

Ethnohistory Field School Report 2015

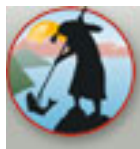
““They’re Not Called Peace
Canoes...”

Formal Coast Salish War Canoe
Racing in Stó:lō History and Identity

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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.



When Stan Greene tells his stories he is sitting in the old chair on his porch and his hands are busy working wet strips of cedar bark that wrap up in long stretches from the large plastic tub at his feet. There are other strips coiled in the now tea-colored water swirling in the tub, and the water is in constant motion as Stan inches the strips up and out and deftly weaves them into the traditional hat he is making. It is in the middle hours of morning in late May and Stan is sharing the history of war canoes as told to him by the elders of an earlier generation. The truth about war canoe racing, Stan says, is that the war part is all the result of white men.

To understand Stan Greene's history is to listen to Stan tell it the way he learned it, and he learned it from Elders in Sts'Ailes. It was primarily from Elders there, and then later from Chief Richard Malloway in Yakweakwioose, that Stan learned the oral history he carries.^{1,2} The Creator instructed the first carver on how to use the cedar tree to carve out a canoe, and the Creator showed the carver how to make the paddle and then how to use it. Because the canoe is cedar, it is a gift, and only clean paddlers ... clean people ... should pull in it. Clean of mind and clean of spirit. These are words that are repeated and echoed now.

"Canoe racing," Stan says as his fingers work quickly, "has been a part of my people's history long before it became 'war canoe' racing. For years my people would just race in whatever canoes they had; it was for fun." Stan's long gray hair is braided tight in twin lengths that hang and frame his chest like suspenders. He wears a black felt hat and he speaks with few pauses.

"Whites called them war canoes because they wanted to make people excited about the races," Stan says, "but real war canoes were very different from the canoes we race now. Even the canoes they

¹ For more on Richard Malloway, visit Brian Thom's collected stories and biography of Malloway here: <http://www.web.uvic.ca/~bthom1/Media/pdfs/ethnography/tell-stories.htm>

raced in back then were not real war canoes ... and this was before they started carving them special.³”

Stan stares out in his front yard at the 54 foot long canoe he carved special years ago. The *Stahlo Princess* rests up on blocks, and her prominent arching curve is apparent even when looking down her bow from Stan’s porch.

“She won her first and her last race,” Stan will later recall proudly. “She was champion for 18 years.”

Stan Greene stares out at the *Stahlo Princess*...stares through her at memory. “She was the first war canoe I carved,” he says, “and I carved her for my wife.” He smiles and is silent for a long time. Stan’s wife has recently passed away. Stó:lō protocol asks that people not to mention her name until a sufficient period of time has passed.

“We needed a canoe for the girls,” he says, continuing, and still staring through time, “Back then there weren’t many girls’ clubs racing, but my wife...” Stan pauses again, “...my wife and daughter loved pulling so much, I decided to carve a canoe for them to race. It was the first war canoe I ever carved and her first race was the 1986 Expo in Vancouver.”

“Right after I finished carving her and she was set,” Stan says, “I asked my wife to run to the hardware store to buy some paint so we could paint her for the race. ‘Red!’ I told her, ‘Or maybe black...’ Something bold, you know?” And here, Stan laughs. He laughs and laughs and laughs.

“She came back with a big bucket of pink paint,” he says finally, still laughing, “And when I started to get upset...started to yell about painting my new canoe pink...she just said ‘When *you* buy the paint, *you* can pick the color...’”

Stan is still laughing, but it is softer now. He looks back from the *Stahlo Princess* and down at the unfinished hat in his still hands and smiles. He is quiet before he says, “And then she won her first race and I knew I could never repaint her. She has been pink ever since.”

³ Stan is referring to the first formal races in around Vancouver Island in the middle of the nineteenth century here.

Stan has not raced the *Stahlo Princess* since his wife passed. He has not even attended a race since.

“It is not the same,” he says. “It will never be the same.”

I met with Stan Greene on the morning of May 26, 2015, and what he shared with me that day was the culmination of my month-long research as part of the Ethnohistory field school held in Chilliwack, British Columbia—Stó:lō country. Stan Greene’s history of canoe racing was very different from the histories that had been shared with me throughout the month from other elders who carved, and raced, and skipped their own teams, yet the differences between these histories are best not interpreted as divisive contrasts; instead, as anthropologists Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay argue: A plurality of understandings and histories “provides a larger comparative context.”⁴ Each oral narrative is an example of what the races and canoes now mean for each of the hundreds of Stó:lō who measure their springs and summers—the time between the winter dance and late summer harvest and canning—in the strenuous pull of paddles, the melodic calls and chants, and the smooth switches of training and racing, and each different variation adds to the complexity of understanding of the tradition of war canoe racing. When taken collectively, these differing perspectives allow us to appreciate war canoe racing for what it is: a uniquely distinct Coast Salish tradition that existed before Contact, and has evolved through years of White influence and interference, and continues to function as an expression of identity for its participants and audience.

