

Ethnohistory Field School Report 2019

Visible and Invisible History: Mapping the Cemetery at Soowahlie First Nation

Jill Levine
University of Victoria

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.



Visible and Invisible History: Mapping the Cemetery at Soowahlie First Nation

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes how “space is a practiced place.”¹ In secular North America, a cultural uneasiness around death and government regulations on burials have resulted in the cemetery as a meme: a single concept easily repeated across time and space. A modern cemetery in the southwestern United States, for example, likely looks similar to one in northeastern Canada. Headstones are arranged in rows and are similar in size and color. Cemeteries can easily be mistaken as space, rather than places and standard qualitative cemetery mapping methods often envision cemeteries as spaces rather than places.

Ethnohistorian Keith Thor Carlson writes, to Stó:lō people, “the power of place—expressed through variously constituted geographical signifiers of shared identity—is profound.”² Carlson focuses on place-based oral tradition, ritual, and other practices that create collective identities in wider Stó:lō Nation. In mapping the cemetery at Soowahlie First Nation,³ I tried to follow Carlson’s example by considering past and present cultural practices and beliefs regarding burial, death, community, and religion in order to create an accurate map of the cemetery. I hope to communicate the importance of the cemetery as a place through combining traditional mapping methods with ethnohistorical research. This approach can help underline generations of cultural practice and community connections, showing the importance of the cemetery in Soowahlie collective identity.

¹ Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 1*. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 118. For more on space versus place see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

² Keith Thor Carlson, *The Problem of Power of Place, The Problem with Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 24.

³ The name of the reserve is sometimes spelled “Soowahlie” in colonial historical documents.

Methodologies

Place and space are important in Coast Salish history and creative non-standardized maps can help express this in nuanced ways. Indigenous counter-mapping, for example, can also be seen as inherently subversive, as it challenges dominant settler power structures and disrupts the concept of mapping as an objective process. As such, indigenous counter mapping has the power to add new dimensions to settler-created historical narratives.⁴ This practice has been used in the past in Stó:lō histories. Sabina Trimble's "Soowahlie Digital Mapping Project" includes a traditional map overlaid with community and traditional Stó:lō knowledge.⁵ *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* includes a collection of countermaps. One map displays Stó:lō transformer stones and the paths transformers traveled in oral histories, while another illustrates the genealogy and spatial familial connections of one Shxw'ow'hamel resident.⁶

The process of counter-mapping proves more challenging in cemetery maps, which call for detailed local precision. The new ethnohistorical methods outlined in *Towards a New*

⁴ Nancy Lee Peluso introduced the concept of counter-mapping in her 1995 work on indigenous forest and land rights in Indonesia in Peluso, Nancy Lee Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Antipode* 27, no.4 (1995): 383-406. These exercises can differ in nuanced ways. For example, Graham Fairclough's 2004 essay calls for counter-mapping other aspects besides traditional cultural heritage and outlines how experts should be used and consulted for mapping and heritage work. Graham Fairclough, "What Was Wrong with Dufton: Reflections on Counter-Mapping: Self, Alterity and Community," in *Who Needs Experts?: Counter-mapping Cultural Heritage*, ed. John Schofield, 241-248 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). Joe Bryan and Denis Wood detail the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, the first example of indigenous countermapping in Canada. Bryan and Wood's work on countermapping also gives a useful overview of historical and modern government land policy in British Columbia and its impact on indigenous land. See: Joe Bryan and Denis Wood, *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015). Examples of non-indigenous countermapping include Shelia Harrington (ed.), *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping Our Home Places* (Salt Spring Island, BC, 1999) and Shelia Harrington and Judi Stevenson (eds.), *Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas* (Victoria, BC: Touchwood Editions, 2005).

⁵ Trimble's 2015 field school report and 2016 MA thesis describes her countermapping exercises with Soowahlie community members, especially Gracie Kelly. Trimble's rich and detailed digital output map can be found here: <http://thewalimap.ca/>. See: Sabina Trimble, "Making Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2015; Sabina Trimble, "Making maps speak: the The'wá:lí Community Digital Mapping Project," MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2016.

⁶ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, David M. Schaepe, and Keith Thor Carlson, "Making the World Right through Transformations, in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson et al. (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001) 6-7.; Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of a Nation," in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson et al. (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001) 32-33.

