

# Ethnohistory Field School Report

## 2015

### *“It’s in my Blood”:* Business and Community Building in the Coast Salish Weaver’s Guild 1970-1985

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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.



Towards the end of my visit at the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre at Squiala First Nation in Chilliwack, I noticed a posting labelled, “Revival of Stó:lō Salish Weaving.” It advertised classes to new and experienced First Nations weavers, as well as a weekend Salish weaving retreat that would take place the following month. Since I was visiting Chilliwack to do research on a society that formed as a result of the 1960s and 70s Coast Salish weaving “revival”, I was surprised to see this effort to, once again, restore this important Stó:lō art. Through my research, I discovered that the possession of knowledge in weaving was (and still is) more than just an opportunity to make money, it is a way bring people together and preserve the cohesiveness of the Stó:lō Coast Salish communities while, at the same time, providing personal comfort and healing. This is an important reason why weaving has become an art that many individuals from the Stó:lō Coast Salish Nation strive to maintain with genuine concern that it will, once again, die out.

Rather than the topic of the weaving revival of the late twentieth century, my paper concentrates on the society of the Salish Weavers – also known as the Salish Weaver’s Guild. It will provide the history of the Guild and explain how the association, through business practices, organization, and teamwork, brought economic relief to many families in Stó:lō communities. More importantly, it will demonstrate how the art of weaving itself worked to blend, strengthen, and heal the Stó:lō Nation as a whole while providing individual strength and well-being to the weavers themselves.

There are a few important works relating to my area of study that have helped guide my research. Two of these works in particular are, Oliver Wells’ *Salish Weaving: Primitive and Modern* published in 1969 and Paula Gustafson’s *Salish Weaving*

published in 1980.<sup>1</sup> These sources are important for two reasons. First of all, they are the two sources that speak directly to the time and individuals I am researching. Secondly, they were both either written during the period of the Salish weaving revival or during the peak period of the Salish Weaver's Guild.

Modern work on the subject has also been done. In her 2010 discussion at 12th Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America titled, "Coast Salish Textiles: From Stilled Fingers to Spinning an Identity," Eileen Wheeler focuses on what the resurgence meant to the individual Coast Salish women who were involved in it.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in her book, *Working With Wool*, Sylvia Olsen researches the industry of Cowichan sweaters produced by Coast Salish peoples involving the use of wool. Through this source I was able to draw upon similarities in community building through business and art.<sup>3</sup>

While these sources are essential for understanding Coast Salish Weaving, this study in particular focuses on the society itself, emphasizing its purpose, objectives, and organization. It demonstrates how the Guild stimulated the Stó:lō community. As such, this paper fits into the larger historiography about Indigenous women's organizations by focussing on Stó:lō labour history, Coast Salish art history, and cultural power.

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<sup>1</sup>Oliver Wells, *Salish Weaving: Primitive and Modern* (Sardis: Oliver N. Wells, 1969); Paula Gustafson, *Salish Weaving* (Vancouver: Doulas & Washington, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler, Eileen. "Coast Salish Textiles: From 'Stilled Fingers' to Spinning an Identity," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* no. 59 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Olsen, *Working with Wool: A Coast Salish Legacy and the Cowichan Sweater* (Winlaw: Sono Nis Press, 2010).

During my research trip to Chilliwack I was fortunate to meet with several women<sup>4</sup> who were directly affiliated with the Weaver's Guild. My interviews with them about their memories of the Guild greatly enhanced this research. While archived documents served to fill the places where there was missing information, hearing the stories and memories of individual experiences allowed me to include perspectives in this study that centered on culture, values, and collective identity.<sup>5</sup>

In order to appreciate the importance of the Coast Salish Weavers Guild and the weaving revival of the second half of the twentieth century, it is important to understand how central weaving was to Stó:lō communities prior to European contact. Salish weaving was a full-time occupation in which many women participated and specialized in before contact. Used for more than just comfort and clothing, woven blankets were often given away at ceremonial occasions such as potlatches, naming ceremonies, marriages, and funerals. They were symbolic of a person's wealth and status in their communities.<sup>6</sup> Gordon Mohs explains, "It was, at one and the same time, a textile

