1940s and 1950s. Of the lists that remain, several indicate a programme played for a particular event, such as New Year's Eve 1946, while another list is titled 'Sheet Music', which implies that the music was read rather than played by ear. A third list is two numbered pages, from 1-66 and beginning again on the second sheet at 133-147; it can be deduced that a middle page is missing,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Family Group Sheet for Robert Dennis Peters, obtained from Genealogy at the Stó:lō Nation Research and Resource Management Centre

and from the style of the script it appears to be a hand-copied repertoire, perhaps for the audience to request songs.<sup>12</sup>

The songs on the lists are generally foxtrots, waltzes, and polkas, and a large majority of the songs are given titles of love lost, hoped for, or gained. A random selection of titles of songs 53 to 58 on one list give a sense of the repetition and themes that run throughout the repertoire: “Pretty Little Thing;” “When My Dreams Come True;” “Without You Sweetheart;” “Lovable & Sweet;” “Some Sweet Day;” “Vagabond Lover.” On the sheets that display the programme for a specific night, the band generally played foxtrots alternating with waltzes. A smaller percentage of the songs are titled for labourers, such as “The Big Rock Candy Mountain,” “Stevedores,” “Bum Song,” and “My Troubles are Over.” It is possible that these songs were played more frequently at hop yards and logging camps rather than weddings and celebrations, because the preserved sheets are from these events do not identify labour-themed titles in their programmes. Several interviewees indicated that the songs were always popular Western tunes and played faithfully to what could be heard on the radio; they do not remember any significant modifications to the music to appeal specifically to the Stó:lō community.<sup>13</sup> Further analysis of the music sheets transposed for the alto by Bob Dennis might reveal variations or space for improvisation by the musicians, but it appears that generally the music was a close repetition of the versions heard on the radio or read on the original sheet music.

The band consisted of a rotating membership of community and family members. Bob Dennis played the saxophone and Lawrence “Choppy” or “Large” James played the banjo; these two members appear to have been the consistent core to the group throughout its varied history.

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 3: Photos.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret George, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011; Ellen Graham, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011; Rita Pete, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, Tylor Richards, Claire Thompson, May 18, 2011.

Sonny McHalsie reports Peter Dennis Peters on guitar and accordion, occasionally playing saxophone as well, and Oscar Dennis Peters on drums. Rita Pete also remembers a family member, ‘Ron’, on the drums. Rhoda Peters identified from a photo Wilf Charlie playing with the band.<sup>14</sup> Frank Malloway remembers a constituent of the Prest family, which was confirmed by Ellen Graham to be her cousin, Charles “Pinky” Prest. Ellen Graham also remembers Mack Eckels on the accordion, Burt Prest and Johnny Andrews on guitar, and a woman named Thelma who played the accordion, the only woman that was mentioned playing in the band in the interviews I conducted. Many of these people are from different generations of families playing in the band at different times, and the composition of the band is further complicated by the existence of two bands that sometimes shared membership—one predominately originated from Katz, the other from Bridal Falls, according to Ellen Graham. Only one person is mentioned to have participated in the music that came from outside the community, a white man who played harmonica on Sundays after helping at church.<sup>15</sup>

One of the mysteries of this group of musicians is where they learned to play with such skill. Rita Pete remembers asking her uncles how they had learned, but they refused to tell her.<sup>16</sup> Sonny McHalsie believes that they might have been part of the Katz Marching Band or the Hope Indian Marching Band.<sup>17</sup> Margaret George thinks that the members might have learned by a tube recorder as her father had;<sup>18</sup> though he never went to school and could neither read nor write, he played banjo and other instruments in the band by learning tunes by ear. She remembers that

...they had one of those old, I’m not sure what they were called, but they had sort of like, tube recorders? And they used to listen to the music from that. They’d

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 3, Photos.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret George, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Sonny McHalsie, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, May 2, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> These were likely the Edison wax phonographic cylinder recorders.



wind up the thing by hand and it would play for a certain length of time and they'd learn the music from it.

It is likely that there were several different ways that members of this band learned to play—some evidently learned by ear, while others such as Bob Dennis could read and transpose music, which is indicative of more formal training. Furthermore, because the musicians tended to have siblings or parents that also played music, learning to play was likely undertaken by families together.

