Ethnohistory Field School Report

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Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō:

Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment

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The Ethnothistory Field School is a collaboration of the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre and the History Departments of the University of Victoria and University of Saskatchewan.

In surveying the implications first contact held for First Nations in North America, the discussion weaves around the impact on and between living individuals. Whether positive or negative, the impacts following first contact and subsequent colonization are narrated through the interactions and changes between fellow Native Americans and their new white neighbours. But what of the dead? While perhaps lacking an observable agency, deceased relatives may, through the living, be similarly affected by the cultural and social changes brought about by a post-contact world. For First Nations such as the Stó:lō, where the living have responsibilities for, engage with, and are in turn affected by, the spirits of the dead, changes in mortuary protocols could have meaningful consequences for both. Assessing this relationship in its historical context provides an opportunity to shed new light on the transformations Stó:lō mortuary practices faced before and after the arrival of the Western world.

Images of native burial grounds found in the British Columbia Archives, dating from the 1860s to the early 1880s, several identified as within Stó:lō territory, offer an opportunity to assess the beginning of a transition to Western style burials. Historicizing these Stó:lō specific images and re-inserting this point of transition into the continuity of Stó:lō burial rituals is the goal of this project. Given the lack of an exhaustive and comprehensive work on Coast Salish burial practices, comparative and speculative analysis are crucial. General studies of Coast Salish and other West coast native experiences of death and the transition to Christian style burials will be placed parallel to more specialized Stó:lō research. Using only images does limit the scope of this historicization; core procedures and elements of burial practices may be absent or only subtly referenced. Hopefully, what information these images unveil proves fruitful not only for academia, but also for the Stó:lō communities discussing similar topics in the present and future.

Framing this discussion is an understanding of Stó:lō burial history as complex and wide-ranging, its continuity non-linear. Mortuary practices were not uniform among the Stó:lō, nor did communities undergo identical transformations. I seek to describe a broader idea of how mortuary practices shifted, rather than uncovering a switch that radically altered burial customs overnight. Despite the implausibility of exploring mortuary practices as universal, recurring practices in both pre- and post-contact Coast Salish worlds reveal potentially core practices from which variations do spring forth. Assessing the continuity of burials and commemoration exemplifies this methodology. Gauging what nuances this study would add onto existing research requires a consideration of the current narratives surrounding Christian influences among the Stó:lō.

The influence Christian priests and missions exerted over native funeral rites have been expressed in negative viewpoints in both academic and lay settings. Where priests historically controlled mortuary protocols, their capabilities have been analyzed as means to manipulate and punish native community members.[1] For native identities and historical awareness, Christian changes to burials have been placed alongside residential schools and the potlatch ban as tools of assimilation and cultural destruction. Since the 1970s Stó:lō families have begun to remove Christian priests, imagery, and rituals from their funerals and graves.[2] One striking example is the spatial arrangement of the Skwah First Nation cemetery. Earlier, cross marked graves are distinctly separated from late twentieth century graves with more hybrid arrangements of both Stó:lō and Christian aesthetics; several meters of unused terrain cleanly separate the cemetery in two.[3]

The recent rejection of Christian influences does not mean it held complete sway over traditional beliefs since its inception in the Frasier river valley. Stó:lō elder Herb Joe discussed burial

1 Gambell, Kevin, "Cemetery spaces of Shxwõwhámel Stó:lõ and the Île-à-la-Crosse Métis" (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009), 59-61
2 Sonny McHalsie and Herb Joe, informal discussions.
3 Visited with Herb Joe, May 21, 2013.

changes as the one arena where cultural beliefs could lie hidden underneath Christian officiating, creating subtle forms of resistance. He suggested that, while on the surface traditions and customs were practiced differently under Christian priests, the core beliefs surrounding death remained culturally intact. While the colonizers could assimilate natives, destroying or subduing overt cultural expressions,"[there was] one thing they could not stop: Indians from dying".[4]

Discussions within Stó:lō communities over the accepted or appropriate procedures to lay the dead to rest are ongoing, especially concerning repatriation activities of ancestral remains.[5] Determining how to bury ancestral remains along with the rejection of "traditional" Western norms opens up questions of whether to turn to known historical procedures, hybrids of existing Christian and Stó:lō practices, or creating something entirely new. The complexities of this continuity have left scholars with several avenues for research and analysis, but detailed compilations of Coast Salish burial customs as a whole have been left wanting. Kathryn McKay notes that many early ethnographic works have commented on the different forms of burials but leave little in actual explanation. Recent works since the 1980s have paid more attention to the processes of burying, grieving, and concepts of death among Coast Salish peoples, also taking into account native perspectives.[6] In re-constructing and re-framing the continuity of Coast Salish burial practices from pre and post-contact eras, little attention has been paid to the period of initial contact itself.[7]

Before examining the images, it is important to understand the various cultural aspects of burial practices in the Coast Salish and Stó:lō world. Laying a person to rest deals with just as much conceptions and beliefs of responsibility, expectations, and family as it does with notions of life and

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4 Herb Joe interview, May 21 2013.
5 David Schaepe interview, May 17, 2013.
6 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2002), 14-15.
7 For other First Nations along the West Coast, research has been done in terms of the transition from traditional forms of grave commemorations to adopting Western styles. See Hawker, Ronald, *In the Way of the White Man's Totem Pole: Tsimshian Gravestones 1879-1930* (MA dissertation, University of Victoria, 1988)

death. Displaying these images alongside a more nuanced continuity emphasizes the need for a greater undertaking on understanding how Stó:lō mortuary traditions shifted and evolved.

