

Ethnohistory Field School Report

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“[The Bass Drum] was the Heartbeat of the Band”: The St. Mary’s Residential School Boys” Marching Band, 1962-1984

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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 History Departments of the University of Victoria and University of Saskatchewan.



As a leader in my community, it's hard to make changes now because there are so many damaged people that will sabotage themselves. It's hard to watch. You know? We're living the aftermath but it's still here with us because of all the sabotage and the drinking that's going on and the drugs... There seems to be a depression. And there's nobody that's dealing with that. I think the government's apology needs to step up and start dealing with that. An apology is nice but for people that might be having problems a 1-800 number is really an insult to them. There are lots of things that need to be done with our people. Part of the purpose of the residential schools was to not only separate the kids from the parents, to take the teachings out, but also to strip away the governance of our people. Our people were no longer able to guide our young people through to become constructive adults. I think that's what we're trying to deal with now, how we can put that back into place. There are a lot of things that we need to do.¹

I begin with this quote to recognize the negative consequences that the residential schools have had and continue to have on the First Nations' communities throughout Canada, as explained to me by Darren Blaney of Homalco. My hope is that by starting on this note I both acknowledge suffering while also embracing the healing attitude that many former St. Mary's students shared with me during my research. Part of the healing process is making known the multiplicity of experiences that students had at St. Mary's and other residential schools. This project aims to recover the story of the St. Mary's boys' marching band, which former students remember as a challenging and rewarding aspect of their attendance. The starting point for this is the marching band bass drum, which played an important role in the boys' marching band but one that was very different from Stó:lō beliefs surrounding drumming. Using the drum as a platform, one can see that the experiences of those who participated in the band were much more complicated than the romanticized reputation that was often perpetuated by the myth of the school: that the band was the pride of St. Mary's, a gleaming memory in a tarnished past. Upon closer investigation, the overwhelmingly positive memories of the band should be remembered

¹ Darren Blaney, personal interview with Ashley Forseille, phone interview, May 24, 2011.

in conjunction with the promotion of pan-Indian identity that accompanied travel and enjoyment. The boys' band was also a gendered experience. The girls dominated the public reputation of the St. Mary's band, but the bands were much more connected than indicated in newspaper articles and school histories. Some memories of the band indicate differences between the girls' and boys' band while others emphasize commonality. These gendered understandings and cultural nuances contribute to the complexity of the marching band, an extracurricular activity that effected Stó:lō culture by encouraging the interaction of Coast Salish values and traditionally European forms of entertainment.

A history of the St. Mary's boys' marching band must begin with the history of brass bands in residential schools. In nineteenth-century Europe, brass bands were seen as a civilizing activity for the working class.² A similar assumption of band participation was applied in early residential schools, and, as Susan Neylan and Melissa Mayer have argued, these bands had a significant influence on Aboriginal communities in British Columbia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Former residential school students headed many of the community brass bands that formed in this period. This was the case for Darren Blaney's great-grandfather, who was the first member of his community to attend St. Mary's, bringing back with him the brass band tradition; "he eventually had three big bands going in Churchill."³ Neylan and Mayer found that brass bands allowed traditional cultural identities to persist in the face of colonial assimilationist efforts.⁴ For the Tsimshian, brass bands were associated with public performance which traditionally played an important role in the ceremonial potlatch by delineating witnesses

² Trevor Herbert, "Introduction," in *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Trevor Herbert (Buckingham and Bristol: Open University Press, 1991), 8.

³ Darren Blaney's grandfather was the first of many members of the Homalco First Nation to be sent to St. Mary's Residential School. The traditional land of the Homalco is located south of Campbell River, B.C. Homalco identifies as the northern most Coast Salish. Churchill is a community in this territory. Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

⁴ Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer, "'HERE COMES THE BAND!': Cultural Collaboration, Connective Traditions, and Aboriginal Brass Bands on British Columbia's North Coast, 1875-1964," *BC Studies* 152 (2006): 36.

as important figures in the community.⁵ Brass bands also demonstrated the material wealth of individuals or communities in the same way that potlatch would have before European contact.⁶ They simultaneously entertained, displayed political power, and acted as a source of status, while operating within the assimilationist framework of the brass band itself.⁷ In these ways, and many others, brass bands were adapted to preserve First Nations cultural practices and integrated into Tsimshian culture, developing a form of “cultural collaboration” rather than resistance to colonial impositions.⁸ These conclusions show the complexity of identity formed and performed through participation in a brass band.

The marching band has gained a prominent place in the historical understanding of St. Mary’s. The first documented public performance of the all-boys band at the Victoria Day 1867 celebration in New Westminster roots the reputation of the band, placing the St. Mary’s band as the first Aboriginal brass band in British Columbia.⁹ The early band is mentioned in local and school-authorized histories of St. Mary’s as a point of pride, being described as renowned and a sought-after form of entertainment.¹⁰ However, this romantic perception of the band is only the ‘thin description’ of what was a complicated interaction of European expectations, First Nations’ values, and traditional practices.

⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁹ This performance was documented in missionary reports and was covered by local newspapers. However, for the purpose of this research I was interested in the way that the band was remembered in histories written contemporary to the boys marching band. From the following sources it is clear that this performance was a prominent part of the historical understanding of the marching band at St. Mary’s. It provided a precedent of excellence and reputation that was emulated in the 1970s and 1980s. Examples of such works include Coqualeetza Archives, “The Way it Was: Mission City and District- A Brief Look at the History of St. Mary’s Residential School,” Mission Youth Project, 1973; Coqualeetza Archives, “School History,” in *The Grotto, 1959-60*; David Mattison, “On the March: Indian Brass Bands, 1866-1915,” *British Columbia Historical News* 15 no.1 (1981): 11.