What is known is that Coast Salish peoples raced canoes for generations before Contact. We learn this from Stan Greene’s stories of races and Jeff Point’s shared memories from his great-great-grandfather pulling to war and then later reenacting past victories in races at potlatches. After non-Indigenous settlement in the latter half of the nineteenth century, formal canoe races additionally became fixtures in Coast Salish society, and these formal races were largely performed in the context of

⁴ Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay, “The Battle of Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories,” *Ethnohistory* 58:3 (Summer 2011). 360-392.

expositions for Whites. However, we learn that while historian Paige Raibmon's "spectacles" and anthropologist Wayne Suttles' "commercial frauds" may have been artifices for White audiences and benefactors, they also provided Coast Salish people (and for the purposes of this essay, the Stó:lō, specifically) opportunities to engage in cultural practices that were otherwise discouraged and sometimes outright prohibited. As a result of, and in spite of White interference, formal canoe races and festivals evolved into culturally valuable events that are now distinct and inseparable expressions of Salish culture.⁵ Over the past half century, the context of the races has changed. While canoe races remain integral for the Salish community, White influence and presence at most races and festivals is now almost nonexistent. They have become important "intergroup gatherings" where Salish identities, individual and group, are established, re-established and affirmed, and they serve as important cultural and spiritual connectors for spectators, and Stó:lō pullers especially, with the pre-contact past.⁶

Shared memory and documentation suggests that formal war canoe racing among the coastal Salish peoples began in the mid-1860s.⁷ The earliest recorded formal races were held in New Westminster (near contemporary Vancouver) in 1864 and were part of larger political occasion organized by the governor of the colony on the occasion of Queen Victoria's birthday. These gatherings became annual events, and as historian Keith Thor Carlson shows, the government quickly sought to transform them from political forums into largely entertainment venues.⁸ Anthropologist John Dewhirst notes that within the first few years after the initial 1864 races, the Salish war canoes "comprised only a

⁵ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians* (Durham: Duke, 2005), 108; Wayne Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 227-228.

⁶ Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays*, 228.

⁷ As this paper discusses at length, canoe racing existed generations before Contact. For the purposes of separating pre-contact racing from post contact racing, I am using the term "formal war canoe racing" for the latter. This term reflects the influence of Whites, as the relative formality of the festivals to this day seems to result from the early rules the White organizers created for the races. For example, only after a few years after the earliest recorded White-hosted races, war canoe teams were limited to 11 pullers (Dewhirst notes that this was likely due to a desire to limit race purses, as some of the early "war" canoes held upwards of 20 pullers (44)) and to this day, 11 pullers is still the universally accepted and applied limit in Coast Salish war canoes.

⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, Problem of Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 220-231; 242; 260.

few events” in the competitions, and suggests that the British watercraft races featuring sailing skiffs, rowing, and sculling longboats were the principle attractions of these “water sports”.⁹ Existing pictures and memories of these early war canoe races also establish that the canoes being used were traveling or cargo canoes: large, wide, stable crafts that sat two abreast and were neither the war canoes they were advertised as, nor built for racing. Although these early exhibitions and competitions only featured “war canoe” races as sideshow novelties, White organizers awarded prizes and money to the winning Indigenous pullers.

As Dewhirst describes in detail, the financial incentive of the early races combined with the reduction of intratribal conflict in the coastal Salish region fostered the rapid development of the “racing canoe complex”.¹⁰ As the need for specialized canoes for war and long-distance transportation gradually diminished in the Fraser River Valley, they were replaced by increasingly specialized racing canoes. Dewhirst suggests that due to the immediacy of European racing crafts at the White sponsored water sports competitions, there might be a connection with the long and narrow appearance of the classic racing war canoe that appeared near the end of the nineteenth century and whose form has remained relatively unchanged since.¹¹ He notes that “[t]he small one and two man racing canoes” which begin to be carved and raced “resemble one and two-man rowing shells used at this time also”.¹² Although no indigenous predecessor is identified for the smaller racing craft, Dewhirst does document and identify the likely Indigenous precursor to the racing war canoe as well: the west coast of Vancouver Island Nootka canoe – giant vessels designed for the rough waters of the open ocean.¹³

⁹ John Dewhirst, “The Salish Racing Canoe” (BA graduating essay, The University of British Columbia, 1967), 50.

¹⁰ Dewhirst, “The Salish Racing Canoe,” 43.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 46.

¹² *Ibid*, 28, 46.