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<sup>4</sup> Although all my interviewees are all women, many of them felt that weaving was not necessarily considered to be "women's work". While women dominated the field, there were still a few men who were directly or indirectly involved in Salish Weavers Guild and produced beautiful and elaborate works. Two of these individuals in particular are Ernie James, son of Salish Weaver, Martha James and Rick Fillardeau from Langley. See Salish Weaver's Photos, *Coqualeetza Archives*, Squiala First Nation, British Columbia.

<sup>5</sup> The Coast Salish weavers had members whose families were affiliated over several generations. In order to distinguish whom the past and present individuals are in this paper, I will use first and last names.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Mohs, "Mountain Goats and Wooly Dogs: The Weaving Industry of the Sto:lo Indians," *Stó:lō Tibal Council*, 1992.

industry and an art form and permeated many aspects of Stó:lō cultural life. Its importance in Stó:lō history and culture cannot be overstated.”<sup>7</sup>

Historian and homesteader Oliver Wells asserts that the Stó:lō communities began to forget the craft of loom weaving during the fur-trade. In 1827, the Hudson’s Bay Company established the Fort Langley trading post and then shortly after, the Fort Yale and Fort Hope trading posts that would trade blankets for fresh salmon. These blankets would eventually replace the woven blankets that were used by Stó:lō peoples prior to the trade.<sup>8</sup> As Wells poetically explained, “The coming of the white man in the customs and dress were the final blows which stilled the fingers of the native women. Their ancient craft and loom weaving was gradually forgotten by succeeding generations.”<sup>9</sup> While, Wells makes a valid point about the fur-trade’s essential role in the decline of Salish weavings, it is quite likely that poverty and government policies were also a factor in the decline of blanket production and weaving.<sup>10</sup>

Oliver Wells has been credited for the revival of the Salish weaving industry in many sources from the 1970s. In particular, *Canadian Homes Magazine* reported, “The late Oliver Wells, a farmer in Sardis, B.C., became interested in Salish weaving and persuaded a number of Indian women to revive the old art. He provided the raw wool,

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<sup>7</sup> Coast Salish Classic weavings were often made using the under-hair of mountain goats. Another material used in pre-contact Salish blankets was dog hair from woolly dogs. While Gustafson suggests that woolly dogs did not play an important role in the Salish weaving, Mohs asserts that it was “the most important fibre in the Salish weaving industry.” The use of wool from domestic sheep to make Salish blankets did not become prominent until the weaving revival of the 1960s. See Mohs, “Mountain Goats and Wooly Dogs, 2-7; Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Wells, *Salish Weaving*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, *Salish Weaving*, 29

<sup>10</sup> Rena Point Bolton and Richard Daly, *Xwelíqwiya: The life of a Stó:lō Matriarch* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2013), 133.

helped to sell the craft work, and wrote a book about the weaving.”<sup>11</sup> The Indigenous women that Oliver had contact with were Mary Peters and Adeline Lorenzetto. Oliver and Adeline re-discovered the method of weaving by recreating an old loom and unravelling a portion of an old blanket to learn it’s the technique. Although Oliver believed that the art of weaving was lost, Mary Peters, with the use of the knowledge passed down to her by her mother, had already been weaving using a loom similar to the one reconstructed by Oliver and Adeline. She was known in her community as an individual who, “[knew] everything, because she never went to school.”<sup>12</sup> For the next couple of years Mary and Adeline continued to weave during their free time with many others eventually joining them.<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1966, Oliver published an article “Return of the Salish Loom,” in the Hudson Bay magazine, *The Beaver*.<sup>14</sup> It was from this article that the women began to receive commissions. Their first request was to weave tapestry for the new Hotel Bonaventure in Montreal. While Adeline Lorenzetto and Mary Peters busied themselves with the weaving, other Salish women, who took notice of the work being done, helped to prepare the sheep wool that needed to be washed, carded, spun, and dyed.<sup>15</sup> By 1967, the group had expanded with more weavers by the names of Martha James, Annabel Stewart, Irene James, Mabel Peters, Monica Phillips, and Lillian Paul.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hilary Clark, “Salish Weaving: The Art that Almost Died,” *Canadian Homes Magazine*, March 20, 1971, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver Wells, “Return of the Salish Loom,” *The Beaver*, Spring 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Mohs, “Mountain Goats and Wooly Dogs, 14.