¹⁰ For an example see Mission Community Archives, “St. Mary’s Student Band,” in *We Shall Pause to Give Thanks: St. Mary’s, 1861-1971*, 5.

The St. Mary's brass band was first assembled in 1864, but was dissolved in the 1940s.¹¹ In 1961, the band briefly revived as an all-boys band under the direction of Sgt. Stuart Dunning of the Chilliwack Regimental Band, although it too disbanded when the old school was abandoned for the new complex.¹² During the 1962-63 school year, Father Dunlop, the school's administrator, strove to begin a girls' band and was successful in planting a tradition that would continue until St. Mary's closed in 1984.¹³ Beginning in the 1960s, the girls' band would dominate public attention. Publications reflect this shift by remarking on the grace and beauty of the band above discipline and ability.¹⁴ During the late 1960s Brother Terry McNamara became administrator and allowed boys to join the band.¹⁵ The boys' band separated from the girls in the early 1970s, but remained so for a short time before the bands were combined once again as the number of students attending St. Mary's dwindled in the early 1980s.¹⁶ While the boys' band was independent for some time, it was often linked to the girls' band while the opposite was not true. One newspaper article celebrates the twentieth year of the girls' band, mentioning the boys' band only briefly.¹⁷ Former students also confirm this connection; Keith Williams, for example,

¹¹ Coqualeetza Archives, "The Way it Was: Mission City and District- A Brief Look at the History of St. Mary's Residential School," Mission Youth Project, 1973; Dalton Silver confirmed this by relaying "I remember that somebody mentioned that... I think a guy in my parent's time, in my father's time, there was no marching band. I heard people talked about that there was no band. But when I was there there was...Oh my father would have been there in the late 40's or early 50's."

¹² Mission Community Archives, "St. Mary's Student Band," in *We Shall Pause to Give Thanks: St. Mary's, 1861-1971*, 5.

¹³ Virginia Joe, personal interview with Ashley Forseille, Mission, B.C., May 12, 2011.

¹⁴ Mission Community Archives, "St. Mary's Student Band," in *We Shall Pause to Give Thanks: St. Mary's, 1861-1971*, 5.

¹⁵ Joan McGeragle, personal interview with Carolyn Bartlett and Kate Martin, May 18, 2009; Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011. The exact date is unknown but this most likely took place between 1968 and 1971.

¹⁶ Keith Williams, personal interview with Ashley Forseille, phone interview, May 16, 2011; this timeline was constructed from dates remembered by various interviewees as well as archival sources. The dates often depend on statements from multiple interviewees to approximate the year of an event. I have included this to give a general sense of timing, however, deriving dates from oral history is limited by the fact that people remember events chronologically rather than specific to a date. Interviewees did not provide these dates without prompting. It was more likely for them to remember an event in conjunction with a second event rather than with a year.

¹⁷ Glen Kask, "Performances Renound: Twentieth Year for St. Mary's Band," *Valley Magazine*, Wednesday April 29, 1981, 6, available at the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre Archives.

remembers working closely with the girls when he and his sister were drum majors of the boys' and girls' bands, respectively.¹⁸ As such, what will follow is an ethnohistory of the boys' band but many elements draw on the accounts of the girls' band.

Accounts from the early twentieth century categorize sports as masculine and the band as feminine. Statements like

The students were gifted in many ways. The boys needed new trophy cabinets to house their trophies gained by soccer teams and from the Golden Glove boxing tournaments. The girls, on the other hand, came home with certificates from the Fraser Valley Festivals. The Girls' Drum and Bugle Band was always in great demand.¹⁹

display a gendered understanding of the band. While the girls' band of the 1970s and 1980s was better known, the feminization of the band is less pronounced. During this period the band was a popular extracurricular activity for both boys and girls.²⁰ Many male students participated in both the marching band and sports without being known exclusively as a band member or a sports star.²¹

The 1960s and 1970s were a dynamic period for St. Mary's as an institution. During the early 1960s the old school was abandoned and the current complex was constructed.²²

Additionally, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate transferred control of the institution to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1973, after which the school became mainly a dormitory, with

¹⁸ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

¹⁹ Terry Glavin, *Amongst God's Own: The Enduring Legacy of St. Mary's Mission* (Mission, B.C.: Longhouse Publishing, 2002): 38.

²⁰ Josette Jim, personal interview with Ashley Forseille, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Sardis, B.C., May 18, 2011. ; Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

²¹ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011; Dalton Silver, personal interview with Ashley Forseille, Maddie Knickerbocker, and Caitlin Copage, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Sardis, B.C., May 19, 2011.

²² Mission Community Archives, "St. Mary's Student Band," in *We Shall Pause to Give Thanks: St. Mary's, 1861-1971*, 5.

students attending public schools in Mission or at Hatzic.²³ Those who lived at the residence seemed to compartmentalize their memories of school and of St. Mary's. In discussions about the band, which was an extracurricular activity provided by the residence, few interviewees mentioned memories of their time in public schools. The ex-students interviewed for this research also remembered the new residence as a different place than the stories told by the elders of the old school.²⁴ That is to say that by the mid-twentieth century students attended St. Mary's willingly, if they lived in an area that did not have a public school, as the school and residence took a less coercive approach to teaching and caretaking. One former band member felt that "it had tamed down" though "there [were] still some people that [he] went to school with that were abused."²⁵ Another important influence during this period was the hiring of First Nations staff, most prominently Joe Aleck, but also others like Virginia Joe. These staff members had a great cultural impact on the students of the 1970s and 1980s.

As the 1970s progressed it became clear that the school would not remain open much longer. The number of students in attendance fluctuated due to the closure of nearby schools but in the early 1980s there was a noticeable reduction due to changes in educational policy.²⁶ Many of those who remained were from isolated areas, like the head of Harrison Lake, where public schools were not an option.²⁷ Josette Jim explained that many of the students were related

²³ Jody R. Woods, "St Mary's Roman Catholic Boarding School," in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson, 68-69 (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001): 69.