¹³ Interestingly, Dewhirst also credits Seabird carvers from the Chilliwack area for developing a slightly smaller version of the Nootka canoe that also influenced later designs in this period (28).

Although Dewhirst goes through great lengths to document the formation of the formal war canoe racing complex, and particularly the specialization of the canoes themselves, he does not devote much research to the long stretch of years that separates the initial White-sponsored celebrations in the mid and late nineteenth century to the subsequent spread and development of the uniquely Indigenous racing festivals at the turn of the twentieth which continues today. He writes that the Coast Salish “developed their own version of the rowing shell—the racing canoe—and cultivated canoe racing among themselves with coaches and managers as part of the enthusiasm in water sports at the turn of the century.”¹⁴ Dewhirst does not engage the oral histories describing the long tradition of pre-contact Coast Salish war canoe racing, though. “It is not known exactly,” he writes—addressing the rapid assimilation of formal racing by the Coast Salish, “how and when canoe racing spread to groups on the lower mainland and in northern Washington.”¹⁵ He goes on to note, without supporting documentation, that by the 1920s formal war canoe racing was universally present in Salish communities, but that the “nature of the races had changed... [t]he Salish organized their own races in which participants did not enter primarily for prize money, but rather for enjoyment of the sport and accompanying social activities.”¹⁶ For Dewhirst, the festivals that existed by the 1920s and have remained an annual tradition since, are inseparable from the early White-hosted races. Therefore, he struggles to understand how or why this dramatic transition takes place. Fortunately, Raibmon and Suttles have subsequently produced scholarship that more extensively explores the Salish appropriation and adaptation of White culture into their own traditions.

Raibmon investigates Aboriginal authenticity and the complicated relationships surrounding Indigenous identity in her 2005 work, *Authentic Indians*. She devotes a large portion of her book to the Salish hop field workers in British Columbia and Washington in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

¹⁴ Dewhirst, “The Salish Racing Canoe,” 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

centuries, and it is in describing their efforts to reinterpret their changing world through adapting their cultural rituals, that Raibmon reveals one possible explanation for the Coast Salish's continued enthusiasm for racing:

Canoe races were another activity that Aboriginal people incorporated into the labor cycle.

Robert Farran of King County remembered postharvest canoe races in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Homeward-bound workers "held a 'potlatch,' going to some selected spot, where they prepared a great feast. This was indulged by many tribes, having different kinds of sports and dancing and then the great canoe races—and such races having 12 to 14 men in a canoe and all paddling—a great sight." As Farran's reminiscence suggests, canoe races were spectacles for White audiences. They were likewise chances to earn money. At one Fourth of July race in Washington, the prizes ranged from fifty-five dollars for first prize in the war canoe category to five dollars for third place in the women's and double-paddle canoe races.¹⁷

Stó:lō elder Jeff Point described memories shared by his great-great-grandfather of similarly structured potlatches (where warriors raced in actual war canoes) that were held before the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ That Farran, a white witness, describes canoe races in Washington at the end of the nineteenth century in almost the exact same words suggests continuity. If we start to imagine, then, the White-sponsored races around Vancouver Island in the latter half of the nineteenth century within the intertwined contexts of cultural tradition and cross-cultural exchange, and not as the *beginning* of a cultural tradition (as Dewhirst¹⁹ and later, Suttles²⁰ does) then the "spread" of formal racing is easier understood. Instead of creating a new tradition, the Salish were adapting a cultural practice that had existed for generations.

¹⁷ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 108.

¹⁸ For from my interview with Jeff Point on May 20, 2015, and his history of war canoe racing, see below.

Some of the reasons for this adaptation are also explained by Raibmon, who argues that the formal canoe races, in part, evolved in response to the ongoing efforts to ban Aboriginal culture in the late 1800s. After the “Potlatch Ban” in 1885, formal canoe races became “acceptable” forms of cultural expression. Raibmon describes the change like this:

Spectacle aside, canoe races were also public affirmations of Aboriginal identity and community. During this period, canoe racing took on an importance independent of functions explicitly known as potlatches. While the colonial economy interfered with many Aboriginal cultural practices, it facilitated others, including canoe races. The greater degree of approval Whites granted this activity made canoe races easier to hold.¹⁹

Part of the White approval Raibmon describes came in the form of financial support and funding for many of these early races. For example, an “Attractions” announcement in the *Chilliwack Progress* on September 16, 1908, describes the formation of one such race and notes that \$700.00 needed to be set aside (presumably for race purses) in order to host it.²⁰ That the formal canoe races and festivals that developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were conducted within the potlatch tradition is quite evident, even when viewed through the eyes of White outsiders.