Ethnohistory, are more useful than counter-mapping practices.⁷ In Kevin Gambell's map of the Stó:lo cemetery at Shx'wow'hamel, for example, he includes areas with unmarked graves identified by oral histories, using traditional local knowledge to supplement firsthand qualitative research.⁸ Similarly, in mapping the Matsqui cemetery, John Bird used oral interviews alongside observational data to create, "a memory map' by attaching oral knowledge and cultural meaning to the physical space."⁹

Bird's term "memory map," best reflects the methodology used in my project. This project has a narrative component that uses new ethnohistorical methods, using Stó:lō oral tradition collected through recent and past interviews with elders, historians, administrators, and other community members alongside traditional archival documents. Additionally, I worked with the band office to determine which format of map would be most useful for them. The final map uses traditional, archival, community-consulted and observational knowledge to weave together a map of the graveyard and stories of the ancestors buried there.

Soowahlie Reserve and Cemetery

The boundary between the Soowahlie Reserve and fee simple lands controlled by settlers is demarcated with a black iron gate accessible by passcode on each side of a winding tree-lined dirt road a few streets off the main drag of Cultus Lake, BC. Every summer, Cultus Lake becomes a crowded summer playground for non-Indigenous Chilliwack residents and others hoping to escape the valley heat. Due to safety and security concerns, the reserve chose to

⁷ Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz and David Schaepe, "Decolonizing Ethnohistory," in *Towards a New Ethnohistory*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i (Albert "Sonny" McHalsie) (Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2018), 20.

⁸ Kevin Gambell, "Cemetery Spaces of Shxwowhamel Stó:lō and The Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis," MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009, 85-6.

⁹ John Bird, "'Coming Back Home:' The Connection Between Physical Space and Culture in Stó:lō Funerary Practices." Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2017, 2.

become a gated community in 2016, but the gate mainly stays open in the low season.¹⁰ Government records show Soowahlie has almost four hundred registered members, but not all live on the reserve.¹¹ Despite their status as a closed community, a large section of the reserve is an active quarry leased to sand and gravel company Linterra Aggregates. The Sweltzer Creek Campground on the reserve also remains publicly accessible.

An historical oral interview recorded with resident Amy Cooper in 1962 helps documents Soowahlie's origin story.¹² The community is descended from two historical peoples: the Chilliwack people who immigrated to the Cultus Lake area and the Nooksack-speaking peoples originally living there. Historical tensions between the two groups lingered, despite peace-making efforts like marriage-alliances.¹³ Cooper said Soowahlie was the first Chilliwack settlement: "Well, Soowahlie was the motherland of Chilliwack. And all the people lived up there. There wasn't any other reserve, you see."¹⁴

The Soowahlie cemetery is located on Sweltzer Creek Crescent across the road from Sweltzer Creek. The creek connects Cultus Lake with the nearby Chilliwack River. The quarry is directly behind the cemetery. It creates a constant noisy din and large trucks pass through on the dirt road. Before the quarry was dug, railway tracks ran behind the cemetery. Soowahlie elder Marge Kelly said the railway was not in use when she came to Soowahlie as a young woman, but people walked along the tracks to get to the lake.¹⁵

¹⁰ "Soowahlie is a gated community," *The Chilliwack Times*, August 11, 2016; Sabina Trimble's interview with elder Pearl Commodore notes some of the tensions between Soowahlie and the community about the gated road. Trimble, "Mapping Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," 25.

¹¹ "Soowahlie Indian Band." British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/soowahlie-indian-band> (accessed June 21, 2019). In 2004, 218 people lived on Soowahlie reserve including 59 non-band members. There were 329 registered members. See: Tara Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past* (2005), 13.

¹² Amy Cooper at Soowahlie, February 8, 1962, Oliver Wells Interview Collection, Stó:lō Archives, 74.

¹³ Personal Communication with Keith Thor Carlson, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, May 16, 2019.

¹⁴ Amy Cooper at Soowahlie, February 8, 1962. Oliver Wells Interview Collection. Stó:lō Archives, 74.

¹⁵ Marge Kelly, interview with Jill Levine and Karen Wagner, Soowahlie Reserve, May 30, 2019.