²⁴ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

²⁵ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

²⁶ When the Sechelt Residential School closed in 1975 many students transferred to St. Mary's. Because the Sechelt school had a strong band program, some of those students joined the boys' band at St. Mary's. The uniforms discussed here were also inherited from the Sechelt band. Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011; Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

²⁷ Joan McGeragle, May 18, 2009; Glavin, *Amongst God's Own*, 9.

through extended kinship networks; “we were all related unless you came from further east, like Hope or something like that” due to the geographical origin of students from common areas.²⁸

This was the St. Mary’s remembered as the setting for the boys’ marching band. The story of the band does not fit into a neat narrative but embraces the complexity of the experiences relayed by those interviewed.²⁹ What follows will problematize the romantic reputation of the band by showing that it simultaneously perpetuated pan-Indian symbols while also maintaining and strengthening relationships, teaching valuable lessons, and creating fond memories for the students involved. It would be easy to point out the ways that the marching band denied Coast Salish forms of music and stop there, but this would only be half of the story.

Many of the stories told by former band members centered on participation in the musical tattoo. The tattoo brought together students in a variety of extracurricular activities; joining the band was the Scottish dancing team, the gymnastics or tumbling team, and eventually a First Nations dancing team. The tattoo necessitated travel around the province, engaged with a non-Aboriginal audience, and formed relationships between St. Mary’s students and students at other residential schools.

The introduction of non-Indigenous forms of performance does not seem to have been an exercise in assimilation but a reflection of the changing attitudes of St. Mary’s administration. For example, the Scottish country dancing existed alongside it the First Nation’s dancing, indicating that it was not introduced by school administration to replace Aboriginal art forms. In fact, many of the students who danced in the Scottish Dancing troupe also danced in the First Nations dancing team.³⁰ Band membership did not challenge or replace First Nation's culture but did teach general lessons. In contrast, brass bands at the turn of the twentieth century were

²⁸ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

²⁹ A narrative is at its most basic a story: an ordered set of events linked together by explanation.

³⁰ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

introduced into residential schools as a ‘civilized’ European pastime, with the intention of cultural assimilation. The lessons learned from band membership were much less visible than they had been in the past. Those interviewed did not continue to play their instruments or join community brass bands after leaving St. Mary’s. Darren Blaney discussed the disappearance of brass bands in Homalco, indicating that marching bands no longer hold the same cultural significance for British Columbian First Nations groups as they had at the turn of the century.³¹ Instead, band members from the 1970s and 1980s learned diligence, cooperation, and perhaps an appreciation of dance and music that extends beyond brass bands and Scottish dancing.

One aspect of the tattoo that engaged Coast Salish practice was the First Nation’s dancing team. The Burrard dances and songs introduced to students by the George and Aleck families allowed for students to learn traditional forms of performance. Former students remember Hollywood icon and Coast Salish leader Chief Dan George (who was father-in law to St. Mary’s administrator Joe Aleck) as a positive memory of St. Mary’s during the 1970s and 1980s. Josette Jim recounted the excitement that accompanied seeing “Chief Dan George, the movie star” when he came to see the students.³² While it was exciting to talk to him because of his fame, Josette also relayed that he would sing songs of his tradition to the students, songs that are still used by the Burrard First Nation today.³³ Eventually, a male member of the George family, remembered as either a son or brother of Dan George, taught a group of children Burrard songs and dances to perform in the tattoo.³⁴ Keith Williams emphasized that the Burrard songs introduced by the George family opened the way for the introduction of other traditional songs; he remembered that “it was Burrard dances and songs that we were doing... but we eventually got into our own

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

songs. Our St'atl'imx songs, our Skatin songs.”³⁵ Joe Aleck facilitated much of this influence while he was the administrator of St. Mary's from 1973 until its closing in 1984, along with his wife, Irene Aleck, a daughter of Chief Dan George. Keith Williams also explained that “[Joe Aleck] was the one that introduced the Native dancing and singing. Stories...he even told stories.”

Another staff member that introduced First Nation's culture was Virginia Joe. While director of the band, she made performance headbands designed from a Coast Salish story about an eagle and a snake.³⁶ These headbands incorporated traditional stories into the uniforms worn by the boys' band. Joe and Irene Aleck, as well as Virginia Joe, offered the students that lived in the St. Mary's Residence both positive role models and taught pride in First Nation's culture.

While the marching band was not a traditional form of music, it was one that had been prominent in Coast Salish society for a century; as such, memories of the band reinforce values that Coast Salish people held dear. Most prominently, the band facilitated the formation of friendships and cross-community relationships. The important place that connectivity has in the narratives of former students reflects the value of family and other personal connections in Coast Salish communities.

For members of the boys' band, relationships were formed primarily with other students at St. Mary's, many of who were relatives. As Stephanie Danyluk has argued, we should not see Stó:lō families as linear but as a “complicated web of kinship relations.”³⁷ The St. Mary's residence was a primary example of the complicated interrelated familial networks in Coast

³⁵ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

³⁶ She could not recall the details of the story but remembered that a student from up-island had relayed it to her. Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

³⁷ Stephanie Danyluk, “[Re]Weaving the Fabric of Kinship: An Analysis of the Role of Names in the Narration of Family History,” field school report, 2009, 2. <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/stolo/pdf/SDanyluk-Revised%20Aleck%20family%20hist.pdf>

