



# Story People: Stó:lō-State Relations and Indigenous Literacies in British Columbia, 1864–1874\*

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## *Abstract*

*The Stó:lō are a group of approximately 28 different communities, which share a common language and culture in what is now generally known as the Lower Fraser Valley of southwestern British Columbia. Between 1864 and 1874, Stó:lō and neighbouring tribes presented four petitions to the colonial and (after 1871) federal government. The survival of so many Indigenous texts from this era that speak directly to the state offers a rare interpretive opportunity. In a relatively brief period of time, colonial and then provincial authorities rapidly obtained increased control over both lands and people in the emerging province. Simultaneously, Halkomelem-speaking peoples in the region swiftly developed new cultural literacies, among which was a facility with one of the central technologies of settler power: writing. As we will see in the following discussion, the earliest forms of Indigenous writing we have for this period are about land and Stó:lō peoples' relationships with settler authorities. This series of petitions traces an important shift in settler-Indigenous relations, while also revealing a great deal about Indigenous ideas around literacy and how settler appropriation of Stó:lō land was*

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*challenged from the very earliest days. Throughout, a focus on story demonstrates how the struggles over land that have characterized Indigenous-state relations in British Columbia are also, inextricably, a struggle for narrative power.*

### **Résumé**

*La nation des Stó:lōs réunit quelque 28 collectivités différentes, qui partagent une langue et une culture communes dans la région connue généralement sous le nom de la vallée du bas Fraser, dans le sud-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique. De 1864 à 1874, les Stó:lōs et les nations voisines ont présenté quatre pétitions au gouvernement colonial et (après 1871) fédéral. La survie d'autant de textes autochtones qui s'adressent directement à l'État ouvre une rare fenêtre sur cette époque. En relativement peu de temps, les autorités coloniales puis provinciales ont pu accroître leur emprise sur les terres et les peuples de cette province naissante. Au même moment, les peuples de la région parlant la langue halkomelem ont rapidement acquis de nouvelles compétences culturelles, dont une aisance à manier l'une des techniques centrales du pouvoir des colons : l'écriture. Nous verrons dans l'analyse qui suit que les premiers écrits autochtones dont nous disposons pour cette période portent sur les terres et les relations des Stó:lōs avec les autorités. La série de pétitions marque un changement important dans les relations entre les colons et les Autochtones, mais elle en dit aussi long sur ce que pensaient ces derniers de l'écriture et sur le fait que l'appropriation des terres des Stó:lōs par les colons a été contestée dès les débuts. Tout du long, on peut voir que les luttes pour les terres qui ont caractérisé les relations entre les Autochtones et l'État en Colombie-Britannique sont aussi inextricablement liées à une lutte de pouvoir pour dominer le discours public.*

### **Introduction**

As Edward Said observed, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging” was a crucial dimension of imperial struggles over land.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, narrative and power are constitutive elements of all human relations: organizing and re-organizing our conceptions of self, other, and relationships; and

defining, maintaining, and challenging the limits of what appears possible in any given moment. Narrative not only shapes individuals and collectives, it also provides a lens through which we can perceive, and thereby begin to interpret, the cultural dimensions of the deployment of social power. And yet humanists and social scientists have only begun to explore and examine the position of narrative in western Canadian history.<sup>2</sup> This paper analyzes a series of written petitions submitted to colonial and then Canadian dominion governments by Coast Salish people living in what is now known as southwest British Columbia between 1864 and 1874. These documents reveal competing narratives about Indigenous peoples' place in the social and geographical landscapes of the time, and illustrate how Indigenous peoples' early engagements with western literacy enabled them to inscribe their own stories onto the changing terrain of Indigenous-settler relations.

In 1864, a petition from 55 Coast Salish leaders to the new governor of the Colony of British Columbia, Frederick Seymour, included the following passage:

We know the good heart of the Queen for the Indians. You bring that good heart with you, so we are happy to welcome you. We wish to become good Indians, and to be friends with the white people.... Please to protect our land, that it will not be small for us: many are well pleased with their reservations, and many wish that their reservations be marked out for them.<sup>3</sup>

Just ten years later, in another much longer petition the sentiments of many of the same Salish leaders suggest a dramatic shift in attitude towards settler authorities. This shift was precipitated by the government's 1865 and 1867 decisions to reduce the same central Fraser Valley reserves that the 1864 petition had asked Seymour to protect. In this second petition, Indigenous leaders from the Upper and Central Fraser Valley (who in the later nineteenth century were increasingly identified by themselves and others as "Stó:lō"<sup>4</sup>) describe a pattern of bureaucratic obstructionism that would come to characterize Indian policy over the next century and a half:

For many years we have been complaining of the land left

to us being too small. We have laid our complaints before the Government officials nearest to us: they sent us to some others; so we had no redress up to the present; and we have felt like men being trampled on, and are commencing to believe that the aim of the white men is to exterminate us as soon as they can, although we have always been quiet, obedient, kind, and friendly to the whites.<sup>5</sup>

In this relatively brief ten-year period, colonial and then provincial authorities asserted unprecedented control over both lands and people in the emerging settler colony. Simultaneously, Coast Salish peoples in the region swiftly developed new cultural literacies, among which was a facility with one of the central technologies of settler power: writing. The earliest forms of Indigenous writing we have for this period pertain to land and Indigenous peoples' relationships with settler authorities. Between 1864 and 1874, Stó:lō and neighbouring tribes presented four petitions to the British Columbia colonial and (after 1871) federal government.<sup>6</sup> The first two, delivered in 1864 and 1866, were signed by 55 and 70 Coast Salish leaders, respectively, and were addressed to Frederick Seymour, governor of what was then the colony of British Columbia. These earliest petitions were relatively brief and generally deferential in stating the petitioners' desires. After British Columbia joined confederation with Canada in 1871, another two petitions were sent to Israel Wood Powell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Written in 1873 and 1874 and signed by leaders representing 73 and 56 communities, respectively, these petitions demonstrate Salish peoples' increasing linguistic fluency, as well as an acute awareness of the ways in which they were being marginalized in the emerging settler culture. The tone of these later two petitions is more explicitly confrontational than the earlier ones.

The survival of so many Indigenous texts from this era that speak directly to the state offers a rare interpretive opportunity. These petitions are important not only for what they suggest about how Indigenous peoples were responding to the imposition of a colonial system of land use, but for what they reveal about a discursive contestation between what might be characterized as Indigenous

micro-narratives and colonial meta-narratives, where parties on both sides of the equation drew on historical understandings to explain the present and to project a future. Historians agree that this period represented the shift where British Columbia transformed from a fur-trading society to a full-blown settler colony.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Indigenous peoples, especially those occupying what settlers perceived as the highly desirable arable and range lands along the Fraser River, were encountering a new form of colonial enterprise — settlement<sup>8</sup> — and with it, a settler government and populace with growing hunger for land, who understood the present, and projected a desired future, according to a particular discursive description of the past. Earlier scholarship has provided rich historical portraits of Indigenous-settler relations for this period through which we can understand the narrative shift evident in the petitions as a reasonable response to Salish peoples' changing political and material circumstances. I would suggest that these petitions also help us consider more closely the narrative dimensions of Indigenous peoples' political strategies, and by extension, the discursive expressions through which Indigenous-state relations were facilitated. The petitioners position themselves (and increasingly, their demands) in relation to a set of settler meta-narratives, which were, in turn, also undergoing change. As legal historian Hamar Foster has shown, Indigenous petitions in the late nineteenth century had not yet adopted the legal argumentation that would come to characterize early twentieth-century Indigenous activism, and instead oriented their messages to British colonial narratives about the promise of racial uplift and inclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Further, the petitions raise a host of questions about the conditions in which Indigenous writing takes shape in this period. How did Indigenous peoples engage the very European tradition of petitioning as a medium through which they could make themselves heard by settler authorities? In what ways was it folded into existing Salish understandings of how to conduct political affairs and authorize important speech? Nineteenth-century petition writing was a cross-cultural collaborative enterprise, involving Indigenous people and non-Indigenous supporters, so how should we conceive of Indigenous authorship? Many critics of recent mechanisms for resolving land