As Patricia Ormerod finds in her anthropological report of the Dennis S. Peters house, where Sonny McHalsie found the sheet music, the Peters family investment in musical instruments was significant. She compared the potential amount spent on the family piano, saxophone, and accordion to the cost of land in the area, and estimates that the investment would have been worth ten acres of waterfront property in that era.<sup>19</sup> The investment was not made with the intention of immediate returns—Ellen Graham remembers paying the band five dollars for an entire night's worth of music, while several of my other consultants remembered paying only 25 cent entrance fees. Given the cost of instruments and the time invested in learning, practicing, and rehearsing music, the imbalance between those costs and the monetary return of the events implies that the real value of the dances were the important role they played in the community.

I approached this project with the intention of employing the methods of Clifford Geertz and Kirin Narayan in conversations with members of the Stó:lō community. For Geertz, one has to approach culture as “semiotic,” crowded with meaning in symbols and signs. The analysis of culture for Geertz is “not an experimental science in search of a law, but an interpretive one in

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<sup>19</sup> Patricia Ormerod, “The Dennis Peters House, Chawathil Reserve: Stó:lō Social Values During the Early to Mid 1900s Reflected in the House,” (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Nation Archives, 1999), 66.

search of meaning.”<sup>20</sup> He explains that the work of ethnography is in “thick description”: using the example of the wink to explain this point, Geertz demonstrates how closing an eyelid could have a range of meanings, from a twitch, a wink, a parody, or a rehearsal. It is the object of ethnography and ethnohistory to illuminate this hierarchy of meaningful structures and how they are produced, perceived, and interpreted. What I have detailed above in this paper could be called ‘thin description;’ I have mentioned details about the saxophone and the life of Bob Dennis, the titles of songs, the membership of the band, how much their instruments might have cost, and where they may have learned to play. While these details are important to the story of the band, they do not ‘thickly describe’ the different symbols and meanings embedded in the memories and stories of dances.

Kirin Narayan’s article “How Native is the Native Anthropologist?” reminds us of the complex identities that each person holds, and the dangers of assuming homogeneity or authenticity of any particular group. She encountered these difficulties in her fieldwork in India; the intersections of race, class, and gender affected her interactions with people who variously considered her local and native, to foreign, American, and ‘Other.’ Narayan advises the anthropologist studying a culture to acknowledge “that ‘we’ do not speak from a position outside ‘their’ worlds, but are implicated in them too...through fieldwork, political relations, and a variety of global flows.”<sup>21</sup> In this text, I use the term ‘the Stó:lō community’ to somewhat loosely describe the people of the Fraser Valley who would identify themselves as Stó:lō. This moniker has the tendency to simplify what is often a complicated identity, with different allegiances to place, ancestry, tribe, and band, as well as layered on identities such as gender, sexuality, and class. One anecdote from my conversation with Ellen Graham exhibits some of

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<sup>20</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Descriptions: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in C. Geertz, ed., *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5

<sup>21</sup> Kirin Narayan, “How Native is the Native Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist* 95, (1993), 676.

the complications of assigning a Stó:lō identity; in describing the slahal games that were played at the hop yards, Ellen felt like she did not belong:

[EG] Me and Edie sitting right there like we knew what we were doing! No! I'm not kidding you! Singing away! And I didn't have a clue, because we actually went to a white school, eh? Yeah, we never did go to residential school or nothing. But we would sing away, as if we belonged, right.

[CC] So you didn't feel like you did belong?

[EG] Well, they didn't know that we didn't belong! But we didn't really. My dad bought land in Chilliwack, and that's where we lived. Because he didn't want us to go to residential school, which was good for us, but anyway, we would play that, and the Katz bunch would be joining our side, because they were considered Fraser Valley, that encompasses all open, all along that side and Chilliwack and so on.<sup>22</sup>

She also speaks about her time in 'white school' as being positive and friendly, but in her choice of terms, it is made clear that she is always separated in her mind from the other children at Chilliwack Central School because she does not consider herself to be white. While Ellen Graham presents attendance at residential school as a prerequisite to 'belong' at the slahal games, for Rhoda Peters, residential school is precisely what cut her off from tradition and learning from her grandparents.<sup>23</sup>

For my own part, I began these conversations from a position of near-total ignorance of the local history and even basic geography. I am a recent migrant to British Columbia, and until relatively recently would sometimes confuse the cities of Victoria and Vancouver. This level of ignorance was a challenge in my conversations with important and knowledgeable elders and community members. I am also a *Xwelitem* (hungry person), a graduate student, and a young woman. My father is an English immigrant, and my mother is Canadian, raised by a Canadian family with Irish and Scottish roots. As Narayan explains, each person "may have many strands

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<sup>22</sup> Ellen Graham, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Rhoda Peters, Interviewed by Caitlin Copage, John Lutz, May 13, 2011.

of identification available, strands that may be tugged into the open or stuffed out of sight.”<sup>24</sup> I wanted, in my conversations, to be cognizant of my own ‘strands’ of multiplex identity and where that might influence a conversation, as well as being wary of simplifying the strands of the people I spoke with.