Salish communities. In the past, family connections were important economically, especially among the elite, to gain access to resources like berry patches and clam beds, and as a result, family networks now stretch across Stó:lō, and indeed Coast Salish territory.³⁸ Family continues to play an important role for the Stó:lō in orienting oneself in the community. *Sq'ewqel* that tell family histories remain central to retaining these genealogical links, assuring that a family knows their history.³⁹ Remembering these familial networks grounds the present in the past and ensures that “the lessons of the past and the requirements of the future [are taken into account] when making decisions in the present.”⁴⁰

The boys’ marching band allowed members to maintain connections with family members while outside of their home communities. Keith Williams and his older sister Sherry offer an example of familial connection. Keith defines his time as drum major of the boys’ band in relation to his sister’s role as drum major of the girls’ band. It was Sherry who “coaxed” him to put his name in for drum major, beginning his five years in the position.⁴¹ Once in the position, Keith and Sherry connected the boys’ and girls’ bands in a way that other drum majors had not. Keith remarked that “it was me and my sister, together, leading the bands;” a tone of solidarity not present in other interviews. The siblings also combined the bands at various instances, the first time on a whim during a performance and subsequently by learning the same songs in order to combine the bands.⁴² Because of this familial relationship a friendly rivalry

³⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, “Expressions of Collective Identity,” in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson, 24-29 (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001): 27.

³⁹ Keith Thor Carlson, “Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory: Reconstructing and Reconsidering Contact,” in *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact*, ed. John Sutton Lutz, 46-68 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007): 51.

⁴⁰ Carlson, “Expressions of Collective Identity,” 28.

⁴¹ The drum major was chosen in an election, in which the other members would vote for a candidate to take the position. While the bass drum was the baseline of the songs, the drum major was the leader of the band both in performances and in terms of moral and social cohesion. See interviews with Keith Williams and Virginia Joe who were both drum majors.

⁴² Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

developed between the girls' and boys' band which existed beyond the reign of the Williams' but was likely not as pronounced; Keith remembers taunting the girls' band with a chorus of the popular rock group Queen's anthem "We Are the Champions" from the changing-room after performances in which they competed for the top position.⁴³ Beyond this joking, the Williams' siblings maintained a strong bond through their joint involvement with the band. They were also aware that their relationship reflected the Williams family as a whole. When concluding his comments about his sister, Keith stated

It was so good that I had my big sister on the other side. We would always be hanging out together to show how close we are. We would stand around together or walk around. The family way I guess.⁴⁴

Another relationship reinforced by the band was that of Virginia Joe and her two sons. Virginia was a child care worker for six years after attending St. Mary's as a student during the 1960s. During her employment at St. Mary's she was a director for the bands and her sons, while not residents at St. Mary's, were members of the band. Her "oldest [son] played the trumpet and the youngest one just banged the symbols."⁴⁵ As a student, Virginia Joe was the drum major for the girls' band when Father Dunlop re-established it in 1962. Her experience in the band was overwhelmingly positive and she maintains many of the relationships that she formed during her time in the band by planning band reunions. By having her sons participate in the band while she directed, Virginia was able to share her positive experiences with them.

Many other students involved in the tattoo relayed memories including their relatives, most of whom were cousins. Josette Jim explained that

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

We all come from around the same area. So we are all family that way. That's how I look at it anyways....my family members [at St. Mary's] were all my cousins. Keith and them, they're my cousins. Sherry, she's my cousin. Marvin's my cousin.⁴⁶

This quotation indicates that a cousin was not only someone who one could trace a direct blood relation, but could be a cousin within a broader sense of the term. In this usage, the term cousin acts as a way to strengthen community cohesion through socially reinforced familial ties.

While not as strongly stressed as kinship relationships, friendships were also described as a result of band membership.⁴⁷ However, common community membership grounded many of the friendships that remained intact away from St. Mary's.

Fictive kinship seems to have played a more significant role in the girls' band than the boys'. Many of the women interviewed by Carolyn Bartlett in 2009 about the girls' marching band spoke about Joan McGeragle, the senior girls' childcare supervisor, referring to her as "Ma" or "Mother."⁴⁸ McGeragle was as a driving force in the success of the band and, for many, a formative figure in their lives.⁴⁹ Virginia Joe continues to call Joan 'Mother' more than forty years later.⁵⁰ The formation of fictive kin was less pronounced in the boys' band. Interviewees did not speak of a parental figure for the band as a prominent memory. One mentioned that Virginia Joe was like an aunt or a mother as a way to explain the way that Alex Brickwood and Virginia Joe were seen by the band. Brickwood, the band teacher and a member of the Chilliwack Regimental Band, was more of a father figure who encouraged discipline and hard work while Virginia "was loving and caring. She cared for us dearly, made sure that we were

⁴⁶ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

⁴⁷ For an example see Darren Blaney (May 24, 2011) who speaks about his relationship with long-time friend Gerald.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Bartlett, "Numinous Objects": The Ethnohistorical Complexities of a Residential School Bass Drum," field school report, 2009. <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/stolo/pdf/Bartlett%20Drum.pdf>

⁴⁹ Marcie Peters, interviewed by Carolyn Bartlett and Kate Martin, May 19, 2009; Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

⁵⁰ Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

ok.”⁵¹ This statement, however, is much more relational, a simile to convey the dynamics. The women interviewed who spoke about “Ma” had distinctly categorized McGeragle as fictive kin, someone who they had an emotional relationship with in a way equated them to family.