The Salish Weaver's Guild was officially formed in 1971, a year after the passing of Oliver Wells. The society formed in part because the women wanted to continue their weaving business in a formal way and to qualify for federal government funding.<sup>17</sup> In encouragement and collaboration with the wife and daughter of Oliver – Sara Wells and Marie Weeden respectively – the Salish Weavers continued their business, now with the label of 'Guild'.<sup>18</sup> Marie Weeden remembers approaching Mary Peters and several of the other weavers to see if they would be interesting in forming a group. She recalls:

I asked them if they could come and meet ... and as far as I know, it was the first time that women from all the different individual reserves in the Chilliwack area and Hope and so on had come together to work on a project and it was a very, very special feeling and we all sat around and they probably all knew each other and I got to know them better and then we decided we probably would like to form a guild.<sup>19</sup>

Through this formal structure the society sought to open a store and maintain a method of bookkeeping to manage the labour and expenses.

The society was built like a traditional European guild. It had a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Annual general meetings and elections were held each year. In 1972, Josephine Kelly from Soowahlie became President.<sup>20</sup> Weeden remembered the day they chose Josephine as President. She explains,

Often there is a quiet pause and in this instance I remember how quiet it was when we talked about the fact that we

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<sup>17</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Paula Gustafson, "Ancient Salish Weaving: An Art Revived," *The Beaver*, Summer 1982, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Marie Weeden (Former Honorary Member of Salish Weavers), interview by the author, Chilliwack, May 14 and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> John Davis "Salish Weaving: A Dying Art Gets New Look on Life," *Valley Magazine*, March 29, 1972; Constitution and By-laws of the Original Salish Weavers and crafts of Koh-kwa-leet-sah, Salish Weavers – Correspondence and Clippings, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0093

needed someone to maybe volunteer to be the chairperson... and I remember people quietly suggesting that maybe Josephine would do it. It took quite a while but finally the discussion sort of indicated to all of us that it would be lovely if Josephine would consider being President and eventually she said she would and she was the President right until the time I left the organization.<sup>21</sup>

Josephine remained president for several years. Her hard work and dedication in everything she did made her stand out as an important part of the Stó:lō and Chilliwack community.<sup>22</sup>

The Guild had its own constitution, by-laws, and rules of membership. The central objective of the guild as outlined in the constitution was: to continue the revival of the Salish weaving amongst the Stó:lō people and to work together to produce, re-teach and market their crafts; to promote the sales of Native Art, Crafts, and artefacts; to teach and instruct others (Native peoples) in Arts, Crafts and Customs of the native culture; and to be a non-profit society.<sup>23</sup> The Guild had three tiers of membership. These were regular, associate, and honorary members and each participant had a fee to pay of fifty cents that were collected annually on the first of every February.<sup>24</sup> By the mid 1970s, the society had eleven Stó:lō bands as active members and nineteen Stó:lō bands involved as contributors. By the time Gustafson published her article, “Ancient Salish Weaving, an Art Revived,” in *The Beaver* in the summer of 1982, the guild had a total of sixty-three

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<sup>21</sup> Weeden, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Weeden, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Constitution and By-laws of the Original Salish Weavers and Crafts of Koh-kwa-leet-sah, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>24</sup> Constitution and By-laws of the Original Salish Weavers and Crafts of Koh-kwa-leet-sah.

members from communities such as Kilgard, Abbotsford, Rosedale, Chehalis, Laidlaw and Yale.<sup>25</sup>