For Frederick Hoxie, ethnohistories should be non-polemical and puzzling; they should embrace unexpectedness and accept the tangle; and, despite the way a story necessarily normalizes and simplifies reality in the writing process, ethnohistories should remain open to co-existence of opposing ideas while maintaining coherence.<sup>25</sup> Historians need to imagine a plural future for their craft.<sup>26</sup> To follow this advice, it is important to be aware of one’s own interpretations and to try not to force the memories and histories related in conversations into a theoretical framework. My analysis will foreground individual and multiple understandings of the history of the band.

However, as Joan Scott notes, the evidence of experience must be treated with caution. She acknowledges the aims of historians attempting to communicate knowledge through the experience of people whose past has been overlooked by more conventional histories. For Scott, these histories have “provided evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds, whether these constructions vaunt the political superiority of white men, the coherence and unity of selves, the naturalness of heterosexual monogamy, or the inevitability of scientific progress and economic development.”<sup>27</sup> She cautions us, however, from treating the experiences of the marginalized as incontrovertible evidence given by an individual who belongs to a pre-existing identity. This serves to reinforce

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<sup>24</sup> Narayan, 673.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick E. Hoxie, “Ethnohistory for a Tribal World,” *Ethnohistory* 44:4, (Fall 1997), 610.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 612.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4 (Summer: 1991), 776.

the orthodox historical standpoint that had created difference in the first place.<sup>28</sup> “The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.”<sup>29</sup> For my project, this means that I must both respect the experiences of my consultants, leaving open the tangle and multiplicity as Hoxie advocates, but I will also try to identify how these experiences are shaped by historical circumstances.

Several ideas have helped illuminate the possibilities of this history, though I am wary of forcing any model or theoretical interpretation on the multiplicity of experience. The dances occurred at a time when Stó:lō identity was in peril—the banning of the potlatch and internal pressures to conform to Western ideals occurred in a period of increased residential schooling, leaving the dances with a mixed legacy in memories of both enjoyment and disquiet. Margaret George believes that Western music was forced on the community from the outside, while Sonny McHalsie posited that the dances could represent a turning away from within the community from traditional forms of celebration. However, there are several layers of meaning embedded in the ritualized performances of family, friendship, and community at the dances, which indicates that there was and is a complex relationship between these celebratory events and identity.

For Judith Butler, identity is “open to intervention and resignification.” Though it “seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means....[identity] is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame...to produce the appearance of substance.”<sup>30</sup> Butler is interested in the performance and politics embedded in

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<sup>28</sup> Scott, 777.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 45.

gender identities, which is fundamental to the core of the ‘self’, but it can be argued that the repetitive practice of identity applies beyond gender. What it means to “be Stó:lō” is different over time and for each person, and it is constructed continuously through many different mechanisms; I would argue that the dances were part of a wider array of repeated traditions in the 40s and 50s that worked to create a sense of community, a creative space where being Stó:lō was practiced and adapted to the historical circumstances.

I also would like to borrow from Michel Foucault’s ‘repressive hypothesis,’ which he describes as a part of the technology of power that is destined to say ‘no,’ but which inspires a will to knowledge.<sup>31</sup> He employs this repressive hypothesis to explain how censorship and silence can have the reverse of the expected effect; the discourse explodes as new avenues of talking about ‘the bad thing’ are created. Though potlatches were officially banned and even sometimes discouraged from within the community, the dances are an example of one of the discourses of silence on the matter. They filled some of the same functions in the community, and could be interpreted as an attempt to replace the potlatch with a mimicked Western surrogate. Foucault argues that there “is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case.”<sup>32</sup> Western-style dances were one of the discourses of silence on the potlatch and both Winter dance and *Sxwó:yxwey* dancing.