When Wayne Suttles witnesses one of the festivals on Cultus Lake near Chilliwack, British Columbia in the early 1970s, he observes that, “[t]he modern weekend of canoe racing certainly has most of the picnic quality of the old potlatch.”²¹ Suttles then argues that the formal canoe festivals do more than resemble pre-Contact potlatches, and that they are, in fact potlatches, especially considering (as he does) them to be opportunities for local groups to “reidentify” themselves within the greater

¹⁹ Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 108.

²⁰ “Attractions,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 16 September, 1908, page 2.
<http://theprogress.newspapers.com/image/43169861>

²¹ Wayne Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 225.

Coast Salish community. Suttles reaches this conclusion after sharing that he was initially “inclined to regard ... the summer [races] as commercial frauds.”²²

The irony of Whites financially supporting and attending formal canoe races at the turn of the century while a ban on potlatches existed seems to have escaped much notice. Perhaps this was partly because of the willingness of the Salish to adapt their races to fit the comfortable, more formal mold that Whites were used to. After the middle of the nineteenth century, races had formal starts and finishes and canoes had a set number of pullers and were increasingly shaped more like the watercraft Whites enjoyed watching race. This suggests that these formal changes to Salish war canoe races may have been intentionally designed by the Salish participants and hosts to ingratiate White audiences, as the benefits from having White support were many.

Not only did the canoe festivals enable the Coast Salish peoples to continue to freely meet in large “intergroup” gatherings where a wide variety of otherwise prohibited cultural practices were encouraged and celebrated for their distinctness by White audiences, but as the relationship between the puller and participants and White audience changed over time, so did the importance of festivals. For example, in his later “Coast Salish Summer Festivals: Rituals for Upgrading Social Identity”, Dewhirst concludes after spending the summer of 1968 watching the races, that the festivals persisted after the “Potlatch Ban” ended because of a complicated relationship between White patrons and Indigenous participants.²³ The Coast Salish, Dewhirst argued, used the festivals to simultaneously promote their own culture for their “highly acculturated young people” (counteracting white cultural influence) while upgrading their own status in the white community due to their desire to “emulate the more prosperous

²² Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays*, 224.

²³ John Dewhirst, “Coast Salish Summer Festivals: Rituals for Upgrading Social Identity” *Anthropologica, New Series* 18, no. 2 (1976): 231-273. Dewhirst is concerned with the “development and growth of summer festivals since 1945.” This frame coincides with the formal end of the potlatch ban in 1951.

white middle class life style.”²⁴ Although Dewhirst’s main point is the latter, his observations on the important role the festivals play during this period in preserving Coast Salish culture for younger generations are revelatory—for example, he notes that “compulsory formal education in residential schools...removed young people from the influence of elders, especially during adolescent years when ritual knowledge, names, family histories and prerogatives would be learned.”²⁵ The festivals, he observes, allows the younger Salish participants (male and female alike) to engage with cultural traditions and practices during the summer, and that this is an alternative to the winter dances they are only limitedly allowed to participate in.

Now, when White influence and attendance is almost non-existent at most of the formal canoe races, and now that regional residential schools have been closed for over a generation²⁶ ... now, the story of Stó:lō war canoe racing is the story of Slade Williams. In his late 30s and no longer pulling regularly, Slade is still built to race, which he does on occasion. At every festival he attends he walks the shore with his arms crossed and around him always hears:

“You racing today, Slade?”

“Bring your paddle today, Slade?”

“You pulling, Slade?”

The story of Slade is that he started racing young. He was ten when he first pulled as a buckskin. It was not long before he was invited to pull for his uncles’ club: River Spirit. Invited may be the wrong word, for all of the Williams family pulls. There was never really any doubt that Slade would too, and looking at old photographs of Slade when he was young and pulled on the first River Spirit team, it is easy to see why. Tall even then, he leans into every frame and is often draped over his teammates’ shoulders; he is all whipcord sinew and muscle. He smiles in every picture and his hair is long.

²⁴ Dewhirst, “Coast Salish Summer Festivals,” 270.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 269.

²⁶ The student residence at St. Mary’s residential school closed in 1986.