Central to the mortuary traditions is the understanding that death is not a final step as it is in the Western-Christian mentality. Herb Joe explained death as part of a cycle, where the mortal body no longer functioned, but the spirit survived.[8] When examining how the people of Chehalis spoke of the dead, Charles Hill-Tout noted the word *te smesteuqsetl* (the spirit-people) was used to distinguish those who inhabited our world and those of the Land of the Dead or Departed.[9] The spirits can linger in the world of the living or the Land of the Dead and in the mortal world can cause serious harm if they come into direct contact with the living. Many authors have noted the importance of the precautions taken to protect individuals from the spirits of the dead. During my stay at Stó:lō Nation, I heard multiple accounts of how upset spirits lingered near homes and caused families severe discomfort or illness; once the spirit was discovered and a burning conducted, what had upset the spirit could often be determined and hopefully resolved.[10] In researching on the Shxwõwhámel reserve cemetery, Kevin Gambell was informed that the spirits were most potent during the transition from night to day. He was asked to avoid visiting the grounds during such hours, to protect himself and the community against possible repercussions from upset spirits.[11] Handling human remains in general holds a certain level of risk, and strict procedures and precautions, such as applying ochre paint to oneself, are put into place to avoid spiritual or physical injury.[12] Sonny McHalsie, Cultural Advisor for Stó:lō Nation, mentioned similar situations where even discussing the ancestors during interviews needed to halt once the sun

8 Interview with Herb Joe, May 21, 2013.
9 Hill-Tout, Charles, *The Salish People: the local contribution of Charles Hill-Tout. Volume III: The Mainland Halkomelem, edited with an introduction by Ralph Maud,* (Vancouver: Talon Books), 1978, 106.
10 Several accounts of burnings helping to soothe spirits and help families were told be Frank Malloway and Helen Joe after a burning ritual for repatriated ancestral remains, May 13, 2013.
11 Gambell, 62.
12 Mohs, Gordon, "Sto:lo Sacred Ground", in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, Carmichael et al, ed. (Routledge: 1994), 197.

began to set.[13] When touring cemeteries with Keith Carlson and Sonny McHalsie for this project, Sonny gently warned me that I needed to avoid being overly animated or excited while walking through a cemetery. Quick movements or disrespectful behaviour could have ended in accidental contact with a spirit, or risked upsetting an ancestor, either outcome dangerous.[14]

The risk spirits pose to the living does not mean one has to fear ancestors. In explaining the danger of direct contact with spirits of the dead, Helen Joe succinctly describes how spiritual power is simply much stronger than physical power: receiving a hug from a relative is a comfortable squeeze; a hug from a spirit would almost certainly kill you. The danger the dead pose does not mean they are "evil or malicious".[15] Explaining the boundary between the lands of the living and dead entails disrespect and incomprehension on the part of the living, rather than the potential danger exhibited by the dead. A story about a mortal's visit to the Land of the Dead features the protagonist, Blue Jay, being sent home by the spirits of the dead. His inability to understand "the reality of the 'life' that surrounds him", results in the dead closing off their world from mortals.[16] Though their worlds may be separated, and one group has the ability to harm the other, the Stó:lō and their ancestors are still one whole, a community whose social relations dictate the expectations of both the ancestors and living members towards the grieving family.

Coast Salish understandings of their dead ground the community's responsibilities when holding funerals and commemorative rituals. Herb Joe described responsibility as cyclical and reciprocal, shaped by a cycle of life worldview.[17] How such connections take place are apparent in the language the Stó:lō use in categorizing identity markers across generations. Identical words are used for great-grand-parents and great-grand-children, great-great-grand-parents and great-great-grand-

13 Informal discussion with Sonny McHalsie, May 2013
14 Tour of Stó:lō cemeteries with Sonny and Keith Carlson, May 19, 2013.
15 McKay, "Disturbing the Dead: Diversity and Commonality Among the Stó:lō", 129.
16 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices,* 46-48, 50.
17 Herb Joe interview, May 21, 2013

children, and so on.[18] Kathryn McKay points out how this emphasizes a cyclical link between ancestor and descendant, cementing the sense of respect and responsibility toward ancestors, no matter the temporal distance between ancestor and living relative.[19] In the pre-contact period, these forms of identity and family connections were intrinsically tied to accessing economic resources; further encouraging closely tied kin groups with identity markers that could surpass spatial or lineal distances. Paying respect to ancestors therefore refreshed and solidified links to ancestors; affirming these connections also reminded families of their history and important spiritual and economic spaces. Wealthy families were those that extensively knew their lineage, using their knowledge to gain access to resource sites.[20] Failing one's duty to their ancestor meant more than tarring one's reputation; it harmed a family's link with their ancestors, bringing potential physical and economic harm.[21] Burials for high status and wealthy individual therefore meant fulfilling communal expectations in addition to personal responsibilities towards ones ancestors.

The ancestral connections demonstrated at funerals and commemorative ceremonies played into assertions of social status in Coast Salish culture. The quantity of wealth spent on post-mortem observances demonstrated the wealth of the deceased individual and his/her family. Charles Hill-Tout noted that among the Chilliwack everyone but the relatives who attended or offered services was compensated with blankets.[22] In his writings on the Upper Stó:lō communities, Wilson Duff observed that a major part of funeral ceremonies was a feast to feed "the large number of people that had come from great distances", and that payments would be made to attendees who had helped with the funeral if the family could afford the cost.[23] At memorial ceremonies, carved figures and mortuary posts used