In 1973, the Salish Weaver's Guild opened its first retail store in Sardis on the corner of Vedder and Wells Road. The location was on the grounds of the Coqualeetza, close to where the residential school and hospital had previously stood. The location was particularly close to the Wells' farm and was central to the production and sales of the group's weavings. Gracie Kelly, daughter of Marge Kelly, remembered the white building that stood close to the Stó:lō Nation office. She particularly remembered spending lots of time there, doing activities in the building's lower floor.<sup>26</sup>

However, the Salish Weavers Guild eventually had to relocate their shop for several reasons. First of all, according to an assessment and proposal from the 1974, it was impossible to get insurance for the older building due to the risk of fire. Secondly, more space was needed as a result of the growth of the business. Other reasons were that the building was too cold in the winter and that there was a need for a sense of ownership over the building and the business conducted within it.<sup>27</sup> I was unable to get an exact date of when the second shop opened and both buildings have since been torn down.

Paula Gustafson had the privilege of conducting her research during the time of the second shop. She wrote about sitting in the kitchen of the shop, which smelled of freshly washed wool and with a gently bubbling dye pot filled with yarn. She recalled

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<sup>25</sup> Gustafson, "Ancient Salish Weaving", 13. ; "Salish Weaving ; Notes from S.S's meeting with Rev. Patterson M.P (Indian Affairs), Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>26</sup> Jude and Gracie Kelly, interview by the author, Chilliwack, May 24, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Criteria for suitable premises and location assessment of Available Opportunities, Jasper Carter Associates Ltd, March, 1974, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

prominent women, such as Josephine Kelly and Mary O'Connell, coming and going while sharing conversation and coffee.<sup>28</sup> Marie Weeden also has similar memories. She recalls, “I think that was a little centre where people could come and do their work and have a cup of tea and watch what some else was doing. I think it was a very special place. Even in the newer shop, I had that same sense.”<sup>29</sup> The Guild shop was central to community life and cultural memory.

The second shop was open from 9:30am to 5:00pm on Monday to Saturdays. It sold various arts and crafts – such as weavings, sweaters, toques, carvings, beadwork, leatherwork, and books. The weavings sold at the shop were made with raw wool from sheep of the Fraser Valley. The wool was washed, carded and spun by hand or through the use of simple equipment. It was then dyed using natural colours from lichens, flowers, bark and roots. The weavings and their designs were all original creations and represented traditional symbols such as birds, mountain, lightning, and animals.<sup>30</sup> After three years of operation it became clear that the business could not continue selling weavings alone. The Salish Weavers then decided to make it what they called, “a bread and butter business” that would sell books and other native crafts. The records of the store philosophy stated, “if we can build a viable bread and butter business on crafts, the weavings will then become PROFIT or at least keep us viable and able to continue producing Salish Weaving.”<sup>31</sup> This philosophy was the reason that other valuable products such as knitted sweaters became a part of the store’s inventory.

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<sup>28</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Weeden, interview.

<sup>30</sup> Brochure, Salish Weavers Information, Coqualeetza Archives.

<sup>31</sup> Store Philosophy, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

By the time of the shop's opening, each member of the Guild had a cooperative role in creating a weavings. Some participants would spin the wool that another member had already carded, while other members would be responsible for dyeing. By the time a weaving was complete, it was possible that four or five different individuals had been involved in its production. Most of this work was completed in the company of family within the weaver's homes, without the distractions of the shop.<sup>32</sup> Often the guild members would work together to complete tasks. When remembering the work her sister used to do at the store, Gracie Kelly explains,

Jude did a lot of the dyeing of the wool, the harvesting of whatever it was that made the colours and there were different people there who taught us everything. And Jude would connect with the elders there and everyone who was doing the work. I think, if someone needed a certain colour then everyone would work together to do colours.<sup>33</sup>

Diane Kelly Anderson, daughter of Josephine Kelly, remembers that her mother was involved with the entire weaving process from washing raw wool, to drying, then teasing, to spinning, to dyeing, and then to weaving. She explains,

My mother would do the wool, sell it to the gift shop and then she would get paid for that. The weavers would go and buy the wool, and a lot of times if they did not have the money they charge the wool, and then as they done a weaving project, whatever the value of that was, then they would deduct the cost or make payments on it. And then... yeah so it was just, a lot of weavers just wove. Not all of them spun.<sup>34</sup>

Each individual had a role to play in the production of the weavings based on their skills and how the business ran on teamwork and collaboration.