The notion of ‘mimickry’ mentioned above is borrowed from Homi Bhabha. Mimickry is “a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1978), 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them.”<sup>33</sup> Western-style dances and music played by Stó:lō people for the Stó:lō people is part of that discourse at the crossroads of the permissible and the concealed; the unspoken, ‘repressed’ traditions of the potlatch are present in the mimicked forms and traditions taken by the dances. Family patriarch Dennis Peters and his sons Alex and Oscar Peters are signatories on the 1915 “Petition Supporting the banning of the Potlatch,” which advocated the prohibition of potlatches in the Stó:lō community in order to lessen the expenses and time associated with the gatherings as well as alleviate the spread of disease. The petition further states that “it is a recognized fact that the Indians who attend such festivals do not become civilized.”<sup>34</sup> Despite the official language of this petition, Patricia Ormerod’s report on the house built by Dennis S. Peters shows how European architecture was adapted for his community’s needs; the house was built with a room large enough to accommodate dances, and it was Peters’ sons and grandson Oscar, Bob, and PD who made up the backbone of the band.<sup>35</sup> I would argue that Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry is a useful tool to understanding the role of the band. He argues that “... mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.”<sup>36</sup> I think the band can be understood this way, teetering on the edge of acceptable behaviour by mimicking Western popular forms of celebration, but also a conscious display of difference from outside that community.

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<sup>33</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” *October*, 28 (Spring: 1984), 130.

<sup>34</sup> “1915 Petition Supporting the banning of the Potlatch,” in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, Carlson, Keith Thor, with David Schaepe, Albert McHalsie, David Smith, Leanna Rhodes, and Collin Duffield, eds, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, and Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 183-184.

<sup>35</sup> Ormerod, 66-67.

<sup>36</sup> Bhabha, 131.

One of the themes that recurred throughout my interviews was the bonds of friendship that were created and cemented at dances between members of the community. It seems that dances in part fulfilled this role in the absence of regular potlatch ceremonies. These friendships from across Stó:lō territory helped to create a sense of shared identity among people from across the Fraser Valley. Benedict Anderson's pivotal text *Imagined Communities* explains how shared identity in nations function. Imagined communities are

*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion....it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.<sup>37</sup>

Dances are part of a bedrock of family memories that tie the Stó:lō together in a collective identity and imagined community in which people from across territories, tribes, and generations could participate.

Some of the most memorable dances were held at the hop yards, where families came together from across the Fraser valley and further afield to mingle and make money during the summer picking hops.<sup>38</sup> As Robert L. A. Hancock notes, the hop yards presented a way of travelling and collecting the community, of “renewing friendships, arranging marriages, and playing sports and games.”<sup>39</sup> Social time at the hop yards began on the weekends; Frank Malloway remembers boxing on Friday nights, dancing on Saturday nights, and sports during the day on Sundays. He remembers these events as being organized for entertainment: “it was mostly a fun thing. Not too many would get into competitive fights or anything like that, it was

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<sup>37</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Robert L. A. Hancock, “The Hop Yards: Workplace and Social Space” in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, Carlson, Keith Thor, with David Schaepe, Albert McHalsie, David Smith, Leanna Rhodes, and Collin Duffield, eds, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, and Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 70.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



all for fun.”<sup>40</sup> For Ellen Graham, participation in the social aspect of hop picking was the real draw for her to the fields, rather than making money. She explained that for many pickers,

...they would take it very seriously, to pick hops to get some school clothes or whatever, eh. But we were there, but basically we were, going to the dance and the slahal games and all that type of thing! Oh they would have boxing! Yeah we had to go to the boxing, too! Because if we were interested in that...But we'd get out of doing anything, lazy lot that we were! Anyway, one day all the hop pickers decided, 'We're going on strike!' [...] We were only getting three cents a pound, and we think we should get more cents, or whatever. More money, anyway. And this old crabby old lady that was with us, says 'We're not striking!' So there's me and Edie, the worst hop pickers in the whole bunch, never picked any more than 10 hops a day, sitting out in the middle of the field, and people streaming by, shouting 'Scabs!' at us, eh! And this is the truth! I'm telling you, 'Scabs!' Edie and I both laughed, we were the worst pickers in the whole place, called 'Scabs!' and we were like nothing, if we made a dollar a day we were darned lucky. But this old lady that was looking after us, wouldn't let us go on strike. But everybody thought it was so funny, because the worst pickers in the whole place, and there was hundreds of them eh. It's us two sitting out!<sup>41</sup>

This story demonstrates how the activities involved in the culture of hop picking outweighed earnings for Ellen; the irony of being labelled a 'scab' for crossing the picket line is that she was never the hardest-working hop picker. For her, picking hops “was actually a big holiday, for everybody, Katz people, and Laidlaw people, and Chilliwack people. And you'd meet all sorts of people out there.”<sup>42</sup> This story also illuminates how the community of families came together as labourers to strike, to act as a coherent unit.