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18 Carlson, Keith, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 44, Figure 1.
19 McKay, "Disturbing the Dead: Diversity and Commonality Among the Stó:lō", 124-125.
20 Carlson, 49, Gambell, 64.
21 Tour of Stó:lō cemeteries with Sonny and Keith.
22 Hill-Tout, 53.
23 Duff, Wilson, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*, (British Columbia Provincial Museum,

to represent the deceased could only be afforded by wealthy community members[24], and potlatches held after funerals and memorials asserted status by the amount of goods given away. In a study on the distribution of varying Coast Salish cultural practices, H.G. Barnett received affirmative responses from all of his informants that "only the rich gives" regarding post-mortem potlatches.[25] Burnt offerings to the dead, ensuring their comfort in the spirit world, required a significant amount of material goods for high status people like siyams[26]. A community may even expect expensive mortuary figures or posts to be commissioned if the deceased was of high status or the family was known to be wealthy enough to afford such expenses.[27] Though focusing on post-contact cemeteries, Gambell describes that these status assertions could result in gravesites where local elites were over-represented.[28] It could be reasoned that earlier Stó:lō gravesites may follow similar patterns, where elites are more visible, though not necessarily more numerous.

This is not to say funerals focused primarily on demonstrating economic strength through spending resources on the community and the dead. The grieving family could access their kinship ties to receive aid in preparing the funeral. Sonny McHalsie explained that receiving aid in conducting mortuary ceremonies is crucial; as the family is grieving, there are greater chances they may make mistakes and fall short in their responsibilities.[29] If a family was not wealthy, a feast would be set at a later date than directly after the funeral, or a potlatch would be held sometime afterwards.[30]

Burning ceremonies were also crucial procedures for helping the grieving family maintain communication with their loved ones and help the recently deceased be ready for the spirit world. As

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Dept. of Education: 1952), 94.
24 Herb Joe interview, May 21, 2013.
25 Barnett, H.G., *Gulf of Georgia Salish* (University of California Press: 1939), 264.
26 Gambell, 64.
27 Herb Joe interview, May 21, 2013.
28 Gambell, 69.
29 Cemetery tour with Sonny, May 19.
30 Hill-Tout, 53, Duff, 94.

the spirit world is understood as resembling the land of the living[31], the deceased should not have to spend their new lives empty-handed and wanting for food and material goods. Burning items in a fire transforms them from physical to spiritual forms, allowing them to be delivered to the spirit world and used or consumed there. Burnt food and drink are not only eaten by the deceased, but by any ancestors who are attracted to the prepared feast; the gathering of ancestors also introduces the newly departed to his relatives and other spirits. Items can also be personalized for the person. Duff describes favoured belongings being burnt at an Upper Stó:lō burning[32]; Barnett found a widespread practice among the Gulf of Georgia Salish of burning the old clothes and bed of the deceased with the intent that the burnt valuables be used in the spirit world. [33]

In providing a medium for both communicating the dead and providing offerings, burnings allowed for protracted engagements with recently departed loved ones or older ancestors. Herb Joe recounted an event that shows how this relationship may play out:

> *My sister had a child that died right after birth, and for years and years and years, maybe as long as twenty years, every year that we had a burning, she would put a baby bottle and baby food for her son. His name was Albert. Finally at one of the burnings, the person who was doing the burning for us, he had his eyes covered and while he was doing the burning, he stepped back and he called for someone from the family. So I went up there, and my wife went up with me; we were standing beside this man that was doing the burning. And he said: "There is a young man on the other side asking for regular food, not baby food." And I said "Woah! Really? Okay, I'll tell my sister." And I went back and I told her and of course…This person that did the burning for us didn't know my sister's story and what had happened. But that was a message that came across from the other side. From that time on, my sister just put out regular food for him.*[34]

Stó:lō traditions offer space and time for grieving and closure. Sonny McHalsie and David Schaepe both explained that the grieving period for a death was four years, enough time to learn

31 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, 47.
32 Duff, 94.
33 Barnett, *Gulf of Georgia Salish* , 262.
34 Interview with Herb Joe, May 24, 2013.

to let go and know that the dead person had passed to the Land of the Dead.[35] Sonny also mentioned that the strongest teaching he had been given regarding funeral said was that the family always has the final word; the community does not impose itself on the family's ceremony. This allows for the wide variety of practices in mortuary ceremonies.[36] Though both men are discussing the contemporary setting of Stó:lō funerals, burnings, and memorials, it is possible that such practices could have existed for centuries. When discussing the telling of transformer stories, oral histories that explain how the world was fixed into its current form by the Xexá:ls, Herb Joe said that as long as the core concepts and messages remain, cosmetic changes to the stories may be acceptable, for example incorporating Christian attributes.[37] Potentially, the same principle could apply to mortuary traditions of the present and past.

With the multitude of varying mortuary practices, it would be flawed to portray Stó:lō mortuary traditions as uniform. Though speaking on a different topic within mortuary practices, Kathryn McKay best describes this context, acknowledging that "the Sto:lo cannot be studied as a "monolith" ".[38] Though variations in protocols are tolerated through the need to respect the family's decisions regarding funerals, present day disagreements exist on what practices best ensure the fulfilment of spiritual responsibilities. For example, opinions clash on the use of red cedar in a burning. Because red cedar is used in cleansing rituals that clear out spirits, some believe that its use in a burning keeps spirits away rather than drawing them towards the feast.[39]

While it is tempting to focus solely on the complex spiritual and cultural elements that inform tradition and practice, it is easy to overlook how mortuary practices also had to be practical. In discussing the placement of cemeteries relative to villages, Sonny McHalsie

35 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, May 19, Interview with David Schaepe, May 17, 2013.
36 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, 2013.
37 Interview with Herb Joe, May 24, 2013.
38 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, 84.
39 Keith Carlson, informal conversation, May 13, 2013.