Slade pulled for River Spirit until he married his first wife, and she was a Point. It was then that Slade switched clubs and began pulling for the Point's and their Five Star canoe. He was champion with Five Star for years, and he sat in the bow for almost every race.²⁷ Both clubs still race today, and even though Slade has not sat bow for an entire season in years, he is still considered to belong on the Five Star club—not his uncles' River Spirit club. That this is mentioned a number of times by Slade's family members and by other pullers from both clubs suggests that it is unusual for a puller to sit on the canoe of a different family's or club's canoe.²⁸ Why a change of this nature might matter is partially answered during an interview with Slade's sisters: Brenda Pike and Shannon Campbell. Both young women are experienced pullers who have raced for years, and both described leaving their uncles' River Spirit club for the Point's Five Star club specifically because of Slade's presence there.²⁹ No one suggests that there

²⁷ In my interview with Jeff Point on May 20, 2015, he described the bowman as being one of the most important pullers in the war canoe. Jeff went into great detail about the value of having a puller with savvy and endurance in the bow, as the bowman is responsible both for setting the pace for the pullers and for helping navigate the turns. When I asked him about Slade, Jeff leaned back and smiled and said, "One of the best bowman I have ever had." I later asked Slade to comment on Jeff Point's opinion of the bowman, Slade thought for a moment and said (quietly as always) "I never thought the bowman as being any more important than any other puller. We are all pulling together for the same thing, and each of us has a job to do. No one is more important on the team. We are all important." It is apparent, though, that Slade's opinion is not shared by all pullers.

When asked about the importance of the bow, Fran Douglas, in an interview on May 22, 2015, shared that on her club the most inexperienced pullers usually started in the back of the canoe and sat immediately in front of the skip, and that the most experienced pullers usually sat in the bow. She also noted that for some canoes with narrow bows, the bowman needed to be slender enough to fit in this limited space, and that filling that requirement often was more important than experience. (When describing how this latter reason was why she was asked to sit bow when she was only 13, she affirmed that this was an honor.)

In their interview on May 28, 2015, Brenda Pike and Shannon Campbell shared a story about Slade and a recent race. Slade was asked to sit bow for Five Star in the Nooksack Mother's Day Race in 2014, even though he had not pulled regularly for a few years, and on the last turn of the race the Five Star canoe was about to miss the turn buoy which would have disqualified them from finishing "in the money", when Slade hooked the turn buoy with his paddle and pulled it under the bow of the canoe at the last moment. (See Figure 1.) "That," Shannon Campbell said, "is why you sit the most experienced puller in the bow."

²⁸ When I was first introduced to Slade by his brother-in-law, Luke Pike, I was told that Slade did not pull for his uncles' club and that this had been a point of some contention back when Slade first changed clubs. Luke suggested that Slade still was teased about it all of these years later, and it is true that at one of the canoe festivals I attended in May, Slade was approached by another puller who asked if Slade was going to be pulling that day. When Slade suggested that he might, the puller asked "For Five Star or River Spirit?" and then laughed. Slade, of course, laughed with him.

²⁹ In fact, Brenda Pike went on to specify that she left River Spirit because she had been pulling for years and "wanted to win" and that having a brother and sister on Five Star allowed her to pull for the champion club.

are rules forcing pullers' priorities, but the implication is: Pullers train and race with their family's or band's club if at all possible.

For Slade, the change of clubs survived the end of his marriage and brought more than his immediate family to the Five Star canoes—his daughter now pulls for the club as well—for in Jeff Point, Slade found more than a father-in-law and skip.

Now the story of Stó:lō war canoe racing is the story of Jeff Point, and Jeff Point's laughs are punctuation. He will finish a story and chuckle--his metal teeth flashing bright under the sun. He is drinking coffee and sitting out on the deck behind his house, and behind him stretches a dugout he has been working on this spring. It is a single's canoe, a few short meters long, and was probably carved in the 1980s.³⁰ Jeff Point has been sanding down the old coats of varnish and patching some of the spots worn thin on sand and gravel river bottoms.

"The older canoes," he says, "Need a little more care and attention....just like the older pullers!" and he laughs.

The single racing canoe is far different than the massive canoes the Coast Salish peoples used for war before formal racing began, and it represents the ultimate specialization of the sport. Just long enough to hold the balance of its puller, and just wide enough at its center most point for an adult's hips to slip in—without a seat or often a support, the single canoe has room only for its puller. Its minimalist efficiency is, of course, what makes it so fast in the water, but it is far different than the larger trading, fishing, and actual war canoes that preceded its place in Stó:lō culture.³¹

³⁰ Jeff was unsure of exactly when it was originally carved, he was repairing it for his daughter.

³¹ Dewhirst's "The Salish Racing Canoe" details the construction of the Coast Salish Racing canoe and tracks its development through the 1960s. This paper will not discuss the evolving design, but it is worth noting that the overall form and function of the racing canoe has remained stable since Dewhirst performed his study. What has changed, however, is the rise in popularity of the cedar strip canoe. Jeff Point noted that his son was making a strip canoe and when I asked why they were more and more popular Jeff noted the increasing difficulty of finding cedar

The war canoes, by all accounts, were the largest canoes the Coast Salish carved. They held dozens of warriors and were drafted deep to better cut through the coastal waters. Jeff has a scale model one such canoe in his house, and he uses his fingers to indicate its scale.