Given the lack of concrete data on the early years of the Soowahlie cemetery, it is unsurprising that the date of its founding remains contentious within the community. Historically, the cemetery was linked to the Soowahlie United Church. Local historian Tara Kelly dates the construction of the church to 1869, while archivist Kelly Harms from the Chilliwack Museum and Archives places it between 1885 and 1885.¹⁶ The church was founded by a joint project between the reserve and the Methodist Indian Mission; chief Captain John Sewalis helped with its construction.¹⁷ While there is little information on the founding of the cemetery, the oldest grave site dates to 1898.¹⁸ In the past, only Methodists could be buried in the cemetery. Late elder Myra Sam revised the rules in 2001 when she allowed Daniel Kelly's family to bury him in the cemetery. Now, all Soowahlie community members can be buried there. There are no federal records of the cemetery, but the band office hopes to get it federally zoned and registered.

Archaeologists have determined that the land around the cemetery has been in continuous use for thousands of years. Pit houses that might have been inhabited as late as 1860 have been uncovered around the cemetery site.¹⁹ Archaeologist Dave Schaepe said earth mounds were used in ancient times to mark burials. Rock cairns were sometimes used, but this was more common on Vancouver Island. Schaepe described the evolution of pre-contract burial practices: "And then ultimately, it's almost as if at some point in time the shift to people being put in boxes and trees and then wrapped, and later on after their flesh has decomposed to [have] their bones prepared, wrapped and put in grave houses."²⁰ Ancestors were not always buried but interred in representations of houses like grave houses and boxes.

¹⁶ Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*, 11.; Kelly Harms, "Soowahlie United Church: An historic part of Cultus," *The Chilliwack Progress*, September 16, 2001.

¹⁷ "100 Year Old Church Destroyed By Fire," *The Chilliwack Progress*, May 21, 1969.; Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*, 11.

¹⁸ Plot 41: Infant Son of George and Sarah Cooper (see Cemetery Map)

¹⁹ Dave Schaepe, interview with Jill Levine, Stó:lo Research and Resource Management Center, May 22, 2019; "Soowahlie Band Works on Restoring Dwellings," *The Chilliwack Progress*, February 8, 1967, 6.

²⁰ Dave Schaepe

It is difficult to know if the exact space itself was used as a cemetery before contact. McHalsie noted, “Most burial grounds or burials end up right behind the village site. So that’s why that cemetery is there, right behind the church and right behind the pit houses.”²¹ Cooper told local ethnographer Oliver Wells that before the current cemetery, residents were buried “where John Wallace is living,” which seems to be near the current cemetery.²² In addition, she describes customary burial practices: “They didn’t bury them. They had them in boxes. They made boxes, and they put them in. And they didn’t lay them down. They put the knees right up here, and then when another one there died, they put that one in until the box is full.”²³

When I spoke to Soowahlie community members about the cemetery, there were two histories that most people included in their interviews: the destruction of the church and the unmarked graves of Chinese miners. The historic church burned down in 1969 and the firefighters blamed the oil-fuel furnace installed in 1961.²⁴ In 1961, the church underwent extensive renovations including the construction of a community hall.²⁵ Some community members believe the destruction of the church was deliberate. “I remember hearing of the church being burned down, and I believe there was people that didn’t want to have it in the community,” said Gracie Kelly.²⁶ With their place of worship destroyed, Soowahlie United Church members held services at nearby Cultus Lake Church for an unknown length of time.²⁷ In 1975 there was a committee to rebuild the church, but original church committee member Marge Kelly said, “Ever since it burnt down, nothing’s been the same and nobody seemed to wanna bother about building. Because there wasn’t enough of us.”²⁸ Myra Sam and Marge and

²¹ Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, interview with Jill Levine and Harris Ford, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, May 23, 2019.

²² In 1960, vandals targeted the cemetery, church, and John Wallace’s house so it is likely they were in the same general area; “Wilful [sic] Damage and Vandalism. ‘Keep Out’ Say Soowahlies,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 15, 1960, 7.

²³ Amy Cooper, February 8, 1962, Oliver Wells Interview Collection, Stó:lō Archives, 80.

²⁴ Kelly, *History of Soowahlie: Echoes of the Past*, 11.

²⁵ “Soowahlie Resident Heads 10-Band Council,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 3, 1965, 16.

²⁶ Gracie Kelly, interview with Jill Levine, Soowahlie Reserve, May 29, 2019.

²⁷ Mrs. P.H. Bartindale, “Review Activities at Church Meeting,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 28, 1970.

²⁸ Marge Kelly; “At 80, she is a bridge across several cultures,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 12, 1975.