described an almost universal practice of keeping the dead buried behind villages. Communities wanted to keep their dead close to home if possible, but given the frequent location of villages on the edge of rivers, the spatial arrangement of River>Village>Burial Grounds shows itself again and again in Stó:lō territory. [40] The archeological digs at the settlement of Xelhalh demonstrate this pattern as exhibiting spatial continuity, as both earthen mounds and a once gated post-contact cemetery exist behind pit house remains.[41] In discussing why his ancestors performed tree burials, Herb Joe emphasized that concerns over natural elements could dictate protocols as much as cultural beliefs. As the communities of Yakweakwioose and Skowkale are situated on the Chilliwack floodplain, the risk of remains become submerged or washed away made internment undesirable. Likewise, tree burials kept the bodies of loved ones away and safe from animals.[42]

Keeping in mind that Stó:lō mortuary traditions feature a combination of practicality and cultural continuity should better inform an understanding of a community's response to change. For example, although he was writing in the context of collective identity and historical consciousness, Keith Carlson briefly illuminated changes to mortuary culture when hit by smallpox epidemics. Though scholars have been apt to investigate the death rate of Northwest Coast smallpox outbreaks, Carlson argues that little attention has been paid to "cultural responses and social effects".[43] With the epidemic wiping out entire tribes, how might mortuary practices have been impacted? What conditions might traumatic, large scale events have forced upon communities? In relating oral historical accounts of the disease, Carlson gives us the opportunity to speculate on how communities may have altered their burial practices. Examples

40 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, May 19, 2013.
41 Schaepe, David, et al., *Exploring Xelhalh as a Place of Centralized Power Among the Stó:lō-Coast Salish*, Draft, presented at the 2011 SAA Conference, Sacramento, 16-17.
42 Herb Joe interview, May 21.
43 Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time,* 92.

of mass internments, villages abandoned and overrun by the forest, and mass burning of bodies in pithouses[44] suggest communities were overwhelmed by the virulence of the disease. Another example comes from a famine story detailing the origin of the Soowhalie tribe, explaining how the lone female survivor of a community gathered the remains of her villagers and cleaned out the longhouse in which they had all died. The assumed burial only happens after she spent extensive time surviving and recovering her strength by eating minnows. That she collects the remains (I speculate this implies the already decomposed remains of the dead) runs counter to the general Coast Salish practice of burying the dead as soon as possible.[45] Extenuating circumstances create deviations from the standard practices, but the survival of mortuary traditions such as ritual burning speaks to continuity rather than an irreversible break from the past.[46] However, this continuity does not necessarily follow a linear transformative path. A brief survey of the history of Stó:lō mortuary practices puts this into perspective.

Even in the distant past, Stó:lō burials were not uniform nor static. In compiling archeological findings, Kathryn McKay notes the variety of practices in the pre-contact period: burial mounds, middens, cairns, rockslab, and cremation. Multiple archeological sites featured several burial types, and many sites showed evidence of ritual feeding and clothing of the dead, demonstrating the longevity of certain mortuary protocols. Practices could change yet hold on to certain elements for centuries.[47] David Schaepe emphasized a regional variation in practices,

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44 Ibid., 94-96, 97

45 The story is found in Wells, Oliver, *The Chilliwacks and their Neighbors*, Ralph Maud et al, ed. (Talon Books: 1987), 50. Multiple writers have mentioned the quickness in preparing and burying the body. Barnett suggests such swiftness often takes place when the body must be positioned into a coffin or funeral box, which must be done before rigor mortis sets in. Hill-Tout notes that his Chilliwack informants said that the longer a body was left in the house, the harder it was to remove the lingering spirit. See Barnett, *Gulf of Georgia Salish* , 261, 290, Hill-Tout, 52-53, 66, 105, McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, 55.

46 This notion is inspired by Carlson's argument regarding the collective identity and historical consciousness of the Stó:lō; pre-contact events, see Carlson, 111-112.

47 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, chapter 1, particularly pp. 19, 43- 44.

and that the changes to mortuary practices were not linear- which reinforces the importance of contextualizing the Stó:lō mortuary continuity.[48]

Even before first contact, there had been considerable changes in burials, from underground graves to above ground ones. Middens and cairn burials are widely believed to have halted around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, replaced for the most part with cedar box burials of different forms, canoe burials, and the use of funerary houses. All include a significant symbolism: covering the remains with a roof, box, etc. signified a shelter having been prepared for the dead. Similar to how ritual burnings delivered material goods for the ancestors, creating a home for the body provided something the deceased would have needed while alive, and would appreciate in the next life.[49] A Kwantlen woman interviewed in 1899 even described these box burials as "in most cases [placing the deceased] in a tiny house raised on posts".[50] While earlier in-ground burials could have signified similar intentions, such a suggestion is more compelling for the smallpox epidemic, where the deceased were buried or burnt in their homes. The literal creation of the owner's home as their final resting place speaks strongly to attempts to carry on some parts of the period's mortuary practices despite the limitations the epidemic wrought (this also points to the practical needs of the community in laying their dead to rest in a time of crisis). The epidemic struck in the same period that box burials were being practised, further demonstrating how elements of existing mortuary customs could be adapted and carried on.