“See,” he says, holding the model (the length of his forearm) in his hands and point to the wide middle with his finger, “if you imagine a warrior being here and the size of my finger ... you can see how many this would hold....” Jeff lifts his finger off the canoe and lowers it again next to where he held it last...indicating where another warrior would sit and pull. He lifts his finger and sets it down again and again...it would take dozens and dozens of his fingers to fill the length of the canoe. Jeff looks up and laughs.

Jeff Point’s great-great-grandfather went to war often. He would pull with as many as 50 other warriors in the great cedar canoes and follow the coast north to fight the Haida.³²

“We’re all Coast Salish [around here],” Jeff says, “We never used to really fight each other. If you wanted a fight, you’d have to paddle north,” and he laughs for a long moment before continuing. “And so that’s what they did.”

This was the story that was passed to Jeff from his uncle, who learned it from his great-grandfather.

logs large enough to dig out. For singles and doubles, the cost of a large cedar log often is significantly more than the cost of the materials needed to make the cedar strips instead. Mark Point also spent an afternoon with me discussing the various canoes he is currently carving. He graciously allowed me to photograph them and spoke at length about the importance of passing along his carving knowledge to interested younger Stó:lō pullers.

³² Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay detail one such battle (possibly the largest in these wars) in their excellent “The Battle of Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories” *Ethnohistory* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 359-392. Angelbeck also challenges the commonly accepted antiquated belief that the Coast Salish peoples were a more passive and defensive people in his “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare, or Coast Salish Pacifism Reconsidered: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography” *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007) 260-283.

“He said they got up there and they had thirty canoes full of warriors. He said that those people [Haida] came out to meet them because they heard they were coming. So they all jumped in their canoes and met them and they started fighting right there on the water.”

Here Jeff pauses. He sips from his coffee and smiles. His teeth flash. He continues.

“And how racing started, and how they would imitate these war canoe battles at, you know, festivals, is the one that was losing the battle would turn their canoe around and take off, and the one that was winning the battle would try to track them down and catch them.” Jeff is grinning, “So that became the sport, you see? If they could catch them, they’d kill them all, and if they couldn’t catch them...” He trails off and searches his listener’s face for understanding.

“So this kind of imitates that, you see? ... When the Coast Salish people used to get together, they used to imitate that war. A family would have a potlatch for maybe a week ... [and] part of that potlatch would be war canoe races. They would put their big war canoes in the river and race against each other.”³³ Jeff Point laughs again.³⁴

The history of war canoe racing for Jeff is inseparable from the history of Coast Salish warfare. Jeff Point trains his pullers as warriors, and he trains his pullers as warriors because he understands war canoe racing to be only a few generations removed these battles and reenactments. Pullers, then, *are* warriors. It is important to note, though, that this is not to suggest that Jeff Point and other Coast Salish skippers and pullers believe that they are going to war when they race, or that they are training for battle or conflict when the season begins. As Angelbeck argues in his “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare” archaeological, ethnographic, and ethnohistoric evidence suggests that the Coast Salish have a long

³³ Here, Jeff Point noted that this was before the middle of the nineteenth century, before Contact and the white organized festivals that followed.

³⁴ Angelbeck and McLay’s “The Battle of Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories” demonstrates through the collection of shared oral traditions pulled from over 20 different bands of Coast Salish peoples all describing the same massive battle with the Lekwiltok at Maple Bay, that memories of major conflicts certainly are shared from generation to generation.

history of being warlike, and that warriors have, in many cases existed as a separate class within Salish culture.³⁵

For Jeff Point and his pullers and for pullers on other Coast Salish clubs, that warrior class continues to exist and they are explicitly and implicitly its members. Jeff Point notes this on many occasions throughout the morning and into the afternoon. For example, when he discusses Slade, he states that Slade is a “great warrior” and that if he would have been a warrior in the time of his ancestors, he would have been decorated time and again for his service. “Our warriors would be called on to fight for other bands often,” Jeff says, “and [Slade] would have been given a nice gift ... like a necklace ... each time he was called on to fight. So, you see, Slade would have been covered in honors...”³⁶

Angelbeck notes that warriors were often professionals and that being a warrior “ran in families.”³⁷ This is certainly true for Slade, and for Jeff Point, and Brenda Williams and Shannon Campbell, and for all of the pullers and elders interviewed for this piece.³⁸ Pulling was expected and few even questioned this. Shannon Campbell (pregnant at the time of her interview) noted that she was planning on pulling with her newborn daughter as soon as possible. “I cannot wait to be out there on

³⁵ Bill Angelbeck, “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare, or Coast Salish Pacifism Reconsidered: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography” *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007) 274-275.