conflicts in Canada have noted that the onus has been on First Nations to speak the language of the state in order to be heard, meaning that First Nations have had to adopt the agendas, concerns, terminology, and communicative style of the state to even begin a dialogue.<sup>10</sup> In the 1860s and 1870s, still early in the history of Indigenous-state relations in Canada's Pacific province, Stó:lō people and their neighbours quite literally had to learn the language of the state by mastering English and becoming skilled readers and writers so as to navigate and communicate with an increasingly bureaucratic government.

In short, between 1864 and 1874, three things were happening at once: the context of Indigenous-state relations was changing — the 1860s and 1870s marked a key moment in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the solidification of settler power over the material and relational landscape of southwestern British Columbia; by necessity, Indigenous peoples were developing a greater familiarity with governmental processes and legitimating narratives of settler society; and finally, the stories Indigenous peoples were telling about their relationships with settler authorities and settler society were changing. This series of petitions traces an important shift in Indigenous-settler relations, Indigenous perspectives on and interventions in the changes taking place, and reveals how Indigenous literacy was used to challenge settler appropriation of Stó:lō land from the very earliest days.

### **The Narrative Worlds of Indigenous-State Relations in the 1860s and 1870s**

My focus on narrative and power is informed by scholars who have put story at the core of their analyses to explore how the narratives we tell have the capacity to shape our relational and material worlds.<sup>11</sup> In particular, historian John S. Lutz's edited collection *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact*, shows that Indigenous and settler peoples encountered and apprehended one another through stories at first contact and in all subsequent 'contact moments,' reaching right up to present-day mechanisms for negotiating conflicts over territory, resources, sovereignty, and historical

injustice.<sup>12</sup> In this paper, I approach Indigenous petitions as a specific kind of discursive or narrative contact moment, and through them attempt to understand the dynamic and entangled ways in which story forms the context for cross-cultural encounters while being one of the main products of such communications.

With the shift to a settlement economy in the 1860s and 1870s, non-Indigenous demand for and regulation of land increased, especially in the corridor of arable lands along the Fraser River. In addition to a growing settler hunger for land, Indigenous peoples were encountering a changing complex of settler visions for Indigenous peoples' proper place in the geographical and political landscape — visions that are referenced in the petitions. The ever-present ideological backdrop for nineteenth-century theorizing on the status of the Indigenous subject was composed of what seemed to be irrefutable global evidence of the superiority of the British race, as well as a widespread myth that Indigenous peoples were — either culturally or physically — a doomed and vanishing race.<sup>13</sup> Colonial philosophies varied on what role Indigenous peoples might play in a post-fur trade colonial society, but for the sake of this discussion I will focus on three meta-narratives that had the most bearing on Stó:lō people and their neighbours. The first held that Indigenous peoples could be integrated into colonial society but only in such a way that they became brown British subjects, having adopted the socio-political, religious, and economic values promoted by British society. The region's most influential early governor, James Douglas, of Caribbean-Creole ancestry with a Métis wife, was a product and proof of, and a firm believer in, this narrative. Underlying Douglas' policies on treaty making and reserve allocation in British Columbia was his faith in the potential integration of Indigenous peoples into settler society. The relatively large reserves mapped out in parts of the Vancouver Island colony and in the Lower Fraser Valley and Okanagan and Thompson River valleys on the mainland are evidence of this ideal. As others have discussed at length, Douglas' reserve lands were intended to be supplemented by Indigenous pre-emptions of private fee simple land, as they became integrated into the culture of individually-held private property.<sup>14</sup> In this way, Indigenous peoples would have sufficient material resources to become gradually incorporated into British settler society.



A second pervasive colonial meta-narrative operating at this time, widely subscribed to by the region's emerging settler population, held that Indigenous peoples were, at best, obstacles to a bold new settler society. Prior to his retirement in the spring of 1864, Douglas appointed Joseph Trutch to the position of Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, a position he would continue to occupy under the leadership of Frederick Seymour, Douglas' successor.<sup>15</sup> As Brian Dippie has shown with regard to the closely-related meta-narrative of the vanishing American in the United States, Trutch can be seen as both product and promoter of this second colonial narrative, first in his capacity as Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, and then as the province's first lieutenant governor (1871–1876). Raised partly in Jamaica where his father was a slave-owning landowner, Trutch was an aspiring capitalist who made his fortune in the relatively small, close-knit colonial society of Victoria and mainland British Columbia.<sup>16</sup> If Douglas is remembered for attempting to balance the needs of a growing settler society while ensuring Indigenous peoples possessed sufficient resources for successful integration into that society, Trutch is now notorious for developing, implementing, and vigorously defending an Indigenous lands policy derived from a narrative that depicted Indigenous peoples as incapable of integrating into a capitalist society, and thus an impediment to white settlement.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of 1867 (just three years after the first petition quoted above), Trutch had reduced the relatively large Stó:lō reserves in the Lower Fraser Valley by 92 percent, or approximately 40,000 acres — where they remain today.<sup>18</sup> Throughout British Columbia, he established a ten-acre per family maximum to determine reserve size, and revoked the right of Indigenous peoples to pre-empt “unoccupied, unsurveyed, or unreserved land” without special permission, which was virtually never granted.<sup>19</sup> This standard stood in marked contrast to the 160-acres that was used to create reserves on the Canadian prairies and was allotted to white settler pre-emptions in British Columbia. After British Columbia entered confederation, provincial-dominion relations with respect to Indigenous policy would be characterized by protracted debates over what acreage should determine reserve allotment. Remarkably, the province's stubborn

refusal to conform to first imperial and then federal policies on Indigenous lands would persist right up to the late twentieth century. The federal government would eventually relent, but not before several decades of disputes with the province, amidst increasingly powerful and vocal Indigenous discontent.