Box burials, whether placed in trees, grave houses, or on the ground, shared several key practises. Bodies would be prepared according to varying local traditions, but were almost always wrapped in blankets, and placed in a red cedar box. Some interviews and studies discuss

48 Interview with David Schaepe, May 17, 2013.
49 Herb Joe interviews, May 24.
50 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices,* 55.

multiple bodies being placed in the same box, the coffin in essence served as a miniature personal graveyard for one family.[51] When boxes were found broken down and the remains scattered, the remains would at times be gathered, placed in a new blanket and placed in a new box, but the ultimate intent was for the physical form of the deceased to be returned to the earth.[52] Burials that featured canoes in lieu of cedar boxes exhibited similar practices: repeated caretaking of remains and placement in new canoes.[53]

Along with box style and canoe burials, new forms of commemoration developed in the period preceding first contact, and form a crucial part of the imagery to be analyzed. Commemorative events were central to the grieving process. Potlatches that gave away the deceased's personal effects not only served to compensate funeral attendees and supporters but served to prevent the family from being reminded of their loss.[54] Burnings performed years after a death would signal acceptance of the loss, as personalized food plates were replaced by general food for all ancestors. New forms of commemoration and memorials emerged with mortuary figures and mortuary posts. Intricately carved, they served to identify deceased relatives through likeness or personal symbols and crests. In historic times, mortuary figures were never used in funerals, only after the person was buried would they be made and presented at ceremonies and in cemeteries.[55] The halq'emeylem word for both images and crests, x^{w}e'si, also translates as “picture”, highlighting how these carvings serves to represent the people in whose image they were fashioned.[56] In present day memorials for the dead, photos instead of a marker are presented, but in both cases, they signal an end to several years of grieving.[57]

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51 Wells, 50, 56, Hill-Tout, 53, 66.
52 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, Duff, 95.
53 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, 58-59.
54 Hill-Tout, 66.
55 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie.
56 Duff, 51.
57 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie.

Mortuary figures are believed to have come into use around the early eighteenth century. A description of figures seen at Scowlitz in 1859, published in the Victorian Gazette, detailed burial grounds "adorned with apparently full-sized figures of the departed braves, sculptured in wood, and highly coloured".[58] Joanna Ostapkowicz noted some early ethnographers described the figures as needing to capture the likeness of the deceased as close as possible, especially when they were of high status. Facial characteristics, painted faces, use of copper, and other elements signified siyams or wealthy families. However, in general the human form was generic in the carving.[59] Clothing could either be placed on the figure, or its likeness made into the carving, and personal effects might also be placed near the figure if it was stationed in a burial ground. Barnett notes that the effigies would be arranged outside during a commemorative ceremony before the work began, introducing the deceased.[60] Having a figure carved also demonstrated respect towards the deceased, keeping the memory of the relative fresh in minds of the living, and was another way to assert high status. Only wealthy people were able to spend the resources or the time in carving the figure or hiring someone to do so; renewing the clothes of the figure or adding personal characteristics also highlighted abilities their wealth brought.[61]

Mortuary posts played roles similar to the figures as memorials in burial grounds, though there appears to be no mention of their use in ceremonies. In featuring family symbols and crests, mortuary posts could serve to identify individuals without explicit personal characteristics or items. Originating from house posts, carvings on mortuary posts also served to showcase the status and wealth of the deceased; the carving of sxwoyxwey masks on a post

58 Sleigh, Daphne, *The People of the Harrison*, (Abbotsford Printing: 1990), the precise date for the Gazette's printing is August 13, 1859.
59 Ostapkowicz, Joanna, *The Visible Ghosts: The Human Figure in Salish Mortuary Art*, presented at 46th Annual Northwest Anthropology Conference, Bellingham, Washington, 1993, 3-4.
60 Barnett, H.G., *The Coast Salish of British Columbia*, (University of Oregon: 1955), 226.
61 Herb Joe interview, May 24, Ostapkowicz, 6.

indicated the deceased ownership of this sacred item, verifying his high status and worthiness.[62]

As Christianity began to penetrate the West Coast through missions in the nineteenth century, a transitional period began for mortuary practices. In piecing together the continuity of Stó:lō burial practises, it is difficult to find a sense of definitive end to traditional forms of burial and memorials before the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, an emerging hybridism of Stó:lō and Christian protocols marks the transition era. Though Ostapkowicz dates the final disappearance of mortuary figures to circa 1905-1910 (taken down in favour of Christian style markers), Sonny McHalsie informed me that figures existed in Ruby Creek in the early 1920s, including at least one figure with a sxwoyxwey mask.[63] While grave sites in Stó:lō territory began to feature iron or stone crosses in lieu of traditional burial markers beginning in the 1870s, tree burials were still being performed until 1913 on Peters reserve. When a railroad was built passing by trees that held visible decomposing blankets and remains, complaints led to forced internment of the bodies; a cemetery was constructed to replace the practice of tree burials. [64] Certain records demonstrate that, while missionaries would have rejected any form of hybrid practise[65], forms of syncretism based on both Stó:lō and Christian parts are present from the late 19th century. At the Shxwõwhámel reserve cemetery, the Catholic Oblate priests continued the practice of burying the deceased with their head pointing towards the East, facing the spirit world.[66] First Nations were just as capable of creating their own hybrid arrangements, adapting Christian practice but interpreting them in ways unintended by the priests. Though discussing the non-Salish culture of the Tsimshian, Ronald Hawker offers arguments that resonate with the transitions undergoing in Stó:lō territory. As Christian efforts to replace

62 Hill-Tout, 50, Interview with Herb Joe, May 21 and 24.
63 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, May 19.
64 Informal discussion with Keith Carlson, during tour with Sonny McHalsie, May 19.
65 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices,* 57.
66 Gambell, 59-60.

burnings and totem pole memorials with Christian funerals and markers came to fruition, Hawker notes that Tsimshian communities used foreign protocols in reshaping their own identities. Indicators of Christian burials were also taken as new ways of expressing social status and kinship to a wider number of Native Christians.[67] In analyzing archival images from the mid to late nineteenth century, scholars and Stó:lō are given an opportunity to see visual representations of this transitional period.