³⁶ When Slade arrived at the Chilliwack Landing canoe festival on Saturday, May 23, he wore a simple carved miniature war canoe paddle from his neck. It was solid cedar and he noted, when asked, that it was given to him after winning a race.

³⁷ Angelbeck, “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare,” 275.

³⁸ I found no evidence to suggest that women were not warriors before Contact; in fact, Joshua Reid includes the following recollection from White sailors who witnessed a Coast Salish attack in the early nineteenth-century in his recently published *The Sea is my Country*: “Striking crew members unconscious, they [the Clayoquot warriors], threw them into the sea, where women in canoes dispatched them with their paddles.” (New Haven: Yale, 2015), 82. This, at least, suggests that some women were warriors and fought in canoes alongside men; however, this alone is relatively insubstantial, and would, in my opinion warrant more research and questioning.

the water with my baby,” she said.³⁹ That pullers are considered to be warriors (and that they consider themselves to be warriors) becomes apparent in more formal circumstances as well. In July, 2015, Slade’s younger brother (and Brenda and Shannon’s older brother), unexpectedly passed away. He too, pulled for years with River Spirit Canoe Club and when remembering him, both socially and formally, his friends and family and community members more than once referred to him as a warrior.⁴⁰

Angelbeck also notes that Coast Salish warriors were often required to endure intense training and “put forth great efforts” and that Stó:lō warriors specifically were “separated from society” due to the fact that they were killers.⁴¹ Similarly, Carlson’s research with Stó:lō Second World War veterans revealed the power that memories of an earlier generation of warriors had within Stó:lō society as a source of suspicion and sometimes ostracization when the vets returned from Europe in 1945.⁴² Jeff Point remembers when Stó:lō pullers would live together in a house for the whole festival season. “The band would pay for them to live there and train,” Jeff says. When asked why the practice has all but vanished now, Jeff thinks for a moment. “I think,” he says, “that there are just too many clubs now. Back then each band would have one club and everyone wanted to pull for that club, and the band would set aside money for things like a house and food and training. But then ... but then everyone wanted a club and wanted to pull.” He laughs. “Now there a lots of clubs associated with each band.... There just isn’t enough money for a band to support each of its clubs like that.”⁴³

Every puller interviewed for this piece went into detail describing the rugged training and cleansing rituals he or she experienced as part of the formal race season. Slade recalls early morning

³⁹ Shannon would, days later, pull Brenda’s daughter, Emma, and Slade’s niece, Odessa, around Chilliwack Lake in a double canoe. It was the first time either girl had been in a canoe.

⁴⁰ “Obituary,” *Dignity Memorial*. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Lance-Williams&lc=3150&pid=175237036&mid=6509340>

⁴¹ Angelbeck, “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare,” 275.

⁴² Keith Thor Carlson, “Stó:lō Soldiers, Stó:lō Veterans,” in *You Are Asked to Witness*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Chilliwack, British Columbia: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997), 125-138.

⁴³ Jeff and Mark Point both noted in interviews that they started the Five Star canoe club because they were unable to consistently pull for their club team and they wanted to race every weekend.

training runs with his teammates at Cultus Lake ... he remembers rising early to run long kilometers before even settling down into the canoe to pull. Brenda Williams and Channon Campbell also remember the more intense workouts when they pulled with the Points' Five Star Club (something they compared to River Spirit at the time, and they both suggested that the difficult training might have been part of the reason why they were more successful pulling on the Five Star teams).⁴⁴ Fran Douglas also remembers training hard when she pulled. "Sometimes," she says, "the workouts were worse than the races!"

Each puller also remembers the many rituals associated with cleansing and pulling as well. Each puller noted without prompting that pullers were expected to not drink or smoke or use drugs for the entire formal festival season. Each puller also shared some of the more specific cleansing rituals. Jeff Point shared happily that he expects his pullers to treat their canoes with respect because they are sacred. This often involves cleaning the canoes with water and cedar before and after using them as well. James Leon from Sts'Ailes remembers when he was younger having to ritually wash all of his club's canoes after every training session.⁴⁵ All the young pullers were expected to do this. Fran Douglas, who also pulled for Sts'Ailes, confirms that she, too, was expected to wash the canoes when she was younger. Brenda Williams and Shannon Campbell remember (with some amusement) their skip asking them to take diuretics early in training to help cleanse their systems before the start of the race season. Stan Greene also remembers cleaning canoes before and after training and racing in them. He also notes that he and his wife would ritualistically bathe the *Stahlo Princess* in cedar boughs before races in order to purify her.

⁴⁴ Brenda and Shannon also note that the training has changed over time. The *Rikkole Cree* women's team (regarded as the champions in the summer of 2015) were credited by both Brenda and Shannon for adopting CrossFit into their training, for example.