In 1864, however, Indigenous peoples were not necessarily clear on which of these meta-narratives held more interpretive currency and therefore had more economic clout. Moreover, the representatives of settler society that were closest to them operated from a third distinct but related narrative vision. Roman Catholic missionaries of the order of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were an early and prominent presence in the Fraser Valley. The deeply evangelical Oblates began visiting the area in 1840, and by 1862 had established a mission school for boys, St. Mary's, in what is now Mission, British Columbia, admitting 42 male students in its first year.<sup>20</sup> As we will see, Oblate missionaries played an important role in Stó:lō communications with the state around land issues, but they did so from the perspective of their own civilizing agendas. As historical geographer Lynn Blake has shown, the Oblates operated from a worldview in which God put certain people in particular places of the world for a specific purpose, a vision they would have communicated to Stó:lō people.<sup>21</sup> In many ways, this cosmological order would have resonated with Coast Salish people, whose relationships to place were defined through kinship connections to spiritual ancestors, and were imbued with a strong sense of purpose, rights, and responsibilities.<sup>22</sup>

At this time, Stó:lō people were witnessing the sudden reduction of their own lands in direct relationship to the expanding areas claimed by their white neighbours, a phenomenon to which they objected and contested in increasingly unequivocal means, with petitions primary among these means. As ethnohistorian Keith Thor Carlson has shown, the reserve reductions of the 1860s were met by Stó:lō people and their neighbours with an opposition that was being organized along progressively more collective lines. Mid-nineteenth-century Salish social organization was characterized by a decentralized network of family-based political authority, where the traditional forces that demarcated people and communities (e.g., family lineages,

status) were combining with colonial forces that disrupted existing networks and introduced new social divisions (e.g., religious affiliations, reserve membership lists). Despite these many barriers to collective self-identification and social action, Trutch's policies represented a general threat and were met as such,<sup>23</sup> evidence of which is provided by the petitions analyzed here, which were signed by chiefs representing an enormous expanse of territory and supra-tribal affiliation. We know from later correspondence that colonial officials took such expressions of Indigenous political unity quite seriously, and often acknowledged that successful colonial settlement hinged on a lack of tribal (let alone supra-tribal) unity in British Columbia.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, Trutch's reserve policies — which represented an indiscriminating assault on an Indigenous population with a long history of fluid and flexible ways of self-identifying — instigated the very shift towards greater Indigenous political unity across a large expanse of territory that was so feared by settler authorities.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing on Stó:lō oral history helps us understand what may have been a broadly-shared narrative informing how Stó:lō people approached colonial society at this still-early stage in the relationship. Contrary to the tendency to emphasize the oppositions between oral and literate cultures, or the inevitability of Aboriginal literacy displacing oral traditions, Carlson suggests that Stó:lō people may have understood Western-style writing as an indigenous extension of, rather than a threat to, their existing means of communicating powerful speech. Carlson recounts a series of Coast and Interior Salish oral histories that represent writing as something that had been possessed by Salish people, but was lost either through the neglectful conduct of their own leaders or the duplicity of white people.<sup>26</sup> Among these, Mrs. Bertha Peters tells of her great-great-great-great grandfather, St'a'asaluk, a nineteenth-century Stó:lō prophet who received a sacred paper from God that foretold the arrival of Europeans and offered guidance on how Stó:lō people should foster good relations with the new people to benefit from the many positive things they would bring. As Carlson notes, such prophecies stand in contrast to other New World prophetic narratives from the same period that advised a rejection of whites and their technologies.<sup>27</sup> This argument invites us to reconsider the naturalized opposition

between oral and literate cultures, while also providing some insight into the narratives that may have informed Salish peoples' approach to their relationships with both settler society and written petitions.

### **The Narrative Dynamics of Indigenous Petitioning**

As other scholars have observed, early Indigenous petitions provide windows into the ways in which Indigenous peoples fashioned new socio-political identities and represented themselves to settler communities and authorities throughout the British Empire.<sup>28</sup> Others have noted that such self-representations were strategic and relational, but no one has yet discussed their storied nature. Petitions were venues in which alternative forms of relationship could be defined and asserted, or identified and rejected. The petitioners positioned themselves — and their requests — in relation to the petitioned, and from this we can learn something of how colonial authorities' self-presentations (and representations of the colonial enterprise) were being read by Indigenous peoples and incorporated into their negotiations with state authorities. In these early Indigenous texts, Stó:lō peoples' stories about self, other, and relationship were intimately connected to their attempts to hold their ground, materially and narratively-speaking. Indeed, narrative has been, and continues to be, a crucial field through which Aboriginal-state relations in British Columbia are defined, disputed, and take shape.<sup>29</sup> Looking at stories in relation allows us to get at what literary historian Penny van Toorn nicely terms the “nitty-gritty of hybridity” with respect to particular ways Indigenous people engaged writing from deeply local vantage points.<sup>30</sup> Indigenous peoples brought their own specific understandings to the act of writing in political relationships, as they brought specific stories to how they made sense of and negotiated their relationships with settler authorities. But these stories and adopted forms were articulated in relation to — and often in anticipation of — the colonial other. What emerges is a complex of narrative dynamics that are hybrid and dialogic in both content (what stories they tell) and form (how writing is employed).

By the 1860s, petitions were an integral part of Britain's imperial

culture as a means through which colonial subjects could appeal to and communicate with socially and geographically distant authorities.<sup>31</sup> Petitions were perhaps most notably and effectively used in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century abolitionist and anti-slavery campaigns. While many anti-slavery petitions were authored and signed by white abolitionists and their supporters in Britain, former slaves and free blacks across the imperial world petitioned for freedom, compensation (among Black loyalists), and an end to the slave trade and to slavery.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Indigenous petitions to British colonial authorities emerged from all parts of the commonwealth, and can be found in the documentary records from the earliest periods of Canadian history.<sup>33</sup> Although the act of petitioning suggests a tacit acknowledgment of the distribution of power in the petitioner-petitioned relationship, petitions also provide a venue in which the very relationship between the two parties can be reframed and contested from the perspective of the petitioner.

In some ways, petitions present challenges for an interpretive project premised on the notion of encounter or exchange: petitions are not guaranteed to garner a response, and if they do, it may not have survived for historical interpretation. The petitions examined here have been preserved thanks to their appearance in official colonial correspondence, and as a result, come down to us with varying degrees of contextual information. For example, there remains very little information on authorship, or the contexts in which the petitions were composed and delivered. This is particularly the case for the 1866 petition. The identity of the scribe is known only thanks to a note written in the margin of a letter forwarding the petitions to the British Colonial Office. Historians of early Indigenous-state relations, however, rarely have access to complete records of an exchange so much as fragments of an encounter. Archived colonial correspondence allows us to peek into, and thereby re-inscribe, the existence of an animated world of political communication and relation beyond the front stage rhetoric that often characterizes the official record of encounter. The comparative lack of equivalent textual entry points into Indigenous political worlds is a commonly recognized problem in history writing, and one that perpetuates archival silences.

The reason so few Indigenous-authored texts remain from this

place and period is not necessarily (or not yet) the product of colonial exclusion — it is also due to the fact that Stó:lō peoples were only very recently becoming participants in western-style literacy. Where the finer details of Indigenous peoples' thoughts, opinions, and internal disagreements may remain hidden from view, we can at least begin from the assumption that, in this period of rapid change, Indigenous peoples were thinking, talking, and strategizing about the best ways to handle their relationships with settler societies. The petitions cannot describe these worlds in full, but they certainly point to their existence. Through a close reading of these textual fragments, we can see how the diplomatic interactions between Indigenous peoples and settler authorities were shaped by a combination of best guesses as to the other's meanings and intentions and their own desires and aspirations. The petitions reveal Indigenous peoples' rhetorical strategies as well as the way they engaged and incorporated textual communication into their expanding vocabulary of political conduct.