Five images found in the British Columbia Archives of the Royal British Columbia Museum make up the foundation for this study. Three are from the community of Yale, the other two are labeled as having been taken at Boston Bar and New Westminster; all images save the one at Boston Bar are photographs, the remaining one a painting. While it is tempting to see some of these images as potentially showing 'pure' pre-contact burial grounds, that these images are taken by a western medium are already indicative of possible pre-existing influence. The presence of crosses and sawn lumber fences make clear that these are hybrid burial sites. The 1858 gold rush witnessed graves plundered for the personal goods that were kept within, while the first missionaries began arriving in the 1830s, and all photos date from the 1860s onward. While it is impossible to verify when markers and graves in the images were created, the temporal context of the images are still worth discussing.

The dates of the images are especially valuable in the first three images. Figures 1, 2, and 3 are all taken from a cemetery at Yale. Figure 1 was taken by Charles MacMunn, figure 2 by Richard Maynard and the photographer of figure 3 is unknown. While the latter two photos are clearly the same cemetery, it is unclear whether figure 1 is as well. All three images feature a funerary house, but the house in figure 1 appears narrower, with a tightly angled roof,

67 Hawker, Ron, *In the Way f the White Man's Totem Pole: Tsimshian Gravestones 1879-1830*, (Master's Thesis, University of Victoria: 1985), 128.

compared to the gentle slopes of the other two images. Figure 1 clearly contains both Christian and Stó:lō mortuary markers, including six mortuary figures, three and possibly four mortuary posts, and one large cross. Figures two and three each contain three identical large crosses and other smaller crosses at different locations. All three cemeteries are fenced in, hinting at them being Christian cemeteries. While pre-contact Stó:lō burial grounds had a distinct spatial presence, marked by either clusters of cairns, multiple trees prepared as tree box burials, etc. David Schaepe believes the delineation of cemeteries by fences is of Christian origin at this time on the West Coast.[68]

If we accept that these cemeteries are in fact 'Christian', or at least controlled by missionaries, there are interesting implications for interpreting the photographs. In figure 1, the cross was placed inside the fenced in area, along with two mortuary figures and what appears to be a house post or mortuary post on the right corner of the funerary house. Catholic missions did not allow non-baptized Stó:lō or those who still practiced traditional customs to be buried in 'holy ground'.[69] That some figures are within the perimeter and some are not suggests an interesting scenario of exclusion and tolerance of traditional forms of memorials. Sadly, this hypothesis is quickly unraveled upon the discovery of the Yale native cemeteries as being under Anglican jurisdiction starting in 1867.[70] However, the inclusion of mortuary figures alongside a cross still raises questions of compatibility. As the BC Archives contain no date on the image, it is tempting then to consider this photograph as having been taken before figures 2 and 3, which both date from the early 1880s (1881 and 1884 respectively). This renders the situation even more curious when the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives date figure 1 in their

68 Interview with David Schaepe, May 17.
69 McKay, "Disturbing the Dead: Diversity and Commonality Among the Stó:lō", 130-131.
70 The archival website MemoryBC notes that the Yale mission (along with nearby Lytton), was controlled by the parish of St John the Divine, with its archival documents in the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster Archives. http://www.memorybc.ca/st-john-divine-parish-yale-b-c-fonds;rad

collection as having been taken in 1890.[71] That such a concentration of traditional mortuary markers exist at such a late date, twenty years before Ostapowicz posits their total disappearance, in a Christian cemetery, raises more questions than it answers about the transition away from traditional Stó:lō mortuary practices.

The markers themselves hold a host of information that corroborates knowledge about mortuary markers previously discussed. The mortuary figures are intricately carved, with the leftmost figure (Fig. 1) providing exceptional detail, with carved and painted pupils, a shirt or sweater painted on, a rifle and blanket/coat placed in its arms. Similar to ritual burnings, the objects left on the figure are most likely personal items, further helping to identify the figure and demonstrate the family's respect towards the deceased by providing items for the afterlife. The other figures all have carved wooden hats, and several have been shaped to appear as though they are wearing western style coats. As for the mortuary posts, two of them feature carvings of animals, with the largest post in the foreground mixing the animals and non-animals carving to create a distinct face. The symbols and creatures exhibited demonstrate the possible crests that identify that family or specify the individual. A crucial point to keep in mind is that these markers do not necessarily denote where the relatives they represent are buried; the figures represent the deceased present at cemetery. One final point of interest is the gender of the figures. The figures appear predominantly male; this resonates with a research sample Ostapowicz performed that found most Coast Salish mortuary figures, and eighty percent of Stó:lō figures, to be male.[72]

While the two other Yale cemetery images do not contain an assortment of mortuary figures, they still contain interesting observations. First is the clear maintenance performed between the dates

71 Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Archives, Document number WMCR-V256/PD1-39, http://www.albertaonrecord.ca/is-whyte-298;rad
72 Ostapkowicz, 3.

the photographs were taken- the perimeter fence has been repaired, vegetation has been cleared, and fences have been built around several crosses. Though it is impossible to ascertain who conducted the maintenance, missionaries or members of the Yale community, the maintenance of a graveyard in the present day is crucial to maintaining the responsibility towards one's ancestors. After touring a cemetery at Ruby Creek that had become overgrown with vegetation, Sonny McHalsie commented on ongoing attempted to organize a day for clearing and repairing the graveyard.[73] Once Stó:lō adopted fenced cemeteries, at what point would the maintenance of these boundaries become inserted into the continuity of responsibilities? A note in the archival description for the St. John's Parish concerning an 1894 petition to renovate and preserve the Yale cemetery could provide answers, unfortunately I identified this too late to visit the archive and view the document.[74]

While the mortuary figures in Figure 1 do not indicate where graves are actually located, figures 2 and 3 offer clues. Christian crosses are used to indicate specific burial sites, and that several crosses are fenced in leaves one to speculate whether these elements are indicating multiple graves. The long funerary house also raises interests as to how remains stored there may have been buried- were traditional box burials placed in there as they would have been in the past, or were more Christian procedures followed? One final point of curiosity is in figure 3. A lone, thin tree emerges from the centre of the photograph. At its lower point, level with a nearby shorter tree, is what resembles a box, or at least a rather large, man-made looking object. Could this be a tree box burial? While the same tree is in image 2, there is no such item visible, meaning it would have been recently placed (within a few years) when figure 3 was photographed. While blatant speculation, it drives the question over the toleration of box burials in territories where burial protocols were supposedly becoming more and more dictated by missionaries.