Hop yard dances happened at a hall that was built on the grounds for that purpose. According to Ellen, they would start “around 7:30. ...We'd pick hops with everybody, we'd shower, we had a big shower place, eh. So everybody was sorta, men's side and ladies' side shower, beat it in there and get the hops off ya, and get our hands clean anyway, and try to put

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<sup>40</sup> Frank Malloway, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 12, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen Graham, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

our best clothes on and off to the dance.”<sup>43</sup> Frank Malloway states that the hop yard dances were not a fancy affair; people wore their cleaner clothes and the hall was plain.<sup>44</sup> Ellen also remembers the dance hall to be plain, offering coffee and only occasionally sandwiches.<sup>45</sup> Plain clothes were a staple of Stó:lō fashion. Ellen remembers being upset at the donations of “flashy” clothes that her grandmother traded beautiful baskets for, as well as the cowboy attire of the Thompsons who largely kept to themselves and were known as the ‘High Heels’, and she remembers laughing at the shiny black boots of the RCMP officers getting scuffed in the hop yards.<sup>46</sup> When asked about whether people would dress up for dances, and what people might wear, Margaret George noted that the band and the audience “mainly wore dark colours, like dark print clothes. Most of them made their own clothes anyway, so. Like, I don’t remember anybody ever wearing anything flashy.”<sup>47</sup> Rita Pete, when asked what boys might wear to a dance, stated “they would just go as they were. [Laughs] No more special than a horse.”<sup>48</sup> The hop yard dances were a place where people would meet and dance from many different communities, and yet there was a clear separation between white hop yards and native hop yards, and between Stó:lō people and Thompson River Salish people.<sup>49</sup>

The hop yard dances were a good place to make new friends. Rita Pete laughed about making friends with boys as well as girls, while Ellen Graham recalls her father destroying quite a few letters from boys she had met at the dances. She related how friendships and romances at

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Malloway, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 12, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Ellen Graham, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret George, interview with Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Rita Pete, interview with Caitlin Copage, Tylor Richards, and Claire Thompson, May 18, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> The segregation of Salish people from German-speaking hop yards was asked for from within the Salish community; see Atlas, p. 70. The Thompson River Salish people, known as the Nlaka'pamux, are separated from Stó:lō people by language and by territory.

the hop yards led to an invitation to stay at the home of Chief Dan George, before he became famous:

Chief Dan George, his daughter was pickin' hops, Marie. And she's the same age as me, eh. And then she had a brother named George, who took a shining to me, but I was far too young to go have boyfriends, eh. But anyway, Marie came up and asked us to go down and stay at their place. So I stayed with Chief Dan George! [Laughs]<sup>50</sup>

Her parents also met at the hop yards; her mother was from Nanaimo, picking hops with her grandmother, and met Charles Prest when he drove her to the dentist at his second job as a taxi service. This couple was so well-liked by Bob Dennis and the band that whenever Charles Prest and his wife entered the hall, they immediately stopped what they were playing and struck up his favourite song, "The Darktown Strutter's Ball."<sup>51</sup> The friendships and bonds created at the hop yards were cemented at the dances, and renewed there again the next year or at the next big dance during the year if the family could travel.

Travel was another recurring theme throughout my interviews; travel was much more difficult at that time, roads were not as extensive and people could not as easily afford the time and the cost associated with frequent trips. Part of the success of the band might be attributed to the connection with the CPR: the perk free train travel must have contributed to easing the great distances between venues that my consultants often commented on. Rhoda Peters recounted a story told to her by her grandmother-in-law, Beatrice Harris:

...and she said she remembers her and her mother when she was a little girl from Seabird, walking all the way up to our house...Grandpa's house way down there, and she said walking from there coming up, because there was going to be a dance at the house.

[J] Oh geez, that's like...20 miles?