Given that the petitions — in these early days of Indigenous literacy — were often written with the assistance of non-Indigenous peoples, we must ask: whose voices are we able to read and hear in these multivocal texts? Early communications between Indigenous peoples and state authorities involve many different kinds of translation, transcription, and mediation. The four petitions considered here demonstrate a range of experimentation with composition and authorship. Working with limited information on how the original petitions were written or who they were written by, the one thing that is clear is that those who signed the petitions — the petitioners — were not necessarily 'authors' in the conventional and restrictive sense of putting pen to paper. Van Toorn variously dubs these middle-figures "scribes," "collaborators," or "co-writers" as a way to draw attention to the social conditions and political climates that made co-authored speech a necessity and to reverse the erasures of Indigenous people from colonial texts.<sup>34</sup> As was the case with the Stó:lō petitions, missionaries often acted as intermediaries in the communications between Aboriginal and colonial authorities. Although in these specific petitions we see Indigenous leaders' efforts to speak directly to settler authorities, it does not follow that greater

Indigenous textual literacy eliminated the need for non-Indigenous mediators. Missionary assistance persisted into the early twentieth century and was combined (or in some cases replaced) with legally trained outsiders, as land claims were increasingly framed in legal terms.<sup>35</sup> To this day, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community outsiders are hired to assist in Indigenous peoples' dealings with the state with respect to land conflicts, and there remains a preference for individuals with some degree of familiarity with communities and community interests, as missionaries would have had in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. That such assistance was and still is necessary is worth some reflection. The need to employ outside representatives can be partly construed as a product of limited resources and capacity within communities, although this is certainly changing.<sup>36</sup> However, the nineteenth-century petitions, with their many layers of voice and non-Indigenous interlocutors, may have also resonated culturally with Salish signatories: in ritual longhouse contexts, hosting families did not (and still do not) speak on their own behalf, but rather through an unrelated professional speaker specially secured for the occasion.

The question remains: how did these co-writers shape the message, language, or tone of the four petitions under consideration here? Certainly some of the language we see in the first petition about "good and bad Indians" comes from local Catholic missionary discourse, as I discuss below. The apparent shift away from missionary co-authorship that we see occurring over time in the petitions could be interpreted in at least two ways. First, Indigenous petitioners may very well have recognized that their own objectives did not perfectly match those of their missionary allies, and as a result attempted to gain more control over their message and communications with settler authorities. Alternately — or perhaps additionally — the move towards more direct Indigenous self-representation may have been a strategy developed in consultation with missionaries to avoid having their grievances dismissed as the work of outside agitators stirring up unrest among an otherwise content Indigenous populace.

Such denials of Indigenous dissatisfaction would become increasingly common among settler authorities as land claims activism became more widespread over the coming decades.<sup>37</sup> Van Toorn

notes a similar tendency in response to Indigenous petitions from Australia in the same period, noting the impossible logic of such prejudicial readings of Indigenous activism: without assistance, Indigenous peoples could not effectively communicate their views to those in power; with it, the authenticity of their message was suspect.<sup>38</sup> It is especially because of the suspicion of Indigenous voices in early petitions that we must flag similar anxieties around authenticity and voice in current-day interpretations. The petitions are multivocal texts in more ways than one, but this multivocality should not lead us to deny their status as Indigenous texts; rather, it points us to a closer consideration of the conditions in which minority voices are able to make themselves heard.

### The 1864 Petition

A few weeks prior to Douglas' retirement, a large group of Stó:lō leaders met him on the lawn of Government House at New Westminster to express their concerns about his retirement and the potential insecurity of their lands.<sup>39</sup> Douglas' response was to send surveyor William McColl to mark out relatively large reserves for many (but not all) tribes in the Lower Fraser Valley. McColl was completing his maps and reports at the end of May when the Stó:lō chiefs publically addressed Douglas' replacement, Governor Seymour, at a huge gathering Seymour had orchestrated on the occasion of Queen Victoria's birthday. The 1864 petition began its life as a series of speeches made by three Salish chiefs at an elaborate public performance welcoming the newly arrived Governor Seymour. Seymour expressly invited the region's Indigenous inhabitants, and their response was overwhelming. That first year, between 3,500 and 4,000 Indigenous people travelled to the event from a surrounding 200-kilometre radius, outnumbering the resident settler population of New Westminster by at least a thousand. The diplomatic exchanges between the three chiefs and Governor Seymour that day must have seemed a remarkable communicative performance for all concerned, at least in scale. Seymour's ship was escorted to shore by almost 700 canoes bearing colourful flags. Once all were assembled near the governor's house, each chief delivered a speech in his own dialect. These



were then translated into the simple Chinook trade jargon by three Indigenous translators, and then again rendered into English by the Oblate Father Léon Fouquet. Seymour's brief reply travelled back along the same circuitous route, ending with his message conveyed to the crowd by the original interpreters, who spoke "with loud bellowing voices in order to be heard by the people far in the distance."<sup>40</sup> In these conditions of speaking, the complexity of what could be communicated was necessarily limited.

According to Father Florimond Gendre, one of the resident Oblate priests at the recently established St. Mary's Mission, it was he and Father Fouquet who were responsible for organizing the considerable pageantry of the day.<sup>41</sup> In an account to his superiors in France, Gendre notes that along with their many other responsibilities, he and Fouquet composed the speeches made by the three chiefs. Further, from his account we know that he and Fouquet were instrumental in creating the petition that comes down to us today, which is a condensed version of the three speeches that were subsequently published in local newspapers. Rather than accept this image of the Salish chiefs as mere conduits for communication between white men, we need to address the context in which Gendre represented the missionary role in these events. His account of the Queen's birthday is one part of a report to his superiors in which he provides evidence of a highly successful mission to encourage continued support of their work in the colony. In this sense, his text is self-promotional. He boasted that Seymour favoured their Catholic mission over the local Protestant ministries for the task of coordinating both the events of the day and for ensuring Indigenous attendance. He frequently noted the amount of work the event required of the resident missionaries, and proudly pronounced its outcome in no uncertain terms: "Everything has thus far been perfect; three thousand five hundred savages are the friends of the priest. The good triumphs, the weak are strengthened, and the bad are covered with guilt."<sup>42</sup> For Gendre, good, bad, and weak were designations assigned according to one's allegiance to the Catholic mission and its faith: "good Indians" referred to members of the Catholic community, whereas "bad" or "weak" characterized individuals who retained a known affiliation to traditional practices or

had fallen under the spell of western vices.<sup>43</sup> Missionaries such as Fathers Gendre, Fouquet, and others were early, earnest, and vocal promoters of local Indigenous efforts to increase reserve sizes at this time, but this assistance was shaped by their own evangelizing and civilizing agendas.<sup>44</sup>

In the same terms, the petitioners asked that the governor protect them from “bad Indians” and “bad white men.” It is difficult to determine what additional meanings the Indigenous signatories would have used to define what constituted a “good” or a “bad” Indian. More revealing perhaps is the absence of Stó:lō peoples’ own origin stories that would come to characterize later protests against the alienation of their lands. Instead, they seem to be identifying and deploying a very British story about the colonial project as one of racial uplift. This move could be interpreted as an earnest recognition of their vulnerable position vis-à-vis settlers at this stage, or as a strategic use of settler stories as the basis for their claim, in that they were owed this ‘help’ in return for the land that had already been taken.