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73 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie, May 19.

74 MemoryBC, Fonds- St. John the Divine Parish (Yale, B.C.) fonds, http://www.memorybc.ca/st-john-divine-parish-yale-b-c-fonds;rad

Moving on, figure 4 exhibits features seldom discussed in the academic literature. In the background of a clearing stand multiple poles with what resemble flags attached. Consultation with Herb Joe gave a suggestion that the flags are actually goat wool blankets, and an excerpt presented by Kathryn McKay yielded a full-bodied contextualization. McKay's source, George Hills, the first bishop of British Columbia, commented on having passed many burial grounds consisting "of upright poles, with cross bars upon which are suspended the favorite blankets... of the deceased. Beneath are wooden square box like tombs".[75]

As a painting, the details of figure 4 are not as clear as the Yale photographs, however several blankets have details of missing pieces, and a "blanket" in the upper left corner resembles a black coat, with two rows of buttons. However, any sign of burial boxes is absent in the piece. The pitched tents, identified as surveyor's tents in an informal discussion with Tia Halstad and John Lutz[76], could have hidden burial boxes, but it is more interesting to note their close proximity to what the painter, Frederick Whymper, clearly labels a "burying ground". Nevertheless, the blankets themselves, as personal items, could have served similar functions as mortuary carvings, identifying and paying respect to deceased individuals. That blanket 'markers' are not really mentioned in ethnographic pieces render this idea speculation at best, but it also makes Hills statement of having seen multiple burial sites such as these all the more interesting. Sadly, Barnett's broad research on Coast Salish practices in the Gulf of Georgia does not reveal whether this practice may have been widespread among Coast Salish tribes or unique to the Fraser river valley. Only two tribes of the seven Barnett interviewed were asked about "blankets put up by grave", with the Sechelt confirming and the Squamish denying the presence of such activity in their communities.[77] Given that burials with scaffolds existed around the same period, it might be that if such burial grounds contained raised blankets, the site would not have

75 McKay, *Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices*, 58.
76 Informal discussion of this research project with John Lutz and Tia Halstad, May 16, 2013.
77 Barnett, *Gulf of Georgia Salish*, 262

been categorized as a unique form or variation of box burials.

The last image, figure 5, dated 1866-70, is the only image to feature a solitary grave site. A lone mortuary figure stands in a shed, with the photographer's caption including "*his wife dying of hunger and starvation at the back of the hut".*[78] The large size of the shed for a lone figure suggests both the high status and amount of wealth of the deceased, or that the shelter might have been used as a family burial or memorial site, with space for several figures. Carvings on the figure that suggest it is wearing a coat, complete with a collar, further demonstrate the high status of the deceased, either a Chief as described by the photographer, Frederick Dally, a siyam, or a similarly important member of the community. The shelter itself exemplifies the housing of the dead, and its formidable size for one lone figure emphasizes the wealth that was necessary to construct this memorial. Similar to figure 4, there is no way to confirm the tomb actually housed the deceased man, though it is likely; the shelter appears to be long enough to house funerary boxes, or the grave maybe an internment nearby.

That Dally describes the deceased man's wife as dying behind the shed from starvation is puzzling. If the memorial was recently constructed, it would be plausible to understand the woman as still heavily grieving. A recent construction of such a large individual grave site, a testament to the wealth of the man's family, would also mean the woman's state of starvation would perhaps stem from the grieving process rather than lack of resources. Such a wealthy man would also probably have extensive kinship networks that the woman could rely upon for support in her time of mourning, giving her time to work through her grief without other responsibilities, such as gathering and preparing food.[79] However, given the inability to date the raising of the memorial, we cannot be sure if Dally's caption is more a testament to his incomprehension of Stó:lō burial practices or a true observation.

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78 Dally, Frederick, *Indian Chiefs tomb and effigy; Fraser River, opposite New Westminster; his wife dying of hunger and starvation at the back of the hut*, Photograph, [1866-1870], British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number C-09274.

79 Herb Joe interview, May 24. Herb Joe also mentioned that had she died, it could very well have been from grief as much as or instead of malnutrition.

In reflecting on what these images reveal, they provide incredible detail on spatial arrangements of burials, the aesthetics of the differing carvings used, and in the case of Yale, an opportunity to analyze changes over time. They also provide visual representations of burial practises that bring to life the oral histories provided to scholars by Stó:lō elders. However, these images are limited in how much they can inform us about Stó:lō burials and beliefs about death. As missions began spreading Christianity into communities and interfering with their traditions, how burial practices may have reflected this slow transition and showcased resistance or adaptation. While figure 1 does show a curious spatial equality of Christian cross and Stó:lō mortuary figures, there lacks an understanding of why or how this could have been arranged. In many cases these images bring up more questions than they answer.