Gracie Kelly also led an effort to fund raise to build a new Church, but they ran into an issue with the church's account at the Bank of Montreal and as a result efforts to see the church rebuilt have halted.²⁹

All community members I spoke to mentioned a mass grave of Chinese immigrant workers in or near the graveyard associated with the historic construction of the railroad. Community members are not sure where the workers are buried, but a large section of the back of the cemetery is now inaccessible and covered with thorny blackberry bushes. While individuals have their own memories of the cemetery, these two histories seem to be shared and foundational in Soowahlie community memory.

Soowahlie First Nation follows the general Stó:lō rules of conduct for behavior in cemeteries. The band office instructed me to leave by three in the afternoon and not to eat or drink in the cemetery. On a tour of an overgrown cemetery at Iwowis Reserve in Hope, McHalsie warned about making sudden movements or loud sounds while in a cemetery.³⁰ This veil between the living and spirit worlds can be so precarious that young children are not allowed at burnings or in graveyards.³¹ Stó:lō artist and educator Nicole LaRock warned against upsetting the spirits through overly emotional conduct at cemeteries:

There are people that do go to, there's quite a lot of First Nations people that will go into the graveyards and they'll lay in there and they'll cry. Cause our rule is you can't be in a graveyard after three and they will go in there, they'll lay there, they'll drink there and sob. But the aftermath of that is so creepy. Have you seen *The Exorcist*?³²

Mapping the Soowahlie Cemetery

²⁹ Gracie Kelly

³⁰ This is also described in Patrick McBride, "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō: Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment," Ethnohistory Field School Report 2013, 5-6.

³¹ A description of a burning ceremony can be found in McBride, "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō: Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment," 8.

³² Nicole LaRock, interview with Kristina Celli and Jill Levine, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 28, 2019.

A past attempt to map the graveyard using only observational data fell short. My map combines the knowledge collected and passed down through Soowahlie community members including the late Ken Wallace who managed the cemetery for decades,³³ information collected by the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center's genealogy office in 2001, and my own data collection from the site itself in 2019. These three sources, when used together along with new ethnohistorical methods, can provide a clearer picture of the cemetery's use, evolution, and deterioration.

Ken Wallace held much of the knowledge about the Soowahlie cemetery. He created a map that was passed on to the band office after his death. The map is a sketch of the cemetery divided into a grid with ancestor names roughly where their burial sites are. The map was originally a sketch map of the graveyard. This is a counter-mapping exercise in itself, as it lacks measurements and orientation. In addition, because of issues with missing markers and grave sinkage that will be discussed later, several of the plots listed in the map are no longer visible. This underlines the presence of unmarked graves in the cemetery, something that would be more difficult to prove without the map.

The Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center genealogy office created a more traditional map of the cemetery in 2001. The map is most concerned with specific measurements, and a handwritten notebook gives fence measurements and documents the spaces between grave markers. The researchers tracked observable features without considering ethnohistorical research methods including oral tradition and community private knowledge. As a result, the map does not document several important historical figures buried in the cemetery, including early Soowahlie chief Captain John. Additionally, unmarked graves are simply marked as unknown persons, showing that the researchers did not consult the Soowahlie community-created map which identifies several of the unmarked graves. However,