When the chiefs stated that some were satisfied with their lands, and asked that other lands be protected and marked out for them, they were likely referring to the reserves marked out by McColl only days earlier.<sup>45</sup> The petitioners asked, “Please to give us good things as to make us become as the good white man, as an exchange for our land occupied by white men.”<sup>46</sup> Here we should see the petitioners making an assertion of territory, and an opening offer to the newest authority in what they regarded as a negotiation of land, resources, and relationship that had been underway since Xwelítem arrived in their territories.<sup>47</sup> In reply, Seymour advised the Stó:lō to listen to and believe the missionaries — missionaries who had been telling them that they could be integrated, that they could and should become farmers, and that they should have an honourable place within, and not just beside, colonial society:

As you say, there is plenty of land here, for both White men and Indians. You shall not be disturbed in your reserves. I shall protect you from both bad White men and from bad Indians. I am glad you want to be civilized and raised to an equality with the White Men. Cultivate your

Lands; send your children to school; listen to what the clergymen tell you, and believe in it.<sup>48</sup>

They may also have been referring to the Douglas treaties on Vancouver Island, which were signed between 1850 and 1854, well within the living memory of many of those assembled at the 1864 event, some of whom witnessed the signing of these treaties.<sup>49</sup> In many ways, the message of this early petition was that Salish peoples were willing to continue the relationship with settler authorities on the terms recently laid out by Douglas and his representatives: government protection of relatively large tracts of land, promises of assistance to be better able to take their place as equals in settler society, and compensation for the lands outside the reserves, which were increasingly being occupied by whites moving into the region. By Seymour's own account, this interpretation was affirmed in his brief response: "I replied merely according to their own mode of expression, that my heart was as good to the Indian as to the white man."<sup>50</sup>

### The 1866 Petition

In his correspondence, Seymour showed no particular dissatisfaction with the stilted communicative conditions of the day, but it would seem that his Indigenous counterparts may have felt otherwise. In each subsequent petition, Salish leaders attempted to shorten the communicative distance between them and settler authorities. Less than a year and a half later, Seymour received another petition, this one delivered at a large protest gathering of chiefs at New Westminster. As he reported to the Colonial Secretary:

The Indian Chiefs came down from Lytton on the North, Douglas on the West, the whole of the Lower Fraser in our proximity, and even from the land of the Euclataws on the Coast, to see me and protest against certain action proposed to be taken by some members of the Legislative Council ... All the Chiefs who set their mark to the Petition and many others assembled on the Lawn of Government House.<sup>51</sup>

As van Toorn observes in relation to the Australian context of early Indigenous petitioning, both colonial authorities and Indigenous petitioners valued the hand-delivery of such documents, albeit for different reasons. On the one hand, for colonial authorities often suspicious of the authenticity of Aboriginal peoples' claims, "the physical presence of the signatories verified the authenticity of their petition"; on the other, Aboriginal peoples were conscious of the need to "satisfy the white man's criterion of authenticity" but also to act in accordance with their own oral traditions of publically witnessed speaking.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Seymour and subsequent authorities routinely made note of the petitions signed in their presence, and whether all the signatories were present to deliver the petition. All four of the Stó:lō petitions submitted in this decade were either successfully presented in person or there was an attempt to do so. We can also see traditional Indigenous practices of oral sanctioning at work here. Throughout the Salish world and beyond, important events, including political claims and statements, were given credence through the practice of witnessing, in which guests — preferably honoured ones representing as wide a territory as possible — bear witness to and commit to memory the details of an important gathering or ceremony, including who attended, what was said, who supported the work, and who did not. Then as now, witnesses could be called on at a later date to settle a dispute over the claims made at such an event. It is likely that the presentation of the petition at a large public gathering was significant for the petitioners in that it accorded with Salish protocols for conducting and recording important political communications. In this regard, Seymour has not been remembered fondly. In Stó:lō oral histories recorded from Tilly Gutierrez in the late 1990s, "Si:mo" (as Seymour is pronounced) is remembered as someone who broke promises; he has long been dubbed "Wel qel mestiyexw," meaning "a bad person."<sup>53</sup>

The 1866 petition seems uniquely crafted to meet all available criteria of authenticity, and is interesting for the ways in which it evidences Stó:lō peoples' experimentations in combining distinct communicative traditions. Not only was it hand-delivered in the presence of all the signing chiefs as well as Governor Seymour, this second official petition on record from the Fraser Valley tribes was

written by a young Salish boy, in tiny, meticulous handwriting, on behalf of his elders.<sup>54</sup> Each line in English is followed by its translation in Chinook; it is signed by 70 chiefs, and witnessed (in both cultural senses) by the prominent Oblate missionary, Father Fouquet. Here we can see how Indigenous petitioners, in van Toorn's words, "were not only working in two verbal media, they were consciously working within two quite different discursive regimes, one vesting final authority in the written word, the other in the spoken word."<sup>55</sup> The inclusion of English and Chinook translations mirrors the oral format we saw in the 1864 Queen's birthday celebrations, which would have been common at a time when the language barriers between Indigenous and settler authorities were stark. In this way, the petition contains multiple translations: it offers a literal translation between spoken languages (Chinook and English), while transposing the central communicative features of an oral exchange onto written text.

In 1866, the petitioners asked the governor to prevent white men from selling liquor to their people; they asked that Indigenous people be exempt from tolls for transporting goods on the Fraser River; and they asked Seymour to protect Indigenous lands and fishing rights. As in 1864, the petitioners here obliquely invoke the story that they are in the process of becoming 'civilized' (by sending their children to local schools) and so deserve protection of their lands: "The white men tell many things about taking our lands our hearts become very sick. We wish to say to Governor Seymour: please protect our lands: many are our children and some go to school one of them as written this."<sup>56</sup> This petition also contains narrative departures from the earlier one penned by missionaries Gendre and Fouquet. Two references point towards a story that suggests Salish people understood their rights as deriving from their prior occupation and ownership of the land: "We do not like to pay money to carry ... things in our canoes on the river of our ancestors. We like to fish where are fathers fished."<sup>57</sup> In the hands of a young, missionary-educated Stó:lō boy and the leadership he represented, petitioning began to refer to a desire for cultural continuity between the past and the present that may not have fit as easily into the forward-looking, conversion-oriented evangelism evident in Gendre's

correspondence. At this time, settlers were beginning to map their own regimes of ownership and management onto the landscape by surveying, fencing, and farming, and by creating reserves. The petition's invocation of ancestral lineages in association with landscapes and resources points to the persistence of Salish laws governing people's access and use rights of territories they recognized as their own.

### The 1873 Petition

By 1868, Trutch's resurveying of the Fraser Valley reserves reduced them by 92 percent, and in response to complaints about the pace at which Indigenous people in the region were pre-empting land, he further eroded Douglas' policies by making Aboriginal pre-emption illegal.<sup>58</sup> As Carlson notes, in 1872, the year after British Columbia joined confederation with the Dominion of Canada, "[h]undreds of Halkomelem speakers gathered outside the provincial land registry in New Westminster seeking settlement of the 'land question.'"<sup>59</sup> A year later, Stó:lō people and their neighbours voiced similar concerns at the annual celebrations for Queen Victoria's birthday. In contrast to the first such celebrations in 1864, in 1873 it was the government officials who were urgently invited to New Westminster by 73 chiefs representing Indigenous communities throughout the Fraser watershed and beyond. The presence of Trutch (by now lieutenant governor of British Columbia) and the recently federally-appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, Israel Wood Powell, was requested "for the purpose of celebrating the Queen's birthday and of stating their wishes to the Indian Commissioner."<sup>60</sup> Powell's description of the gathering is similar to Seymour's, noting the extraordinary pageantry: "We anchored ... in the evening of the 26th and were saluted by grand volleys of Musketry from three or four thousand Indians who crowded the wharves and streets of the Town to witness our arrival."<sup>61</sup> Although settlers perhaps experienced the gatherings as a kind of entertaining spectacle, for Indigenous attendees the birthday celebrations provided opportunities for prominent people representing a large territory to meet and discuss their collective opposition to government policies on land issues, and to do so in a way that would not seem threatening to settler society.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, and despite the petition's polite phrasing, its text suggests that such celebrations provided Salish peoples with opportunities to hold settler authorities publicly accountable.