[R] Yeah, it is a long time, and she said a lot of people would be there, but she said they would be walking along, and they would get close to the house and they would hear music, and Susie's grandma said that her mom would grab her hand

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<sup>50</sup> Ellen Graham, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

say ‘Let’s go!’ and just go running as fast as they could to get there, because they didn’t want to miss anything because the music was happening. I mean, can you imagine! Out in the middle of nowhere, the closest thing being, out on the tracks.<sup>52</sup>

Margaret George remembers people staying overnight, especially if they had travelled from Vancouver Island or from across the American border, due to sparse train travel. These events tended to be more rare or important, such as New Years’ Eve parties or weddings. People also came by canoe, if they lived across the river.<sup>53</sup> Dances presented a way for young men to meet the women who worked as cleaning or nurses at the Coqualeetza hospital; Frank Malloway met his wife in this manner, and commented that the women who worked there came from all over British Columbia, and were all single.<sup>54</sup>

One of the most impressive acts of travel around Stó:lō territory in association with dances and community were the clean-ups held in relation to church services in Stó:lō territory. Margaret George describes how her grandmother’s volunteer work lead her to travel to a new church each Sunday:

We travelled with my grandmother, a lot of people travelled too because they went in with sort of like a sin, if you didn’t go to church on Sunday, if you knew that the priest was going to be around. So everybody made an effort to travel. And because there wasn’t that much hotels and motels to camp in, you carried everything you needed, your blankets and sheets and towels and clothes and dishes and pots and pans, and off you went! [...] Usually after church when they had the lunch and then the entertainment, there was always a ballgame going on, and then planning for the next whatever was happening, because besides doing all that, some of the things that they did as they went from place to place was some of the old people’s homes who were repaired. If it was getting near wintertime the young kids would go out and get, you know those trees that are dead in the forest and falling over? The kids would go out and get those, cut them up for firewood for the old people, and make sure they had enough wood for the winter, and make sure their root cellar was cleaned out, so that if they’re, going to be putting potatoes and vegetables away for the winter, their root cellar was cleaned out. [...] People carried stuff with them that you wouldn’t normally carry with you when

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<sup>52</sup> Rhoda Peters, interview with Caitlin Copage and John Lutz, May 13, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Margaret George, interview with Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Frank Malloway, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 12, 2011.

you're going out to some place, like bits of paint and nails, and hammer and everything. You just took everything with you when you went because you, you did a lot of work, you didn't go just for the church service and the entertainment, you went and you helped.<sup>55</sup>

This tradition of travelling and working as a community while attending Catholic services is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry. In attending Western religious services, community members performed an acceptable form of spirituality, but these Sundays were also co-opted as community events that lasted the whole weekend. The Sunday mass served as the pre-requisite, but not the only purpose for the travel and effort expended each weekend. Co-operative aid was 'just expected', according to Margaret, rather than enforced or even given in the context of 'Christian charity.' The dances held on Sundays after church confirmed and codified that community. Margaret George only remembers one white man attending the weekend clean-ups, but he was known for helping to cook and play the harmonica in the band without actually attending the mass.<sup>56</sup> His presence was welcomed because of the work he did, despite his absence from the service, but he was also clearly separate from the rest of the community. Margaret George recalls participating in these clean-ups up to 1946, when she was sent to residential school. She feels that it was the departure of children for residential school that permanently severed this tradition.

Travel was not sufficient on its own to tie a community together; this is why hop picking is remembered as a relative 'golden age' of togetherness, while berry picking, which also featured long periods of travel and community living, did not. The hop yards were self-regulated, while the berry-picking farms were run by farmers who counted workers as they might count livestock. Ellen Graham remembers that the "fellow that owned it would come out and count everybody, just like we're a head of cattle right. Dollar, dollar...they got a dollar for everybody

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<sup>55</sup> Margaret George, interview with Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret George, interview with Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

that they brought over there, eh. So if there was forty of us, the guy would get forty bucks, eh. Me and Edie would get counted! [Laughs] Hopeless too, eh. Wasn't for young boys helping us, we'd be long dead, I tell ya! ... they'd load you aboard like a bunch of cattle.”<sup>57</sup> Margaret Graham describes berry picking in the United States as having had none of the elements of hop picking that made it fun: “the last time I went berry picking was down in the States, and that was in the, around 68 or 69, and that was a totally different, different community atmosphere. There was no music or no bands or nothing, it was just work.”<sup>58</sup> Rhoda Peters met people at roller rinks on Saturdays while berry picking, which was fun and where she became friends with many aboriginal people from other places, but there was no entertainment within the berry picking camps themselves.<sup>59</sup> The dances and other entertainments punctuated life at the hop yards and created an environment that lives on in the memories of elders and the stories they tell their children of good times.