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<sup>32</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 109-112.

<sup>33</sup> Jude and Gracie Kelly, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Diane Kelly (Former Treasurer of the Salish Weavers), interview by the author, Chilliwack, May 27, 2015.

The balancing of production and materials required heavy bookkeeping. All expenses such as equipment, wool, labour, workshops, advertising, office supplies and operating expenses were carefully budgeted and recorded.<sup>35</sup> Also product sales, their monetary value before sale, and their selling price were all recorded. The contributions of each regular and associate member were tallied and then compensated. After each sale, deductions were made for wool and administrative fees, and then the weaver would receive the payment for their weaving depending on the worth of the materials to make the product.<sup>36</sup>

Weavers such as Mary Peters and Martha James created the more higher-priced, larger items that were sold for more than their material worth.<sup>37</sup> Frieda George, granddaughter of Elizabeth Herling from the Squiala community, remembers:

They would measure [my weaving] it and then it was so much per square foot that you would get. And back then, oh my goodness, back then I think it was twenty-one cents a square foot I was getting. So it wasn't that much. No. And so, I could remember sitting, and the manager who was looking after the sales part, sitting there and she is going 'this is your money' and I would have a big weaving and only get like twenty-five dollars or something like that for a weaving. So it wasn't much that you got.<sup>38</sup>

Rhoda Mussell, niece of Martha James recalls:

I didn't know how to spin so they had people that spun the wool and dye the wool in the club. Then I would just go and ... they had a little black book and said okay you owe this and when you finish your product then we will deduct it and you will get whatever was made on it. I enjoyed it. I think the most exciting one was when I went one

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<sup>35</sup> Salish Weaver's Club Budget, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>36</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Salish Weaver's Club Sales Charts, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>38</sup> Frieda George (Member of Salish Weavers Guild), interview by author, May 28, 2015.

day and brought in a small weaving and they said, ‘your weaving went to New Zealand!’ ‘Awesome!’ I was a teenager then.<sup>39</sup>

For some weavers the financial profit of each sale was minimal, but the work was still rewarding and fun.

The Salish Weavers had buyers from all over the world. Jude remembers that many of the larger weavings, like one of the ones done by Monica Phillips, would go to government stores or buildings or places like Germany who had a large interest in Canadian Indigenous crafts.<sup>40</sup> But sales were not the only source of funding. Sometimes the guild would receive donations that they could add to their revenue. The Hudson’s Bay for example gave them a donation that they used to assist their members for purchasing gas and babysitting.<sup>41</sup>

The Salish Weavers business relied heavily on the word of mouth of satisfied customers to draw in business.<sup>42</sup> However, certain methods in advertising also brought attention to the business and further increased sales. One particular method was through magazine and newspaper publications. Like the famous 1966 publication by Oliver Wells, in *The Beaver*, these articles brought the national and world-wide attention of buyers.<sup>43</sup> The society had publications in magazines such as, *Western Homes and Living*, *Canadian Homes*, and *Beautiful British Columbia* magazine.<sup>44</sup> Through the magazine

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<sup>39</sup> Rhoda Mussell (Associate Member of Salish Weavers Guild), interview by author, May 26, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Jude Kelly, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Salish Weaver’s Club Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1971, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>42</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Publicity for Salish Weavers’ Exhibition, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>44</sup> Hilary Clark, “Salish Weaving[?]: The Art that Almost Died,” *Canadian Homes Magazine*, March 20, 1971, 8; Philip Hersee, “The Almost-Lost Art of Indian Weaving,”

publications, more attention was brought to the women's work, which ultimately promoted sales. Many of these sales would come in the form of commissions in which a certain weaver would be requested or a specific order with design and size would be requested from the buyer. To help spread their name, the Salish Weavers began to brand their work by attaching tags on the weaving with the society's name and logo. Marie Weeden remembers,