It is clear that for the petitioners, Powell initially represented a new possibility for having their claims met. Powell presented himself and was approached as a conduit through which the superior authority of the federal government (as the new representatives of the Queen) could be brought to bear on the unruly child that was British Columbia. Indeed, provincial-Dominion relations on the issue of the so-called 'Land Question' would remain tense for the next several decades, as Ottawa and its representatives pushed (to varying degrees, depending on who was involved) for British Columbia to settle the lands issue, whether by making treaties and extinguishing Indigenous title, or by granting reserves large enough to satisfy the Indigenous populous and prevent unrest among them.<sup>63</sup> This tension is significant for our reading of the next two petitions because they show how Indigenous leaders oriented their speech to the dissonance between provincial and federal policies.

Given the events since the early 1860s, it is perhaps unsurprising that the 1873 petition is, from the outset, much more direct in its message than the 1864 and 1866 petitions. According to Powell, the 1873 petition was "very creditably read in English by one of the assembled Chiefs."<sup>64</sup> Powell — and through him, Canada's authority — was politely welcomed, but in a way that makes explicit the petitioners' expectations of him and the federal government: "We the Chiefs of various villages ... are truly happy to welcome you our new Chief sent by Canada to take in hand the interests of the poor Indians ... we have been longing for a Chief, who will truly have at heart our Interests so long neglected for the past."<sup>65</sup> As Powell reported to his superiors in Ottawa, his meeting with individual chiefs the next day revealed a highly focused message: "They all had complaints, the burden of which was their land, having either an insufficiency of reserve or in many cases no land at all."<sup>66</sup> These 'complaints' were presented unequivocally in the petition:

The white men have taken our land and no compensation has been given us, though we have been told many times that the great Queen was so good she would help her dis-

tant children the Indians. White men have surrounded our Villages so much as in many instances especially on Fraser River but a few acres of Land have been left us.

Stó:lō people's initial optimism about Powell was not necessarily unfounded. Relative to many of his peers, scholars now consider Powell to have been an earnest supporter of Indian land rights to the extent that he doggedly fought provincial resistance to the expansion of reserves. This commitment, however ultimately unfruitful, was evident in Powell's 1873 report to the Secretary of State for the Province of British Columbia, in which he detailed the surprisingly concrete assurances he offered Salish petitioners in response to their presentation to him in May of that same year. By his own account, he asserted the following to those gathered: "I had been commanded by Her Majesty to see that every Indian family had land and it was my intention to procure this for them as soon as possible, that each family should have sufficient land for their maintenance to be their own [sic] property and that of their children for ever."<sup>67</sup> To a group of people who seemed to be calling the Queen's honour into question, and in the face of a great deal of evidence to the contrary, Powell echoed Seymour's sentiment from almost ten years earlier: "Her Majesty their Great mother had the same kind care for the Redmen as she had for the White."<sup>68</sup> Powell's inability to provide sufficient evidence of this sentiment would add him to a growing number of settler authorities who were perceived by Indigenous peoples as either unwilling or unable to adequately defend Indigenous rights, or even implement the state's own policies.

### The 1874 Petition

The second quote cited at the beginning of this paper is taken from a petition written in 1874 by "a young female residential school alumna" on behalf of 56 communities from Bute Inlet to Douglas Portage, including most of the Fraser Valley communities.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to the earlier petitions, this one is eight pages long, organized as a series of numbered and clearly detailed points of grievance, and its 56 signatures were witnessed — not by Father Fouquet — but by



Peter Ayessik, chief of Hope. Ayessik was also one of the petition's two primary authors, along with Alexis, chief of Cheam. Both young men, Ayessik and Alexis spoke English and possessed at least basic reading and writing skills.<sup>70</sup> As Carlson observes, Ayessik and Alexis represent a new generation of leaders appearing at this time, whose distinguishing feature was an increased fluency in the language and culture of settler society, and although Ayessik is remembered as a devoted Catholic and prominent "Church Chief," leaders such as Ayessik and Alexis emerged not necessarily in opposition to, but as "protégés of the older elite."<sup>71</sup> Both Ayessik and Alexis were related to the powerful Liquitem of Yale, an experienced diplomat who was instrumental in negotiating a peaceful resolution to violent conflicts between the gold rush migrants and local Stó:lō people in 1858.<sup>72</sup> The presence of an older generation of leaders in the lives of people such as Ayessik and Alexis suggests an intergenerational continuity of leadership structures. As Carlson notes, what the generic designation "Chief" meant to Stó:lō peoples at the time did not necessarily correspond to what it may have meant to settlers. In some instances, the term and the new authority it conveyed after the institution of the Indian Act in 1876 (and prior) was used to promote people to positions of authority they may not otherwise have been able to achieve. In the case of Ayessik and Alexis, however, we see examples of people with new skills (and elite ancestry) being internally promoted by their communities to act in accordance with the same responsibilities as leaders of earlier generations: that is, "to look after community interests as best they could."<sup>73</sup>

As Stó:lō, Alexis and Ayessik witnessed the aggressive pace with which settlers were acquiring their lands; as leaders able to access the communicative technologies of settler culture, they were aware of how settler governments were ensuring white settlement succeeded at the expense of Indigenous people. The stakes involved in developing a cross-cultural fluency had never been higher than they were at this moment. Of the Stó:lō petitions to date, the 1874 petition is the best expression of such fluency, characterized by a painfully and clearly communicated consciousness of how their place in the new settler society was being envisioned by settler authorities. At the outset, the petition asserts Salish people's broad awareness of Canada's

federal policy on reserve creation, and British Columbia's stubborn exceptionalism in resisting federal policy. In what seems a strategically flattering characterization of the moral integrity of the Dominion government, the petitioners state:

[W]e are fully aware that the Government of Canada has always taken good care of Indians, and treated them liberally, allowing more than one hundred acres per family; and we have been at a loss to understand the views of the Local Government of British Columbia, in curtailing our land so much as to leave in many instances but a few acres of land per family.<sup>74</sup>

With evident urgency, the petition exposes the inconsistent and arbitrary way in which reserves were being defined and allocated (when allocated at all) by provincial authorities, even by the meagre standards of ten acres per family promoted by Trutch:

Chamiel, ten miles below Hope, is allowed 488 acres of good land for the use of twenty families: at the rate of 24 acres per family; Popkum, eighteen miles below Hope, is allowed 375 acres of bad, dry, and mountainous land for the use of twenty-seven families: at the rate of 13 acres per family; Yuk-yuk-y-yoose, on Chilliwhack River, with a population of seven families, is allowed 42 acres: 5 acres per family; Sumass, (at the junction of Sumass River and Fraser) with a population of seventeen families, is allowed 43 acres of meadow for their hay, and 32 acres of dry land; Keatsy, numbering more than one hundred inhabitants, is allowed 108 acres of land. Langley and Hope have not yet got land secured to them, and white men are encroaching on them on all sides.<sup>75</sup>