³³ Gracie Kelly

Name	Map ID	Born	Died	Age	Marker Type	Marker Inscription	Bio
Jean Anne Wallace	1				Wooden Cross		Jean Ann Wallace's ashes are buried here
Infant Son Wallace	2				Wooden Cross & Stone Statue		Likely the grandson of Jean Anne Wallace
Sam George Wallace	3	January 13, 1904	January 7, 1979	74	Flat Stone	In Loving Memory Of	Samuel George Wallace was born in Flood and lived in
Ivan Wallace	4				Broken Wooden Cross/Wooden Platform		
Mary Wells	5	October 8, 1925	August 24, 1990	64	Flat Stone	In Loving Memory Of; Nec Sam	One of Sophina's aunts. She lived on Vancouver Isl
Danielle Dawn St. Denis	6	March 27, 1987	April 27, 2003	16	Wooden Cross with Plaque		Article in the Chilliwack Progress
Stella Rose Wallace	7	June 2, 1961	September 15, 2012	50	Wooden Cross with Plaque		
Talitha Bissillon	8	May 22, 1994	December 4, 2017	23	Wooden Cross with Plaque		
Russell Bissillon	9		April, 2018	53	Wooden Cross		
Gregory Van Hook	10	1963	1995	32	Flat Stone and Concrete Ledger	Always Loved, Sadly Missed; Rest	Arthur Gregory Hook and Kerry Trevor David Camp
George "Shorty" Francis Kelly	11	1922	2006	84	Flat Stone	"Keep on Truckin"	Husband of Marge Kelly
Kerry Trevor David Campbell	12	October 30, 1959	May 13, 1995	35	Flat Stone and Concrete Ledger	In Loving Memory Of; He'll Always	Arthur Gregory Hook and Kerry Trevor David Camp
Clara Joan Campbell	13	1922	2001	79	Flat Stone and Partial Concrete Ledger	Forever In Our Hearts	
Harold Ensley Campbell	14	1911	1993	82	Flat Stone and Concrete Ledger	A Free Spirit At Last	
Earl Michael Campbell	15	January 17, 1943	August 21, 2013	70	Flat Stone and Partial Concrete Ledger	Strength Lies Within	
Ida Ensley	16		December 22, 1955	103	Upright Stone and Concrete Ledger	In Memory Of Dear Mother; Forev	Born Ida Uslick. Ida and her husband lived just behind
Eva Ensley	17				Upright Stone and Concrete Ledger		Marker erected after 2001
Thompson Uslick	18		November 14, 1908	80	Upright Stone		Thompson Uslick was one of the oldest known Chilliw
Susan Uslick	18		November 13, 1905	65	Upright Stone		Susan was Thompson's wife. Dan Milo said that her an
Unmarked Grave	19				A broken wooden cross was recorded here in 2001 and is now missing, possible		unmarked grave
Elizabeth Uslick	20	October 8, 1898	August 10, 1901	3	Broken Upright Stone		Daughter of Harry and Elizabeth "Lizzie" Uslick
Infant son of Harry Uslick	21		March 1, 1901		Upright Stone		Born Elivra Josephine Nowell
Harry Uslick (Bautyatte/Bolhiati/Pochi	22	1865	March 12, 1951	86	Flat Stone	In Loving Memory Of	The son of Thompson and Susan, Harry "Boxer" Uslic

Screenshots from the author's Excel map of the Soowahlie Cemetery

The map can be printed for Elders and can be easily updated by the Land Use Committee or other administrators. Trimble's work notes privacy issues with open-access digital maps in an interview with late elder Myra Sam. There is a "...concern that when digitized or publicized, private knowledge becomes public, and thus is at risk of misinterpretation and misunderstanding."³⁵ I therefore decided to create accessible tools for the community that will not be available to the public. This format also allowed me to add information about grave sites and ancestors in a separate tab, creating a "memory map" that can be easily updated on Excel by the band office or community members.

Challenges to Mapping the Cemetery: Unmarked Burials

The band office hoped that the new map would work to identify or address some of the unmarked burials in the cemetery. Schaepe said unmarked graves are an issue in many Stó:lō cemeteries: "That's a common need among the communities in this kind of the style of funerary practice and cemetery."³⁶ Communities fear losing their own history. Unmarked graves are also a practical concern. McHalsie said, "...quite often because we don't have registered burial sites and don't have maps quite often with the people that go to dig for a new plot, they hit coffins, then they have to move over."³⁷ (See *Supplemental Information* for inferences on some of the unmarked burials in Soowahlie cemetery).

³⁵ Trimble, "Mapping Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," 24.

³⁶ Dave Schaepe

³⁷ Sonny McHalsie

Stó:lō cultural funerary practices can accidentally result in unmarked burials. Many of the graves in the Soowahlie cemetery follow the same practice: an individual is buried, and the community holds a funeral and a burning. The initial grave is marked by a wooden cross. The cross might not have the deceased person's name or other identifying information. In approximately four years, the family holds a memorial in the winter or summer in which they feed hundreds of people and purchase a stone or more elaborate wooden marker for the cemetery plot.

Practices can vary among different families and communities. McHalsie and Marge Kelly both said the amount of time between an initial burial and memorial service can be different—not all adhere to the four-year window.³⁸ Families can combine forces to pay for memorials. Marge Kelly said when her husband died, “Like he passed away, four years, and then we have some kind of a ceremony. Yeah, I did that with my husband and his sister in law. We combined and then that way it was a lot cheaper to feed hundreds and hundreds of people.” She continued, “It costs a lot of money. You gotta pay out all these workers.”³⁹ Soowahlie elder Sophinia said at one point a lot of families decided to purchase gravestones at the same time when the band office organized a good deal for community members.⁴⁰ Traditionally, there was no money exchanged on reserves. The introduction of money to the region after contact and subsequent disenfranchisement of First Nations peoples likely made it more difficult for those living on reserves who did not handle money to arrange memorials. This often results in wooden crosses deteriorating without being replaced by stones.