However, in that sense there may lay a different strength in these images. That they open up more intriguing avenues of exploration may help draw more attention to this period of transition. While studies on missionary activity and the creation of reserves retain the bulk of scholarly attention for this period, a more focused analysis on burial imagery may help us tweak the continuity of mortuary practices to better reflect dynamic engagement of the Stó:lō in resisting or coming to terms with invasive influences. Given that missionaries first arrived in Coast Salish regions in the 1830s and the full abandonment of traditional protocols is considered to be around 1930 marks a century long transitional stage, rather than an overnight shift or a leap over a single generation. While archeological studies demonstrate the persistence of ancient traditions in the first contact world, the same could be said for the present. That Stó:lō people today use pictures of their loved ones at memorial services[80], could be taken as drawing upon the use of mortuary figures as much if not more so than the impact of Christianity. Instead of trying to recreate a sense of pre-contact burial practices, these images provide the chance to take a peek into a time of slow and steady change. This project has hopefully

80 Cemetery tour with Sonny McHalsie.

demonstrated that there is promise to be had in expanding research on burial imagery and the era of post-contact mortuary transformation

Fig. 1. "First Nations burial ground along the Fraser River"

Fig. 2 “Indian Burial Ground at Yale”

Fig. 3 “Cemetery at Yale”

Fig. 4. “Indian Burying Ground, Boston Bar, BC

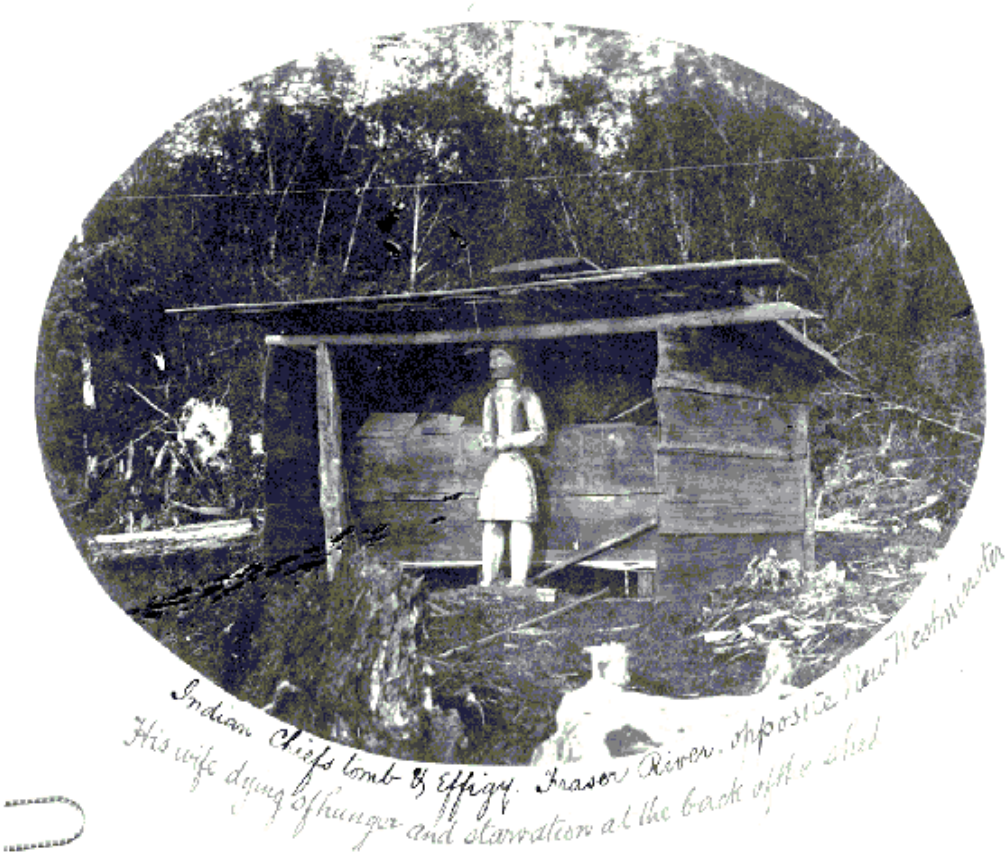

Fig. 5. "Indian Chief's tomb and effigy"

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Images

Figure 1. Macmunn, Charles, *First Nations burial ground along the Fraser River;* [Charles Bradbury collection; photographer's number 262], Photograph, British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number H-00534 http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-4D8D747/cgi-bin/text2html/.visual/img_txt/dir_146/h_00534.txt

This image has also been found dated from 1890 at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Archives, http://www.albertaonrecord.ca/is-whyte-298;rad

Figure 2. Maynard, *Indian burial ground at Yale, Photograph*, 1881**,** British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number F-05152, http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-4D8D747/cgi-bin/text2html/.visual/img_txt/dir_80/f_05152.txt

Figure 3. Undetermined author, *Cemetery at Yale*, Photograph, 1884, British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number I-30794, http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-4D8D747/cgi-bin/text2html/.visual/img_txt/dir_30/i_30794.txt

Figure 4. Whymper, Frederick, *Indian Burying Ground;* [Boston Bar, BC], Painting, 1863[?], British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number PDP00108, http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-4D8D747/cgi-bin/text2html/.visual/img_txt/dir_91/pdp00108.txt

Figure 5. Dally, Frederick, *Indian Chiefs tomb and effigy; Fraser River, opposite New Westminster; his wife dying of hunger and starvation at the back of the hut*, Photograph, [1866-1870], British Columbia Archives, Visual Records Catalogue, Call Number C-09274, http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-1C35B0C/cgi-bin/text2html/.visual/img_txt/dir_117/c_09274.txt

Interviews

Interviews with Herb Joe, May 21 and 24, 2013. Notes for both and tape for May 24 in possession of the author.

Interview with David Schaepe, May 17, 2013. Notes in possession of the author.

Cemetery tour/interview with Sonny McHalsie and Keith Thor Carlson, May 19, 2013. Notes and partial audio of video footage in possession of the author.