The petitioners also displayed an awareness of the racial narratives settlers used to justify the expropriation of their lands. In the 1874 petition, Indigenous leaders explicitly challenged such narratives, asserting that they were not "lazy, roaming about people" but were attempting to follow the path that had been laid out for them by settler representatives such as Douglas and the Oblate missionaries by

clearing and farming their lands, only to have the same lands pre-empted by whites.<sup>76</sup> The petition demonstrates an acute awareness of the injustice of their situation:

We are now obliged to clear heavy timbered land, all prairies having been taken from us by white men. We see our white neighbors cultivate wheat, peas, &c., and raise large stocks of cattle on our pasture lands, and we are giving them our money to buy the flour manufactured from the wheat they have grown on same prairies.<sup>77</sup>

They registered the effects of these injustices on their people in collective and affective terms, speaking of their “wounded hearts” at the government’s ill use of the Stó:lō and the ways in which “[d]iscouragement and depression have come upon [their] people.”<sup>78</sup> The petitioners’ conclusions about settler intentions (“the aim of the white men is to exterminate us as soon as they can”) mark a dramatic shift in how they had earlier understood the settler stories that had so much power to shape their futures. At the same time, however, they continued to orient their speech towards the narratives at the heart of British colonialism: that its supposed promise was not extermination or exclusion, as with American and other imperial forces, but inclusion “with your kind assistance ... into the path of civilization.”<sup>79</sup> The 1874 petition asked that the promise of British justice for Indigenous people be honoured: “We humbly pray that this our petition be forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Provinces in Ottawa ... [to] see that justice be done us.”<sup>80</sup>

Here we glimpse into the experience of what Lutz has termed ‘peaceable subordination’ in reference to the “techniques of power that the British used to secure the colonies, all the while decrying the violence used by other colonial powers.”<sup>81</sup> Lutz and others have explored the narrative of benevolent conquest at the heart of the British colonial enterprise.<sup>82</sup> To what extent settler authorities in British Columbia believed this story in relation to the pressures of what historical geographer Cole Harris aptly terms “raw self-interest” is difficult to determine.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, there are revealing slippages in official correspondences, as seen in Seymour’s exchange with Lord Carnarvon in which he forwards the original 1864 petition to the

Colonial Secretary. No doubt with the recent Tsilhqot'in uprising fresh in his mind, Seymour writes: "I think it is a very satisfactory state of things when the Aborigines who so vastly outnumber us in this colony where no troops are stationed, thus adopt the mode of petitioning instead of redressing their real or imaginary grievances by force."<sup>84</sup> As an indication of how state officials received such petitions, however, this statement should be read with caution. As Lutz notes, although subjugation was the ultimate objective of peaceable subordination, it was never perfectly realized.

Ayessik continued to sign petitions and testified at the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1914 at the age of 64. Alexis of Cheam would go on to be the primary representative for several subsequent petitions. In 1875, he wrote to Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs James Lenihan, with the request that Lenihan reject the Dominion funds sent for the Queen's birthday celebration, as the chiefs of the Lower Fraser refused to celebrate a Queen who "has not said a word in our favour," calling into question the power of a monarch who appeared unable to compel the provincial government to follow her own policies.<sup>85</sup> Less than a year after their initial address to him, and with obvious outrage, the petitioners also rejected Powell as a trusted representative of their cause:

We write to you [Lenihan] as we have no confidence in the other Indian Commissioner [Powell]. He has been pulling along with British Columbia Government. He willingly accepted in our name the allowance of the local Government 20 acres for a family of five members — four acres per head!!! and he went on helping the local Government. Sent surveyors to divide some Indian Reserves in 20 acre lots. Not telling us a word about it — not asking our consent, though he was perfectly aware that we would never agree to such terms. Alexis, one of the Chiefs, proved to him at Yale in July that 20 acres of family of five members or four acres per head was a mockery, was destruction of the Indian races.<sup>86</sup>

Their request to have their petition forwarded to the lieutenant governor was forcefully denied by the provincial secretary, who stated that he "had no intention of forwarding a petition that was disrespectful to the Queen and potentially seditious."<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

The Salish petitions discussed here signal the beginning of what would become a widespread pattern of Indigenous lands activism in British Columbia, in which Indigenous peoples incorporated the state's languages, technologies, and narratives into their strategies for dealing with settler authorities. The main narrative work of the 1874 petition was to identify and hold state authorities accountable to the founding stories that settlers claimed characterized their relations with Indigenous peoples. Judging by state responses to this and similar actions, it would seem that this rhetorical strategy was an effective one. Crafted several years before Indigenous peoples in the province would begin basing their demands on sophisticated legal arguments, these early Stó:lō petitions were emblematic of an emerging pattern of progressively more collective forms of protest and political organization that would eventually produce the first of a series of joint federal-provincial commissions on Indian lands.<sup>88</sup> The final report of the 1878 Dominion-Provincial Joint Reserve Commission recommended increasing reserve sizes in most parts of the province, but like many such reports to come, the province was largely successful in undermining the authority of the Commission and blocking attempts to implement its findings. By the mid-1920s, Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia were becoming so proficient in deploying the legal and moral languages understood by the majority of British Columbians, that the federal and provincial governments moved to silence them altogether.

The 1927 addition of section 141 to the Indian Act made it impossible for Aboriginal people or their representatives to pursue land claims in any form without prior approval from the minister of Indian Affairs. As Paul Tennant describes, section 141 was broadly interpreted by those responsible for its implementation, such as Powell, Lenihan, and the broader network of Indian Agents in British Columbia. The amendment made it illegal

for any Indian or other person acting for [an Indigenous organization to] request or receive from any registered Indian any fee for legal or other services or any money for postage, travel, advertising, hall rental, refreshments, research expenses, legal fees, or court costs.<sup>89</sup>

Although activism did continue in various forms on an underground basis, the effectiveness of this single action in freezing Indigenous peoples' ability to make their grievances about land known and heard cannot be overstated.<sup>90</sup> Section 141 was just one component of a document that transformed the lives of Indigenous peoples throughout Canada. Moreover, it is worth noting that the authority of the Indian Act as law relies on a very specific and culturally-rooted founding story about the power and sanctity of text, a story that Stó:lō peoples were becoming painfully cognizant of in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Evident in the petitions examined here are the many ways in which Halkomelem-speaking peoples attempted to hold their ground in their communications with settler authorities. They were attempting to hold their ground in a material sense: by defending and struggling to maintain the right to people the land, to move about on and access the physical landscape and the meanings they understood it represented and contained. But they were also holding their ground in a narrative and relational sense, by aligning themselves with, or identifying and countering the stories that had increasing power to shape their lives, by asserting stories of their own and pointing to the narrative infidelity of settler authorities. They did so in this case through the medium of petitions, which was one of the only available mechanisms through which Indigenous peoples could make themselves heard by settler authorities at this time. As we have seen here, by developing a mastery of the petition as a political mechanism, Salish leaders were confronting settler authorities with and on their own terms, their own language, and their own narratives.