Dances are remembered in a positive light, but there are also darker memories of the abuse of alcohol associated with the parties. Ellen Graham remembers a ‘dry’ hop yard: “No drinking, none. Not allowed in the hop yards, eh. Which was wonderful, but to me I think, that’s the worst scourge of all natives, that bloody booze [...] But no booze at the dancing! No booze at the slahal games, or the boxing. Actually there’d be RCMP running around, eh. They would just come and check, every now and again.”<sup>60</sup> The portrait of an alcohol-free hop yard can be directly contrasted with that of Rita Pete’s memories: her mother would not allow her to attend the dances there because of the dangers. Rita Pete’s mother felt that there were “too many [Laughs] Too many people. They used to come from Kamloops, Lytton, and the Coast. [...] in the hop yard

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<sup>57</sup> Ellen Graham, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret George, interview with Caitlin Copage, May 17, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Rhoda Peters, interview with Caitlin Copage and John Lutz, May 13, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Ellen Graham, interview with Caitlin Copage and Tylor Richards, May 16, 2011.

dances there was lots of alcohol. They couldn't, people didn't leave that alcohol out of there, out of those dances.”<sup>61</sup> It is possible that this change occurred toward the end of the 1950s; in 1959, the prohibition on alcohol in First Nations communities was lifted. Rita Pete remembers a fight breaking out after someone stole a hidden bottle; this implies that alcohol was a visible but still concealed presence at the dances, so it is possible that concealed alcohol was more common than Ellen Graham had noticed.

I have argued above that the dances served an important function in Stó:lō society by bringing together people from across the Fraser Valley for celebration, creating and solidifying bonds of community in an era when traditional forms of celebration were discouraged from without and within the nation. This is not the only interpretation; equally valid are Margaret George's suspicions that Western music was imposed on the Stó:lō, and Sonny McHalsie's thoughts about the influence of the anti-potlatch legislation from inside the community, and the anti-culture petition signed by members of the band in 1915. All three of these interpretations can co-exist in the history of the band—an organization that lasted for more than 20 years is unlikely to remain static in its influences, motivations, and identity. To choose any one of these perspectives to the exclusion of the others would be misleading. Dances were a way to imitate and integrate the celebrations of Western society into Stó:lō culture, but the forms those dances took and functions they performed were adapted to promote a sense of identity and community among the Stó:lō, and in that way the dances became their own. The 1960s ushered in a different kind of Stó:lō music, which had more freedom to interpret western-style music with Stó:lō interests and experiences.<sup>62</sup> However, these bands had less opportunity to perform to a 'captive' audience; as transportation became easier and music equipment more affordable and accessible,

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<sup>61</sup> Rita Pete, interview with Caitlin Copage, Tylor Richards, and Claire Thompson, May 18, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Dalton Silver, interviewed by Caitlin Copage, Ashley Forseille, and Maddie Knickerbocker, May 19, 2011.

bands multiply and simultaneously become less vital to the health and identity of the community.

Rhoda Peters often states that she had been born too late, that she wishes she could have been a part of the earlier generation that tells stories of huge reunions accompanied by sounds of her grandfather's band.



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## Appendix 1: "My Grandfather's Words," by Rhoda Peters, 2011

Did my grandfather's words shape a part of my life? I remember when we were walking down to the river to check the net, he told me "every rock, tree, animal and even the wind has a spirit Tahee." Did these words give me my love of nature, and teach me to think of these as living things to be looked at in a new way? I was 6 years old, and going into grade 1 that summer.

I don't know if I would be looking at some things differently if at that time a mouse ran across the road, or a slug or snake was passing by, and he included them. Would I think differently about rodents and icky, slimy things crawling the earth?

It was my grandfather who told me to get an education, to read those books and listen to my teachers. Did his words have anything to do with my love for reading and holding education in high regard? Yes, I think so.