Families often do not have the resources to pay for a memorial, or they move away, or the deceased person has no close family in the area. Barb and Susan Kahama, two community members buried in the Soowahlie cemetery have no family in the area.⁴¹ One plot has a wooden

³⁸ Marge Kelly; Sonny McHalsie

³⁹ Marge Kelly

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Sophinia, Soowahlie Reserve, May 27, 2019.

⁴¹ Personal communication with Anonymous Soowahlie Community member, May 24, 2019.

marker with no identifying information and the other is unmarked—we only know they are Barb and Susan’s plots because of Soowahlie community knowledge.⁴² To make matters more complicated, there are proper procedures for discarding the initial wooden crosses outside the cemetery, but they are not always followed.⁴³ Therefore, some of the older wooden crosses might not be marking graves, but could have been tossed to the side when the stone was placed. This is not a common practice in Soowahlie and all wooden crosses are likely individual plots.⁴⁴

There are other explanations and factors for unmarked graves. Marge Kelly and Sophinia both spoke about vandalism by outsiders. In 1960, vandals from outside the community broke windows in the Soowahlie United Church, knocked over and broke some of the gravestones in the cemetery, and broke windows in John Wallace’s house, demanding money from him. The reserve had previously turned a blind eye to illegal small-time hunting and fishing on their land, but this incident led the community to ban trespassers and not allow passersby to stop on the land without permission.⁴⁵ Wooden crosses and carvings have likely been stolen or broken as well in recent years—a photo in Nadine Commodore’s obituary shows a carved wooden marker at her grave site that has since disappeared and has not been replaced by a stone.⁴⁶

⁴² The graves were identified through a walk in the graveyard with Sophinia and another Soowahlie community member who wished to remain anonymous.

⁴³ Sonny McHalsie

⁴⁴ Personal communication with Anonymous Soowahlie Community member, May 24, 2019.

⁴⁵ “Wilful [sic] Damage and Vandalism. ‘Keep Out’ Say Soowahlies.” *The Chilliwack Progress*. January 15, 1960, 7; Marge Kelly; Sophinia.

⁴⁶ “Chilliwack Road safe at posted speed, says City of Chilliwack.” *The Chilliwack Progress*. May 6, 2003, 4.



The Chilliwack Progress (January 15, 1960)

In addition, stress on the land because of continuous use might cause plots to sink.

Gracie Kelly spoke about her experience with a sunken gravesite in her youth.

...it was our job to go and help mow the lawn. And so they had a riding lawnmower. And so, I remember just going, oh, I'll just, I'll ride on the back with [Mitzy], of the lawnmower with her. And you had to like sit very carefully because it was really hot. So I sat in close to the top and as we were going around the grave site, the grave site fell and, we've never seen that before and we've been doing it pretty much all summer. So, we were like really scared and we were happy that we didn't fall in. And, I ran all the way and Mitzy ran home, she ran all the way home here and went into my mom and I said, the grave, the grave fell like that. I was just really scared, you know, she goes, oh yeah, that happens.⁴⁷

There are five visible unmarked plots with wooden crosses that the community and I were unable to identify in this report. Nine visible unmarked plots could be identified through Soowahlie records and community-consulted work. In addition, at least three wooden markers were visible in 2001 and have since been destroyed. There is also a section with a sunken plot and possible other plots around it.⁴⁸

Conclusion

⁴⁷ Gracie Kelly

⁴⁸ Personal Communication with Sophinia, Soowahlie Reserve, May 28, 2019.

A cemetery map informed by Stó:lō cultural practices that weaves community memories and information about ancestors with qualitative data is the best way to create a map of the Soowahlie cemetery. The paper and map together will help non-indigenous researchers better understand the role of the cemetery in Soowahlie and Stó:lō collective identity. The map will hopefully create a foundation for the band office to move forward to shape the cemetery into a federally recognized living historical site.