⁴⁵ From an informal interview on May 21, 2015.

This, then, is where the histories of Jeff Point and Stan Greene begin to blend. Stan Greene does not discuss whether Salish canoe racing had anything to do with war before Contact and the arrival of Whites, and he sometimes argues that the more violent tendencies of the sport are unnecessary results of White interference with the races, but when he shares his story of how the Coast Salish peoples raced each other in their canoes for generations before the arrival of Europeans, and when he describes the sacredness of the cedar canoes and the time-honored purity rituals pullers perform throughout the festival season, he is sharing the story of all Stó:lō and Salish participants.

These shared memories combine with the shared memories from Jeff Point's uncle and great-great-grandfather...of famous war canoe battles being reenacted by former participants and the generations that followed them ... to form a comprehensive view of what the story of Stó:lō war canoe racing is today. Jeff Point's history and Stan Greene's history both accept that canoe racing existed long before Contact, and that many of those traditions persist today, in spite of the interference of Whites beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Research and scholarship help explain how and why formal Coast Salish war canoe racing changed and adapted to White influence, and illuminate how the Stó:lō and other Coast Salish peoples were able to use the formal festivals (with White support and approval) to continue celebrating their unique culture and identity with otherwise prohibited celebrations and gatherings. Now, the festivals continue to be important for preserving traditional Coast Salish identity and for continuing the Stó:lō warrior culture, in a modified capacity.

There is a refrain that is overheard often at the canoe festivals: "They don't call it war canoe racing for nothing...." Slade mentions it first when he describes one of the challenges of pulling in the bow.

"Coming into turns, when two canoes are close together, they often will try to 'hook' each

other, or push one another out of the race. The bowmen will sometimes really go at it; they will, you know..." and here Slade mimics an overhand chopping motion, holding an imaginary paddle. "You often get your fingers hit pretty hard. Broken sometimes." He pauses for some time as if considering his last statement, before adding, "Well, they don't call it war canoe racing for nothing."

When remembering her first race sitting bow, Fran Douglas also recounts the sudden violence of the turn when her canoe and another canoe became tangled together: "Our skip hooked the back end of their boat trying to, you know, impede them. And they turned around and started to hit us with their paddles! I was on the bow of the boat and was pretty young, you know, 14 years old, and I get hit with a paddle across the back of my head. [The puller sitting behind me] grabbed me and pushed me to the bottom of the boat and told me to stay there. Then she proceeded to have a fisticuff on the turn! It was, yeah, pretty intense."⁴⁶

Brenda Pike and Shannon Campbell also recall the often violent races with some humor: "I think most of the time if I hit somebody it was not intentional ... it was like, by accident," Brenda says and Shannon laughs. "It's called war canoe racing," Shannon adds, smiling, "it happens and some races will disqualify you for it, but as long as it is super intense and nobody breaks a rib or anything ... then it just happens. And some years another canoe club will just decide to paddle fight with you every race...even if it means being disqualified."

"It's all cheating," Stan Greene says, and he is vehement. "The hitting, the hooking, the paddle fighting...it is all cheating." His fingers work the cedar strips into the hat again with rapidity. "Our canoes would carry our warriors to battle, yes, but they carried the wounded warriors home too. The races we have today are not like the races we had before the Whites. The Whites wanted "war canoe racing" because they thought that was more exciting than just "canoe racing" and so we called them war

⁴⁶ Fran Douglas was interviewed on Friday, May 22.

canoes. But before then we just raced canoes and it was separate from war ... it was what we did for fun. We raced canoes and carved canoes but not racing canoes then. The Creator gave us the cedar to carve the canoe and gave us cedar to carve the paddle and the cedar is sacred. Before and after we pull in them we bathe them in cedar boughs, and we must bathe, must make ourselves pure too, before we can sit in our canoes. When we race and pull, we must be clean of mind and spirit.”

When I ask Slade if he feels like the contact and occasional violence of war canoe races is in keeping with what he sees as his Stó:lō warrior tradition, he pauses and takes a long moment before answering. We have just witnessed an especially violent race at the Seabird Island Canoe Races and as we watch the bettered pullers climb out of their canoes (more than one paddle was shattered in the race, and one of the pullers has blood freely flowing down his left arm as he comes ashore).

“I think that war canoe racing is not really about the violence, no,” he finally says. “We are very competitive and we want to win, of course, and sometimes that means, you know, that we have races like this—where the pullers are really going after each other, but pulling...pulling is not about violence. Being a warrior, and I am glad Jeff used that term, being a warrior is not about violence. It is about embracing and honoring a way of life, it is about our tradition, you know? It is about being Stó:lō.”

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