Why? Because I loved my grandpa, and he knew everything, and I wanted him to be proud of me. His words were true, and he believed in the spirit of earth. Because I wanted to be like him. I looked up to him, as he was always kind, funny, loving, and cared about me. He worked hard for the CPR, and never missed days due to drinking, although there was alcohol in the house. He loved my grandma and took care of her and took her on trips. They travelled across Canada, they went to Niagara Falls to celebrate an anniversary, they travelled to California and Mexico with family and friends. Did my love for travel come from the pictures of them in these places and the stories of their travels?

I remember as a little girl at Christmas time, my grandfather, grandmother, Uncle Bobby and I would board the train at Haig station early in the morning and ride into Vancouver to shop for Christmas presents. The biggest treat for me was getting off the train and running into the station, and there was the biggest Christmas tree in the world in front of me. It was always surrounded with presents wrapped with the biggest bows, toys, dolls and bikes. Because of these happy memories, I'm sure that's why we always have the biggest tree in our house every Christmas season.

Not all people shape our young lives, but for those we love the most, want to be like the most, we listen to whatever they say and take it as truth, they have some effect on our young minds, whether it is good or bad. To me, it is our spirits connecting and transforming into our children.

I will always be my grandfather's granddaughter, and his spirit will live in me. I will continue to learn and do my best, because it was expected of me. I will always carry his teachings in my heart and pass these on to my grandchildren.

What we do and say today matters tomorrow.

Ruth Elizabeth (Rhoda) Peters

## Appendix 2: Photos

The Saxophone:



Bell Detail:



Song List:

1. Moonlight	34. Precious Little Thing
2. Just a Little Melody	35. Goodbye Melody
3. The Bluebird	36. Wedding Bell
4. Sweet Home	37. Cuckoo (Cuckoo)
5. Old Man River	38. Hill Top
6. Sonnet Ball	39. Glad Rag Doll
7. Out of the Moon	40. Dream Song
8. Sweet Home	41. I Don't Care
9. Mistletoe	42. Painted Doll
10. Blue Bird	43. Lullaby
11. Sonnet Ball	44. Huggable Karate
12. Blue Bird	45. Mother's Day
13. Dream House	46. My Lullaby Song
14. My + Mary Moore	47. When the Bells Ring
15. Mistletoe	48. Memories of Sweet Love
16. 10 miles town	49. Honey
17. Constantinople	50. Whispering
18. Rock Candy Mtn	51. Here We Are
19. Run Song	52. Am I Blue
20. Painted Doll	53. I'm Not Little Thing
21. Sweet Home	54. When My Dream Comes True
22. I'll Be Home	55. Mistletoe
23. You're (Birdsong)	56. Goodbye Melody
24. Painted Doll	57. Love Song
25. Sweet Home	58. Goodbye Melody
26. Sweet Home	59. Goodbye Melody
27. Sweet Home	60. Goodbye Melody
28. Sweet Home	61. Goodbye Melody
29. Sweet Home	62. Goodbye Melody
30. Sweet Home	63. Goodbye Melody
31. Sweet Home	64. Goodbye Melody
32. Sweet Home	65. Goodbye Melody
33. Sweet Home	66. Goodbye Melody

Line Up for New Year's Eve, 1946

DECE 29 / 46.	
LINE UP. 4 FOR NEW YEARS EVE 29 19 46.	
GROUP	
1. W. REMEMBER	
ANNIEVERBAY WALTZ.	
2FT. SHOO FLY PIE.	SCHOTTIS.
LAUGHING ON	
3. FT. LAZY DAY,	1. KARLSTAD.
DETOUR.	2. GRABBAR.
4. W. HAVE TO SAY GOOD BYE	
WHEN THE WHITE AZALEAS,	MIDNIGHT.
5. FT. WHO DO YOU LOVE.	
DOIN WHAT COMES NATUR,LLY	GRAND MARCH.
6. FT. GOOD GOOD BOOGIE.	
STRUT R. TRAIL.	REPAZ BAND.
7. W. A LITTLE DANCE.	AULD LANG SYNE....
SUNSHINE SMILE.	
8. FT. FIV MINUTES.	
NEW DAY.	
9. FT. MOOD	
COMES LOVE.	
10. W. VALLEY YESTERDAY.	
SOLDIERS LETTER.	
11. FT. EACH HIS OWN.	
GYPSY.	
12. FT. SPANISH TWO STEP.	
SGUITAR.	
13. W. KENTUCKY.	
STREET.	



Photos of the Band from Rhoda Peters' Album



Bob Dennis Peters, back right.



Bob Dennis Peters, Centre.

Bob Dennis Peters, in a new car