The band office is planning a cemetery revitalization project that includes a new fence and sign. Gracie Kelly pointed out the little pathways at the Squiala First Nation cemetery and little benches at Matsqui First Nation as good examples of creating inviting community space in Stó:lō cemeteries. Gracie Kelly also mentioned the monument at the cemetery at Squiala First Nation as an example of what the Soowahlie band office could strive for in the future. She said, “It would be great to dedicate something to Kenny, to Kenny Wallace for all the work that he's done in there. And, uh, you know, and then I think of the other people that were connected with our United Church, um, they could be placed on there as well cause they, they helped assist us with, with the church.”⁴⁹

Gracie Kelly also spoke about the need for a community plan for care and maintenance of the cemetery. In the past, the late elder Ken Wallace prepared the graves and knew the correct teachings and procedures.⁵⁰ Myra Sam later oversaw the cemetery and helped families select grave sites. Now, elder Ab Kelly mows the lawn, but is often hesitant about cleaning the graves themselves. When Wallace oversaw the cemetery, he would organize older youth to help clean up and maintain it. Gracie Kelly has reached out to other community members and they plan to start planting shrubs along the fence in a beautification effort.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gracie Kelly

⁵⁰ Gracie Kelly

⁵¹ Personal Communication with Gracie Kelly, Victoria B.C., June 25, 2016.

I recommend researchers or archaeologists use ground penetrating radar to check several sections of the cemetery for unmarked graves. A metal detector that can identify nails used in now-deteriorated wooden crosses could be useful as well if funding for ground penetrating radar cannot be obtained. There are also many other important histories to investigate that relate to the cemetery. Important figures in Soowahlie history including Captain John, Andy Commodore, George Cooper, Amy Cooper, and others are buried there. The ancestors in the cemetery are all related as kin, showing the familial ties in the Soowahlie community. The Methodist church has a complicated history in the reserve, but many at Soowahlie, including Marge and Gracie Kelly remember it positively, as a place of warmth and community. These histories underline that cemeteries are more than a place to remember passed loved ones; they are a place for the living to gather and to continue to build community.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Newspapers

The Chilliwack Progress

Interviews (Archived)

Amy Cooper at Soowahlie, February 8, 1962. Oliver Wells Interview Collection. Stó:lō Archives

Interviews

Gracie Kelly, interview with Jill Levine, Soowahlie Reserve, May 29, 2019. Recording and transcript by Jill Levine.

Marge Kelly, interview with Jill Levine and Karen Wagner, Soowahlie Reserve, May 30, 2019. Recording and partial transcript by Jill Levine.

Nicole LaRock, interview with Kristina Celli and Jill Levine, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 28, 2019. Recording and transcription by Kristina Celli.

Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, interview with Jill Levine and Harris Ford, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, May 23, 2019. Recording and partial transcript by Jill Levine.

Dave Schaepe, interview with Jill Levine, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 22, 2019. Recording and transcript by Jill Levine.

Secondary Sources

Bird, John. “‘Coming Back Home:’ The Connection Between Physical Space and Culture in Stó:lō Funerary Practices.” Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2017.

Bryan, Joe and Denis Wood. *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2015.

Carlson, Keith Thor. *The Problem of Power of Place, The Problem with Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Carlson Keith Thor, John Sutton Lutz and David Schaepe. “Decolonizing Ethnohistory.” In *Towards a New Ethnohistory*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts’i (Albert “Sonny” McHalsie), 1-38. Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2018.

Fairclough, Graham. “What Was Wrong with Dufton: Reflections on Counter-Mapping: Self, Alterity and Community.” In *Who Needs Experts?: Counter-mapping Cultural Heritage*, edited by John Schofield, 241-248, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

de Certeau, Michael. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 1*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

Gambell, Kevin. “Cemetery Spaces of Shxwwohamel Stó:lō and The Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis.” MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009.

Harrington, Shelia, ed. *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping Our Home Places*. Salt Spring Island, BC, 1999.

Harrington Shelia and Judi Stevenson, eds. *Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas*. Victoria, BC: Touchwood Editions, 2005.

Hurley, Andrew. “Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets with Digital Divide.” *The Public Historian* 38 no. 1 (2016): 69–88.

- Kelly, Tara. *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*. 2005.
- McBride Patrick. "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō: Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment." Ethnohistory Field School Report 2013.
- McHalsie, Albert (Sonny). "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of a Nation." In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson et al, 32-33. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- McHalsie, Albert (Sonny), David M. Schaepe, and Keith Thor Carlson. "Making the World Right through Transformations. In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson et al. 6-7. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- Peluso, Nancy Lee. "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Antipode* 27, no.4 (1995): 383-406.
- Schaepe David M., Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Keith Thor Carlson, and Patricia Ormerod, "Changing Households, Changing Houses." In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson et al., 40-47. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- "Soowahlie Indian Band." British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/soowahlie-indian-band> (accessed June 21, 2019).
- Trimble, Sabina. "Making Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2015
- Trimble, Sabina. "Making maps speak: the The'wá:lí Community Digital Mapping Project." MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2016.
- Tuan Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Supplementary Information: Documentation of Unmarked Graves

This exercise shows a cross-reference of three data sources to try to determine some of the unmarked graves in the cemetery.