Eventually we got the government to print us up some little labels which we hadn't had before I always wish there was some way and I used to suggest that the ladies could put their initials on their weaving and we never did get to that but when they were sold they usually had a tag on them and the persons name was with it.<sup>45</sup>

The emblem of the Salish Weaver's Guild, was The Flying Goose. The Flying Goose represents the resurrection of weaving and the "old ways" because Canada geese always return to the place of the birth on the Coqualeetza grounds as part of a seasonal cycle.<sup>46</sup> Another form of advertising was through post cards. In 1971 the society ordered six thousand postcards for the purpose of advertising. These postcards were sold at all locations in the Chilliwack area that handled postcards.<sup>47</sup>

This business could not maintain its success without the interest of new recruits. Eventually, the interest in weaving began to grow, young women as young as fourteen became affiliated with the Guild. Two of these women in particular were Monica Phillips and Frieda George who received formal training sessions.<sup>48</sup> It was very common

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*Western Homes and Living/ Vancouver Life*, February 1969, 55-59; Oliver Wells, "Salish Weaving", *Beautiful British Columbia Magazine*, Summer 1969, 35-39.

<sup>45</sup> Weeden, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 113.

<sup>47</sup> Salish Weaver's Club, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1971, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

<sup>48</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 106.

for young women to start participating in guild activities and courses at a young age. Diane Kelly Anderson, who started weaving at seventeen, remembers that it was a way to make money because there were no jobs elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> New weavers were allowed to borrow looms until they generated enough income to buy their own and would be given wool at no expense for their first three woven products.<sup>50</sup> Marge Kelly remembers teaching these classes. She explains, “There was so many, we had classes down at Stó:lō Nation there. We had a great big building and people were teaching spinning, knitting, how to wash and dye the wool. At that time there was mostly, if we taught, we never got paid, it was all volunteer. There wasn’t much money those days to pay the teachers. But later on we had classes at the log cabin and we taught how to do the spinning.”<sup>51</sup> Teaching and learning was an essential feature of the Salish weavers to ensure its future success.

Young Stó:lō women were trained not only in weaving but how to manage the Salish weaving business. A course outline from the 70s and early 80s highlights a elaborate training system in which women would learn everything from bookkeeping, taxes, budgeting finances, banking, staff responsibilities, and business objectives to sales, marketing, to advertisement. Each young woman was expected to keep a diary, be debriefed daily, and was graded based on their learning and understanding.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Diane Kelly Anderson, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Salish Weaver’s Club, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1971.

<sup>51</sup> Marge Kelly (Member of Salish Weavers Guild), interview by author, May 25, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Preliminary Course Outline, March 17, 1980 – April 7, 1980 Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994; Business Practices, 24 May 1973, Salish Weavers: Constitution, Minutes, Correspondence, Financial Statements, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0994.

However, most of the education came from watching and doing. By the time Frieda George was three-years old, her mother, Margaret Jimmie, who was also a weaver and guild member, would send Frieda to her grandmother's house. While there, Frieda would always sit by her grandmother and watch her weave. When Frieda turned thirteen she received her first loom and was told it was her time to put what she learned into practice. She remembers, “[Granny] finally gave me a loom and said, okay you are ready to start ... from just from me watching, she said you should know how to do it on my own.”<sup>53</sup> All the women that I interviewed insisted that the informal mentorship that came from watching elders and family members was the most important part to their education of the art.