Traveling with the tattoo facilitated other relationships described by former band members.⁵² Darren Blaney noted that “it was interesting. [Traveling with the band] you kind of get to meet other students from other schools.”⁵³ These would have been students from other residential schools in British Columbia who had traveled to perform in the tattoo, prompting the formation of relationships between First Nations students across the province. Additionally, band members were billeted in private homes in many of the places they traveled. Keith Williams found that being billeted “was quite the experience sometimes. We always got put in with good families but it was quite different to have the two cultures there,” highlighting that the billets were a cultural experience for some St. Mary’s students.⁵⁴ Virginia Joe echoed this in a similar statement in which she indicated that billeting allowed her to connect with people outside of St. Mary’s when she felt very isolated at the school.⁵⁵

Former band members also emphasized that band membership was a learning experience. These narratives reflect the form of storytelling that is a central feature of Stó:lō culture in which the performance of *sxwōxwiyám* and *sq'ewqel* are a way to teach lessons rooted in the past.⁵⁶ The stories told by former students paralleled this structure by emphasizing a main lesson learned

⁵¹ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

⁵² Travel was often one of the most positive aspects remembered by former students, in both the boys’ and girls’ bands. Many told the stories about the same events, which for the boys’ band was a trip to Disneyland to perform in an anniversary parade. These events often highlight experiences that were out of the ordinary, a draw to joining the band.

⁵³ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

⁵⁴ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

⁵⁵ Virginia Joe, personal interview with Carolyn Bartlett, May 19, 2009.

⁵⁶ This is something that I observed while watching the Samoya Dance Group as well as Josette Jim perform. Many thanks to those involved in these performances. I feel that I learned much about Stó:lō culture from the stories both shared with me.

from experiences in extracurricular activities at St. Mary's. Josette Jim emphasized that her involvement in gymnastics taught her to be fearless. She learned that by refusing to see limitations she could achieve things that she could not have otherwise.⁵⁷ Virginia Joe, as someone who directed the band, explained that the band taught confidence to students because they were comfortable performing in front of a crowd.⁵⁸ Darren Blaney valued the discipline that the band, as well as sports and dancing, taught him; as a student he "didn't want to get too bored so [he] kept busy," a practice which he continues as an adult.⁵⁹ The majority of those who shared their stories stated that they are grateful for the experiences that they had in the marching band because it was formative of who they are now.⁶⁰ Virginia Joe went further to say

that it's always good to have somebody come and [ask about my experiences] because then it makes me feel better about who I am because of who I was in those days, and how it channelled me through a good life, as opposed to going down the black road.⁶¹

She values the act of sharing her story as a way to bring the positivity from her past into the present. Virginia indicates that the act of creating and telling a narrative can be powerful in the continual reconfiguration of the self, as much as the experience itself.

In other ways, however, the marching band appears to have denied Coast Salish beliefs. While Susan Neylan and Melissa Mayer argue that brass bands allowed Aboriginal culture to continue through a period of change, in the views of those interviewed, the St. Mary's band does not appear to have been such a venture. The form of performance encouraged by the band does not appear to have impacted status within First Nation's communities nor did it incorporate similar dynamics of performance. Thus, the marching band was not a form of "cultural

⁵⁷ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

⁵⁸ Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

⁵⁹ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

⁶⁰ Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011; Josette Jim, May 18, 2011; Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

⁶¹ Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

collaboration” as was the brass band for the Tsimshian at the turn of the twentieth century. It would be easy to see that drumming held an important position in the band and see a similar value in Coast Salish communities but this does not problematize the place of the drum in either setting. Instead, we must see that drumming held an important place in each but each in a very different way.

Many former band members expressed that the bass drum was central to the band.⁶²

When asked about the bass drum, Keith Williams explained

We marched to the sound of the drum. It’s what kept us in beat in our song and it kept us in line with our marching too. Our steps went with the drum, our beat went with the drum, our music. We would start and stop with the drum.

Because of this, the band could not play without the bass drum; if forgotten the band could not play.⁶³ It was also Keith who stated that the bass drum “was the heartbeat of the band;” a striking statement because of its similarity to the prominent phrase that First Nation’s drumming is “the heartbeat of the people.”⁶⁴

When asked about the importance of the drum in the marching band in relation to traditional drumming Josette Jim explained that there was little cultural transfer between each form of drumming. The lack of transfer was informed by the cultural delineation incorporated into the tattoo. For the Stó:lō, drums are respected because they are made from deer or elk hide; they are recognized for the life that they had before being made into a drum.⁶⁵ In trying to understand the depth of this concept one must reference the *halq'eméylem* term *shxweli*. When Sonny McHalsie asked the late Rosaleen George “What is *shxweli*?” she answered

⁶² Joe Aleck, personal interview with Carolyn Bartlett, May 20, 2009; Joan McGeragle, May 18, 2009; Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

⁶³ Joan McGeragle, May 18, 2009.

⁶⁴ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011. The phrase “the heartbeat of the people” was one I heard often while conducting interviews in Chilliwack. See following comments about contemporary drumming practices made by Josette Jim.

⁶⁵ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

‘*Shxweli* is inside us.’ And she put her hand in front of her and said ‘*Shxweli* is in your parents.’ She raised her hand higher and said ‘then your grandparents, your great-grandparents, it’s in your great-great-grandparents. It’s in the rocks, it’s in the trees, it’s in the ground. *Shxweli* is everywhere.’⁶⁶

Josette Jim indicated that a hide drums is respected because it has *shxweli*. She also explained that how a drum is held affects the impact it has; traditional drums are held close to your chest so that “you could feel the vibes coming from that drum.”⁶⁷ The St. Mary’s bass drum was held in the front, perpendicular to the ground, in a way that the vibrations were lost. From statements like these it is evident that a hide drum has a spiritual significance that gives meaning to the phrase “the heartbeat of the people.”

This phrase likely prompted Keith Williams to use the word heartbeat in so much as it is often repeated, impacting the narrative he told about the band. His statement, however, highlights that the bass drum was a constant and unwavering beat that kept the band on time. It was more of a descriptive term than the analogy explained by Josette Jim.