SRRMC 2001: Data from the Stó:lo Research and Resource Management Cultural Center

SBO: Soowahlie Band Office Data

FS 2019: Data taken in 2019 Ethnohistory Field School

2. Infant Son Wallace

SBO: Infant Son Wallace

SRRMC 2001: Unknown Wooden Cross

FS 2019: Unmarked Wooden Cross

4. Ivan Wallace

SBO: Ivan Wallace

SRRMC 2001: Unknown Wooden Cross

FS 2019: Unmarked Wooden Cross (Bad Condition)

8. Russell Bisallion

SBO: *Russell Bisallion*

SRRMC 2001: N/A

FS 2019: Unmarked Wooden Cross

17. Eva Ensely

SBO: Eva Ensely

SRRMC 2001: “? Ena Ensley”. Image unclear.

FS 2019: Unmarked Stone

19. Unmarked Grave

SBO: No record

SCCRM 2001: Unmarked wooden cross

FS 2019: Noted pile of stones as possible unmarked plot

31. Wooden Cross with Thorns

SBO: ?

SRRMC 2001: Not recorded

FS 2019: Unmarked Wooden Cross. Community members could not identify. It is likely a community member who died after 2001.

My guess is that this is the plot of Jarvis Andre John, but there is not enough information to be certain.

52. Wesley David

SBO: Wesley David

SRRMC 2001: Unknown

FS 2019: Missing Stone

60. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Hard to tell because this section is misaligned

SRRMC 2001: Unknown

FS 2019: Unmarked wooden cross

It's hard to know with the misaligned map but there is a chance that #60 or #64 would be Jim Wallace.

63. Alice David

SBO: Alice David

SRRMC 2001: Not included in report

FS 2019: Unmarked Stone

64. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Hard to tell because this section is misaligned, maybe could line up with Jim Wallace

SRRMC 2001: Two unmarked wooden crosses

FS 2019: One unmarked wooden cross.

Compilation of the data suggests this might be two unmarked plots. Would recommend this area for further investigation.

75. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Does not seem to line up with any names

SRRMC 2001: Two unmarked wooden crosses

FS 2019: One unmarked wooden cross

Same as 64. Compilation of the data suggests this might be two unmarked plots. Would recommend this area for further investigation.

76. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Does not seem to line up with any names

SRRMC 2001: One unmarked wooden cross

FS 2019: One unmarked wooden cross

83. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Might line up with John Wallace or Mary Wallace

SRRMC 2001: One unmarked wooden cross

FS 2019: One unmarked wooden cross

84. Broken Wooden Cross

SBO: Might line up with John Wallace or Mary Wallace

SRRMC 2001: No record

FS 2019: One unmarked wooden cross

85. Nadine Commadore

SBO: Nadine Commadore

SRRMC 2001: Unmarked Wooden Cross

FS 2019: Unmarked Wooden Cross

89. Barb Kahama

SBO: Barb Kahama

SRRMC 2001: No record

FS 2019: Unmarked stone statue

91. Nadine Commodore

SBO: No record

SRRMC 2001: No record

FS 2019: Unmarked grave. Determined it was the younger Nadine Commodore through community consultation.

92. Susan Kahama

SBO: Susan Kahama

SRRMC 2001: Unmarked Wooden Cross

FS 2019: Unmarked wooden cross

94. Unmarked Grave

SBO: No record

SRRMC 2001: Records a wooden cross next to the right of Bill Chesskaile.

FS 2019: No visible marker or plot

95. Area with possible unmarked Wallace graves

SBO: Louise Wallace, Mabel Wallace, Richard Wallace

SRRMC 2001: No record

FS 2019: Visible sunken grave. Sophinia pointed out this area as where the Wallaces were buried. This is likely the grave area that sunk in when Gracie Kelly was a child. Sophinia remembers purchasing a stone for Richard Wallace but there is currently no marker.

96. Unmarked Grave

SBO: No record, but difficult to tell because of misalignment

SRRMC 2001: Unmarked wooden cross between William Commodore and Rose Wallace

FS 2019: No visible plot or marker