The role of family was significant in all aspects of weaving for the guild. Not only did younger people learn to weave from their elders, they were also involved in the production of weavings themselves. Often husbands built the looms for their wives and children would help with the processing of the wool.<sup>54</sup> Diane Kelly Anderson remembers, “My brothers were a lot younger and used to help my mom wash the raw wool. And that way the people, the young ones could earn some money. It was a dirty job but it got to earn a little bit of cash. So yeah, I guess there would be a just a variety of ages. The members got their children involved or their grandchildren.”<sup>55</sup> Diane Kelly also remembers taking on administrative duties to relieve the pressure of her mother’s responsibilities. She explains, “I was a treasurer for a little while because I had to write cheques. And that’s when they would come to our house because they didn’t have a shop

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<sup>53</sup> Frieda George, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Diane Kelly Anderson, interview.

at the time. So yeah they come to the house and I would have to write cheques out for them, because a lot of people did not want to be involved with doing that. But since my mom was, it just sort of happened.”<sup>56</sup> In the time of the Salish Weavers, if an individual had a family member participating, chances are, that they would also be involved in one way or another.

The Salish Weavers Guild promoted community on all levels. One particular way was through the Chilliwack community. Every year that the Guild was active, members would attend and host exhibitions. The Edenbank farm, then home of Marie Weeden, hosted many of these exhibitions. At the farm, weavers would display their work and demonstrate spinning and weaving to the Chilliwack community.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, there was the Annual Chilliwack Fair where the Guild members would enter contests and sell their products. Gracie Kelly explains, “every year the Chilliwack fair would have these big rooms and then people would bring their stuff and say if Jude submitted this [points at a weaving] and got a prize, and she would get like fifty cents for a prize. So it was a really big thing that the women would all make stuff so they could go and win some prizes.”<sup>58</sup> Frieda also shared her memories of the fair. She explained, “my grandmother used go there, setting up her weaving and my mom and Josephine [Kelly] and they all would have a little booth and they would take turns sitting all day weaving spinning, or carding.” There was one particular day at the fair that sticks out in Freida’s memory. She explains, “one day my grandma entered me into a spinning competition there and I said what am I doing here? Because I thought I was there to watch her then and they called my name

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<sup>56</sup> Diane Kelly Anderson, interview

<sup>57</sup> Pamphlet, Salish Weavers 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Exhibition, Salish Weavers – Correspondence and Clippings, Marie Weeden Fonds, 2004.052.0093.

<sup>58</sup> Jude and Gracie Kelly, interview.

and said, ‘Sit down Frieda Jimmie!’ and I said ‘What for?’ and my grandma entered me into the spinning competition, and I took first place!”<sup>59</sup> Frieda says she was hooked to weaving for life right there at that moment. Jude Kelly also has fond memories of other Stó:lō weavers helping her while selling products at the fair. She explains, “We would have our tables and my first daughter, my daughter was born, [we would] set up a little hammock and we all just kept busy and everybody watched her. I guess that is when the profit and whatever started because that’s when everyone would bring their projects.”<sup>60</sup> The participation in fairs and exhibition allowed the Salish Weavers to connect with community on all levels: the Stó:lō community, the local non-Indigenous Chilliwack community, and the weaver’s community.

The most important characteristic of the Salish Weavers Guild is that it brought people together, regardless of where they were from or what community they were a part of. The warmest memories of the women I interviews were of when all the guild members got together. Gracie and Jude Kelly remember bringing stuff to gatherings, eating food, and sharing knowledge with people they knew.<sup>61</sup> Frieda George’s fondest memories were spending time at the shop. When recalling her favourite memories she explains, “All these women would be sitting outside the building, sitting there weaving, like spinning in one spot and there’s great big drying racks to dry the wool. [My favourite memories] are just sitting there with them, watching the elders. Its like an exciting feeling when I used to go there. I still do when I do my work, I get all happy.”<sup>62</sup> Marie Weeden similarly remembers, “I felt, and I think they all felt that pleasure in

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<sup>59</sup> Frieda George, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Jude and Gracie Kelly, interview.

<sup>61</sup> Jude and Gracie Kelly, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Frieda George, interview.

working together, no matter where they lived. And that was, I think in that sense we all got pleasure from it, I know I certainly did.”<sup>63</sup> The gathering of individuals and families from various Stó:lō communities, as a result of the Salish Weavers Guild, created community and camaraderie within the Stó:lō Nation itself.