The bass drum was also a public symbol connecting the band and school to the wider community, while a hide drum is used for private gatherings and provides intra-community cohesion. The marching band represented the school in a parade or tattoo and the painted banner on the bass drum indicated the band’s affiliation. Hide drums are sometimes painted or held in decorated drum bags, but these embellishments often connect the drum to the individual drummer.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sonny McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything.,” in *Be of Good Mind*, ed. Bruce Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007): 104.

⁶⁷ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*



The boys' band uniform. Courtesy of Father John Tritschler.

While the bass drum was clearly not traditional the uniforms worn by the boys' band occupy a more culturally complicated position. The performance uniform worn by the boys, as pictured above, consisted of blue pants and a blue vest, red silk shirt and loincloth, and headbands or headdresses.⁶⁹ One former band member described the uniforms as “pretty cool” but many seemed to describe them without much reaction.⁷⁰ The uniforms were more of a dynamic entity in stories about the girls' band. They had a traveling outfit and several performance outfits. The girls' also took pride in the thunderbirds that they hand beaded on the

⁶⁹ The drum major, two bass drummers, and eight snare drummers wore headdresses while the rest wore leather or beaded headbands.

⁷⁰ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

front of one uniform.⁷¹ Connection to the band uniforms was much less obvious for the boys' band.

These uniforms clearly reflect what scholars have termed pan-Indianism, a modern phenomenon by which certain Aboriginal customs have come to define "Indianness."⁷² Often these originate in Plains cultures; for example the powwow, the tipi, and the headdress have become common expressions of pan-Indian iconography. Thus, the band uniform reflected pan-Indianism by using Plains-style headdresses and loincloths rather than clothing traditionally worn by the Coast Salish.

Thomas Mcilwraith discusses pan-Indian influences in his anthropological study of contemporary Stó:lō identity.⁷³ He found that in both Aboriginal-administered and public schools "local native people [were presented] as Plains Indians, and pan-Indian."⁷⁴ Popular movies and television shows further entrenched pan-Indian iconography by showing that "to be Indian you lived in a tipi and had a long flowing headdress."⁷⁵ Powwows played an important role in the dissemination of pan-Indian culture. Since the 1950s and 1960s, powwow dress and Plains' regalia have been used as a "demonstration of nativeness" and as a way to create boundaries between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in Stó:lō territory.⁷⁶ Through powwow and popular culture, Plains traditions have slowly encroached on traditional Stó:lō culture. Mcilwraith argues

⁷¹ Virginia Joe, May 12, 2011.

⁷² Michael A. Rynkiewich, "Chippewa Powwows," in *Anishinabe: 6 Studies of Modern Chippewa*, ed. J.A. Paredes, 31-100 (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1980): 97.

⁷³ Thomas Mcilwraith, "The Problem of Imported Culture: The Construction of Contemporary Stó:lō Identity," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 20 no.4 (1996): 41-70.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁵ Sonny McHalsie, personal interview with Thomas Mcilwraith, Hope, B.C. March 23, 1995. Quoted by Mcilwraith on page 41.

⁷⁶ Mcilwraith, "The Problem of Imported Culture," 50.

that elements of Plains culture have been incorporated into contemporary Stó:lō traditions to the point where Stó:lō identity is now a hybrid of Plains and traditional Stó:lō.⁷⁷

When conducting his research, Mcilwraith found that there were competing views as to the value of pan-Indian activities, and the powwow in particular. These issues surrounded the meaning of authentic culture as defined by the Stó:lō, not about the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.⁷⁸ Sonny McHalsie, a researcher in cultural heritage and aboriginal rights and title at Stó:lō Nation, explained to Mcilwraith that

A lot of [Sto:lo culture has] been lost, so what do we do? Well, let's borrow. Let's borrow this powwow dance until we find out some more about us. At the beginning I heard... let's borrow some of this culture, this smudge, this sweat. But after you do it for so long, you get hooked into it, and accept it as something that belongs to you.⁷⁹

In statements like this, McHalsie expressed that by taking on Plains traits traditional Stó:lō activities become further obscured.

During interviews with Gwen Point, who worked with the Stó:lō Nation on youth education programs, she expressed that her family encouraged powwows; she further explained that powwow dancing is an exciting way for Stó:lō to be involved in First Nation's culture "because the Longhouse isn't meant for everyone-not everyone can be a part of that."⁸⁰ Point further articulated that people should choose the cultural activities that work best for them,⁸¹ indicating a fluid sense of what authenticity should mean for the Stó:lō.⁸² Josette Jim echoed

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁸ Dewhirst suggests that summer festivals, the mid-twentieth century Stó:lō form of powwow, were focused on the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal while contemporary ceremonies are focused on the Aboriginal community. John Dewhirst, "Coast Salish Summer Festivals: Rituals for Upgrading Social Identity," *Anthropologica* 18 no.2 (1976): 232.

⁷⁹ Sonny McHalsie, personal interview with Thomas Mcilwraith, Hope, B.C. March 23, 1995.

Quoted by Mcilwraith on page 57.

⁸⁰ Gwen Point, personal interview with Thomas Mcilwraith, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Sardis, B.C. May 2, 1995. Quoted by Mcilwraith on page 55.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² I do not use the term authentic as Paige Raibmon defines it. She defines authentic to mean "traits that colonizers assumed were authentic." Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-*

Gwen Point's view of powwow when talking about the Prairie drum as a way to express culture. For Josette, the round drum emphasizes family participation and pride in being First Nations.⁸³ Michael Rynkiewich as well as Patricia Barker Lerch and Susan Bullers have shown that pan-Indian does not necessitate homogeneity; both studies demonstrate that communities operationalize pan-Indian culture in a unique way, based on local characteristics,⁸⁴ questioning the extent to which pan-Indianism is truly an activity in cultural levelling.