Weaving, especially in a group, was also important for individual mental health and healing. Some of the interviewees connected weaving to the relaxation of the body and mind. When it came to her weaving Diane Kelly recalls, “It was a way of earning money but...if you were feeling stressed, it would relax you. Even though it was work, it would still relax you. I know for my mom, when she would spin wool, it would calm her down because she is thinking about that.”<sup>64</sup> Rhoda Mussel similarly shared, “It’s good medicine too. It helps you because it makes you think in a healthy way what do I put on there, what does and eagle represent or a diamond. It’s good medicine because it comes from the heart and that’s where it has to come from to be good. But I never did it to make a living, I did it because I enjoyed it.”<sup>65</sup> In his work, Mohs touches on the connection of spinning and weaving and the transformation of the heart and purification. The weavings, he explains, symbolize the transformation process, notably, the transformation of animal hair into objects of beauty, strength and wealth.<sup>66</sup> Weaving was important for improving personal health and strength, but it was even more important for community and cultural healing. The Saish Weaver’s Guild embodied this.

Salish Weaver Rena Point Boulton emphasizes how Indigenous women organizations were essential to the health and healings of communities in the latter half of

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<sup>63</sup> Weeden, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Diane Kelly Anderson, interview.

<sup>65</sup> Rhoda Mussell, interview.

<sup>66</sup> Mohs, “Mountain Goats and Wooly Dogs, 5.

the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> In her book *Xwelíqwiya* she explains, “In 1952, the potlatch ban was lifted finally and we were allowed back and speak out language openly, and do our arts and craft – to teach it again. This was quite difficult because several generations had already, well, gone by without knowing anything about the weaving, the medicines, the carving, even the potlatch... We decided to revive as much of it as possible.”<sup>68</sup> Decades later, Stó:lō individuals were feeling a sense of revival. When Frieda George explains her motivation for weaving she asserts:

It is relaxing and I just love doing it, and it just stayed with me being... like, I never knew that it was part of my culture until these past fifteen, twenty years and now I’m thinking oh my god, I am keeping this going. I didn’t think of it that way I just did it because I loved doing it. Now I think of it as keeping it going because my great grandmother was a weaver, my mother’s mother was a weaver and her mother was a weaver and they did it with wild goat hair and wild dog hair and everything. So that’s why I like it, its in my blood.<sup>69</sup>

Besides financial profit, community and cultural healing and strengthening was something the Salish Weavers Guild strove for and they were ultimately effective in their goals.

As of right now it is unclear how or why the second shop closed and why Salish Weaver’s Guild disbanded. Many of the women I spoke to do not have a clear memory of this. Frieda suspects it was a result of discontinued government funding.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Rena Point Bolton and Richard Daly, *Xwelíqwiya: The life of a Stó:lō Matriarch* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2013), 133. This book is important for discussing the political involvement of women’s organizations such as the Indian Homemakers’ Association which was active during the same as the Salish Weavers Guild. See also: “Indian Homemakers’ Association of British Columbia”, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/?id=547> (accessed July 15, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Bolton, *Xwelíqwiya*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> Frieda George, interview.

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Regardless, the momentum and interest for Coast Salish weaving hit a sharp decline in the 1980s. Today, many member of the Stó:lō community are working to re-ignite this art.

The Salish Weavers Guild that resulted from the initial efforts of Oliver Wells, Mary Peters and Adeline Lorenzetto brought about an Indigenous art revival of the late twentieth century. This, in turn, resulted in the creation of the Salish Weavers Guild. The Guild functioned as a formal organization and business. The Guild did more than just provide a small amount of profit for the women; it stimulated culture, education, community, and healing. The commercial and educational practices of the organization worked to promote success, while also ensuring a future for its younger participants. The society also brought together individuals and their families from several Stó:lō to work together for a common goal -- to continue the art of Salish weaving.

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