Clearly this is not an issue for which a Stó:lō opinion can be identified, nor one that can be easily combated. The use of pan-Indian symbols in the St. Mary's boys' band was just as complicated. When speaking about the incorporation of First Nation's culture into the band Keith Williams said that

It was interesting that when we were out at the tattoos we would meet people that would want to meet us just because we were Aboriginal or Native or Indians, whatever they call us. A lot of times they just wanted to look at me and meet me and shake my hand. See an Indian. *laughs* Well I didn't know my language. I just represented, an icon of sort. It was Joe Aleck that taught us his ways. His dancing and his songs.⁸⁵

This comment indicates that Keith felt he stood as a pan-Indian symbol himself, which the headdress and loincloth would have confirmed for the public. It was not uncommon for residential school teams to have similar uniforms during the mid-twentieth century, while nineteenth-century brass band uniforms were more likely to be in the European-style: dark coloured wool uniforms with gold edging.⁸⁶ The use of headdresses and loincloths simultaneously introduced Aboriginal culture into an institution designed to extinguish

Century Northwest Coast, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005): fn 13, 212. Instead, authentic here refers to what Stó:lō think is authentic, although I do not presume to understand Stó:lō subjectivities. The discussion here highlights that for the Stó:lō there is not one authentic culture but many ways to see authenticity.

⁸³ Josette Jim, May 18, 2011.

⁸⁴ Rynkiewich, "Chippewa Powwows"; Patricia Barker Lerch and Susan Bullers, "Powwows as Identity Markers: Traditional or Pan-Indian?" *Human Organization* 55 no. 4 (1996): 390-408.

⁸⁵ Keith Williams, May 16, 2011.

⁸⁶ For an example see J.R. Miller, "The La Tuque school's 'Indiens of Quebec,'" in *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996): 226.

such culture but in a form that maintained the pan-Indian icon as a symbol of otherness. The value of incorporating the headdress into the band uniform is just as complicated as the above discussion of powwows. For some, the headdress may have served as a connection to First Nation's culture and as a publically displayed sign of pride; for others it could have replaced traditional Coast Salish regalia.



St. Mary's Closing Ceremony, 1984. Courtesy of Mission Community Archives. (Image 0250-14)

The use of pan-Indian iconography in these uniforms is exemplary of the complicated cultural landscape that was the St. Mary's boys' marching band. While some attributes of the band were gendered, former students identified that the girls' and boys' bands had more commonalities than differences. Both the boys and girls enjoyed traveling and having time to explore new places. They also created and maintained relationships through the band, though the boys' band lacked the formation of fictive kin that was so

prominent in the girls' band. Culturally, the band simultaneously introduced, denied, and allowed the enactment of both Coast Salish and pan-Indian culture. The bass drum was the heartbeat of the band, but not in the same sense as a hand drum is the heartbeat of the people. It kept the rhythm and was central to the band but did not carry the *shxweli* of a traditional hide drum. Taking into account these elements, the marching band was much more complicated than it was represented in newspapers and brief histories, although the fact that it was so often mentioned as a prominent part of St. Mary's is telling. The first performance of the St. Mary's brass band in New Westminster has gained a reputation as the beginning of an important part of the St. Mary's story. So too has the performance of the band at the closing ceremony of St. Mary's 120 years later.

Appendix 1: Methodology and Theory

This research is based on five oral interviews conducted during fieldwork in Chilliwack, British Columbia. I am grateful to those that shared their stories with me. My hope is that they found the interview as enjoyable and rewarding as I did. I also incorporated interviews conducted in 2009 by Carolyn Bartlett as part of a project about the St. Mary's girls' marching band. Collectively, these interviews form the basis of my research. While I recognize the limitations of oral history, I place great value on the perspectives of those interviewed. Simultaneously, I have questioned the statements made by interviewees rather than presenting them as discrete facts.

The approach taken in this research can be classified as ethnohistorical, a field which many historians and anthropologists have attempted to define. The aim of some is to understand the way that anthropology and history interact within the ethnohistorical method. Of these, the present author tends to favour those that see ethnohistory as a way to combine the best qualities of history and anthropology.⁸⁷ Julie Cruikshank's approach does not reify the boundaries of each discipline but recognizes that they are artificial, created by scholarly discourse, and thus flexible and transgressible. Others seem to resist fluidity in an attempt to maintain the disciplinary paradigms. Don Kalb et al. identify two trends in ethnohistory: anthropological history and historical anthropology.⁸⁸ While it is useful to understand the trends within scholarship this article tries too hard to fit a wide range of research into these two trends. It seems reductionist to suggest that "anthropology... functions [within anthropological history] as a vehicle for the movement away from social history and historical sociology, and towards a new cultural history"

⁸⁷ For an example see Julie Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues," *Canadian Historical Review* 75 no.3 (1999): 403-418.

⁸⁸ Don Kalb, Hans Marks, and Herman Tak, "Historical Anthropology and Anthropological History: Two Distinct Programs," *Focaal* 26/27 (1996): 5-13.

when many historians combine social history and cultural history.⁸⁹ These are not approaches which are mutually exclusive.⁹⁰ Further, the particularities of historical anthropology are defined as variations of anthropological concepts failing to engage with the historical concepts and assuming that because a study is about the past it is historical.⁹¹

Rather historians should implement ethnohistory as a vehicle to see beyond disciplinary paradigms. Ethnohistory is understood here to be a set of common values that necessitate the use of both historical and anthropological methods. Most prominently, and arguably what sets ethnohistory apart from other approaches, placing value on engagement with the community. Ethnohistorians recognize that scholarship should be a collaborative process, a relationship between historian, community, and those who share their stories,⁹² accompanied by the awareness that the scholarship produced impacts the community and the scholar must ensure a positive exchange. As a response to Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and others who agree that non-Aboriginal researchers should “stop stealing Native stories,” all *xwelitem* researchers should address this topic.⁹³ By approaching this project as a relationship I hope that to have avoided appropriating Coast Salish knowledge but to learn from it instead.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ This line of thought is prompted by disciplinary objectivity. Allan Megill defines this as a “disciplinary consensus [that] is the measure of truth;” therefore, scholarship is labelled objective if it conforms to disciplinary standards of truth. It causes scholars in a given discipline to question the forms of scholarship that transgress disciplinary paradigms. Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 114.

⁹¹ Kalb et al., “Historical Anthropology and Anthropological History,” 8.

⁹² This is a lesson that I have learned from the instructors of this course, both through their scholarship and from the perspectives that they shared with myself and others while conducting research in Chilliwack. I am grateful to both for contributing to my view of what constitutes a good historian. Keith Thor Carlson, “Reflections on Indigenous History and Memory: Reconstructing and Reconsidering Contact,” in *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact*; Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Keith Thor Carlson, John Lutz, and David Schaepe. “Turning the Page: Ethnohistory from a New Generation.” *The University of the Fraser Valley Research Review* 2 no.2(2009): 1-8; John Sutton Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

⁹³ Lenore Keeshing-Tobias, “Stop Stealing Native Stories,” in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, 71-73 (New Jersey: Rutgers, 1997).

Secondly, ethnohistorians recognize the validity of oral history as a source of knowledge. Accordingly, oral interviews are a common method of conducting ethnohistorical research. It is important to resist the assumption that if something is written down it is a more reliable source, a point that ethnohistorians prove by using interviews in a way that transcends the false binary of primary and secondary source.

Thirdly, ethnohistory should resist providing metanarratives in order to accept the complexity of historical situations rather than ignoring the cases that do not fit into the metanarrative.⁹⁴ This approach allows for many stories to be told and for each to be considered valid.

However, one must also realize that any piece of writing imposes a narrative, even those that acknowledge multiplicity. Ethnohistorians engage narrative in two ways. Firstly, by prompting their creation during the interview process and secondly, by creating a framework by which to understand a how multiple narratives intersect and overlap. At each step I, as a researcher and author, have imposed my own narrative. During the interview, I impose a narrative in the questions that I ask and the way that I ask them. Unavoidably, I emphasize what I feel is important to the story. This interacts with what the interviewee feels is important to form a hybrid narrative, the interview. Secondly, I construct a framework that links the narratives from many interviews into one coherent narrative. Once again, this selective and interpretive process emphasizes points that I feel are important or interesting.⁹⁵ Historians should not try to avoid

⁹⁴ Frederick E. Hoxie, "Ethnohistory for a Tribal World," *Ethnohistory* 44 no.4 (1997): 609-610.

⁹⁵ The narrative that I create is constrained by my subjectivity as a young *xwelitem* woman from a French-Canadian family who grew up in a small town. I recognize that each of these impacts the way I think of the marching band, although I cannot always understand the complexity of my own subjectivity.

being selective or interpretative because this is an impossibility. History is inherently narrative; after all, historians are storytellers too.⁹⁶

Alessandro Portelli describes memory as “an active process of creation of meanings.”⁹⁷ Identity is impacted by the formation of narrative, a process which is altered by the “three-way conversation” involved in an interview.⁹⁸ These narratives are laden with cultural knowledge. As Louis Mink holds, narratives are “most useful evidence for coming to understand conceptual presuppositions quite different from our own,” because they reflect cultural attributes that have not been “explicitly formulated as a philosophical theory.”⁹⁹ Additionally, as Ronald Barthes states, “narrative is translatable without fundamental damage,” allowing ethnohistorians to interpret the narratives of community members to find the culturally specific aspects provided by the interviewee.¹⁰⁰

Narrative is not unconstrained but created within a framework shaped by public memories of residential schooling. Lynn Abrams has argued that “memory...exists in a symbiotic relationship with the public memorialisation of the past.”¹⁰¹ In this case, the public memory of residential schooling has been shaped by the stories of abuse shared by some residential school survivors; stories that were hidden from public memory until

⁹⁶ While I share Hayden White’s opinion that narrative is natural and “narrativity could only appear problematical in a culture in which it was absent,” I do not agree that the structures of meaning discussed in *The Content and the Form* and *Metahistory* are “generally human rather than culturally-specific.” Instead, these structures are culturally situated within the constructions of humour, romance, and infinite other concepts that interact within a narrative. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: J. Hopkins University Press, 1973); Hayden White. *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): 1.

⁹⁷ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998): 52.

⁹⁸ “The oral history interview is a three-way conversation: the interviewee engages in a conversation with his or herself, with the interviewer and with culture.” Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 76.

⁹⁹ Louis O. Mink, “Narrative as a Cognitive Instrument,” in *Historical Understanding*, eds. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann, 182-203 (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1987), 198.

¹⁰⁰ Ronald Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” *Image, Music, and Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Hill and Wang: New York, 1977), 79.

¹⁰¹ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.

recently. That these stories have been made known, shapes the way that former students form and tell their narrative.

The narratives expressed in these interviews had in common a structure that acknowledges the negative impacts of residential schooling while simultaneously emphasizing positive experiences. Interviewees reframed the metanarrative of victimization that has surrounded residential schooling in a way that recognizes both positive and negative experiences as valid. Often the band was remembered as an activity that made St. Mary's a more positive memory, although good experiences expressed by interviewees were accompanied by a proviso that not all students have such stories.¹⁰² This narrative framework is much more nuanced than the former which casts First Nations communities as victims of colonial violence, acknowledging that they were actors in this story, not merely static victims. It emphasizes the need to remember negative aspects of the past while moving forward to create a more positive future. The need to move forward was also an aspect of the stories I was told, exemplified by the quotation that began this essay.

¹⁰² Josette Jim, May 18, 2011; Darren Blaney, May 24, 2011.

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