Between 1864 and 1874, we see not a simple transition from oral to literate, but rather, Indigenous peoples' adaptation to a significant shift in the balance of power between Aboriginal and settler societies. That same shift created the conditions in which Indigenous literacy became a matter of necessity. Even if Trutch had not terminated Douglas' pre-emption system, successful applications for pre-emptions required a degree of literacy and familiarity with colonial bureaucracy that few Indigenous people would have had at the time.<sup>91</sup> Coast Salish people recognized the connections between settler power and its textual culture. This awareness was evidenced in

the very act of petitioning, but also occasionally mentioned more directly in the petitions themselves. Two petitions from individual tribes in 1868 (the year in which Trutch so drastically reduced the Fraser Valley reserves) make direct references to the power of the written form. The first, addressed to Seymour by members of the Whonuck tribe, referred to the edict sanctioning the reductions:

Some days ago came new men who told us by order of their Chief they have to curtail ours small Reservation, and so did to our greatest grief; not only they shortened our land but *by their new paper* they set aside our best land, some of our gardens, and gave us in place, some hilly and sandy land, where it is next to impossible to raise any potatoes.<sup>92</sup> (emphasis added)

The second raises similar concerns around the reserve cut-offs, this time from Matsqui chiefs to Seymour, and ends by investing hope and power in the petition itself: “It is then with confidence, that in these Days of sorrow, *we send [this] paper* to your Excellency praying that you may be good enough to remove the cause of our grief”<sup>93</sup> (emphasis added). Whether or not Stó:lō people conceived of textual literacy as something indigenous or introduced, they were recognizing that it was fast becoming a medium through which powerful speech occurred, at least with respect to their relationships with settler authorities.

The expression and contestation of power through narrative remained a constitutive feature of Indigenous-state relations throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century British Columbia. As conflicts over land and authority show no signs of abating as we enter the twenty-first century, reflecting on the dynamics of story and power in the past can help us better understand how those same dynamics operate in the present. Writing was a technology at the heart of the transformative process colonialism represented, and a central mechanism through which colonial forces had the power to actualize their stories. In the 1860s and 1870s, we see the early attempts of Stó:lō and Coast Salish people to intervene in this powerful process and become skilled writers themselves, on their own terms, and to accomplish their own objectives. To a great extent, they

continued to story their worlds in the manner and mediums they had developed long before Xwelítem came to shore. But in engaging settler states through petitions and, later, a much wider spectrum of the textual world, they were also attempting to inscribe their stories about themselves and their place on the land in the minds of those they understood as the most influential members of settler society.

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### Endnotes:

- 1 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. 1st ed. —. (New York: Knopf, Distributed by Random House, 1993), xii-xiii.
- 2 Two important studies that have paved the way for analyses of narrative power in Native-newcomer history are Brian Dippie's seminal study of the myth of the 'vanishing American' in the history of the United States, and John S. Lutz's deconstruction of the narrative of the 'lazy Indian' in British Columbia. See Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*. 1st ed. —. (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), and John S. Lutz *Makúk: a New History of Aboriginal-white Relations* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2008).
- 3 British Columbia Archives (hereafter, B.C. Archives), Stó:lō Speech to Governor Seymour, Great Britain Colonial Correspondence, CO 60-19, Seymour to Cardwell, 31 August 1864.
- 4 For a discussion of the history of waxing and waning group affiliation in this region, see Keith Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). The Stó:lō are generally recognized as a group of 28 culturally and linguistically affiliated Coast Salish Indigenous communities along the lower Fraser River and its tributaries. Halkomelem is the generic term for the traditional language spoken in this region. It contains three distinct dialects: Halq'eméylem (Yale to Abbotsford), Hun'qumyi'num' (Abbotsford to Vancouver), and Hul'q'umín'um' (southern parts of what is now called Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands). The signatories of the petitions discussed here represented communities throughout these and neighbouring regions. In this paper, I refer to the signatories of the petitions



somewhat interchangeably as Stó:lō, Coast Salish, Salish, or Halkomelem-speaking peoples. Where the petitions seem to have been spearheaded by communities in the Lower Fraser Valley and therefore more concretely within Stó:lō territory, the signatories represent a much broader expanse of Salish community identities. For a fulsome exploration of the shifting and fluid often nature of community identity in the region, please see Carlson, *Power of Place*, 2011.

- 5 Richard Wolfenden, Government Printer, Petition to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, *Papers Related to the Indian Land Question 1850–1875*, 1875, (Reprint, Victoria, 1987), 14 July 1874.
- 6 Between 1866 and 1873 another five petitions referencing land from individual Stó:lō tribes were sent to settler authorities. These were followed by a further five from either individual tribes or a number of tribes between 1875 and 1876. The petitions examined in depth in this paper were signed by leaders representing between 55 and 76 communities. Stó:lō petitioning continued at least until 1923, becoming ever more lengthy and pointed.
- 7 Most notably, see R. Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849–1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990).
- 8 Harris, *Making Native Space*, 24.
- 9 Hamar Foster, and Benjamin L. Berger, “From Humble Prayers to Legal Demands: The Cowichan Petition of 1909 and the British Columbia Indian Land Question,” in *The Grand Experiment: Law and Legal Culture in British Settler Societies*, edited by Hamar Foster, Benjamin L. Berger, and A. R. Buck. Law and Society, (Vancouver: Published for the Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History by UBC Press, 2008), 240–67.
- 10 Carole Blackburn, “Searching for Guarantees in the Midst of Uncertainty: Negotiating Aboriginal Rights and Title in British Columbia,” *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 586–96; Paul Nadasdy, *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-state Relations in the Southwest Yukon* (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2003); Andrew Woolford, *Between Justice and Certainty: Treaty Making in British Columbia*. Law and Society Series (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).
- 11 Among these: Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West*, McGill-Queen’s Native and Northern Series 17 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997); J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. 1st ed. (Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 2003); Daniel Wright Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000); Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series

- (Vancouver; Seattle: UBC Press; University of Washington Press, 2005); Elizabeth Mary Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: a Native Narrative*, Massey Lectures (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003); John S. Lutz, ed., *Myth and Memory: Stories of Indigenous-European Contact* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism, Politics, History, and Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, Distributed by Random House, 1993); William J. Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau*, Nature, History, Society (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Jeremy H. A. Webber, Rebecca Johnson, and Hester Lessard, *Storied Communities: Narratives of Contact and Arrival in Constituting Political Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
- 12 Lutz, ed., *Myth and Memory*, 1.
  - 13 Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 12–31.
  - 14 See especially, Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 168–73; Harris, *Making Native Space*, 35–6; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 34–6.
  - 15 Immediately after Douglas' retirement, Seymour became governor of the mainland colony of British Colony (1864–66), and then the combined colonies of British Columbia and Vancouver Island (1866–69).
  - 16 Harris, *Making Native Space*, 45–6.
  - 17 See Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 173–5; Harris, *Making Native Space*, 56–69.
  - 18 Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 45. Some adjustments have been made to the Fraser Valley reserves since this time, but Stó:lō people have seen no major increases in their reserve lands.
  - 19 British Columbia, “An Ordinance further to define the law regulating acquisition of Land in British Columbia,” 31 March 1966. Cited in Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 42.
  - 20 Stó:lō Heritage Trust, *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Vancouver; Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre; University of Washington Press, 2001), 68.
  - 21 Lynn Blake, “Oblate Missionaries and the ‘Indian Land Question’” *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, no. 119 (1998): 27–44; Vincent J. McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard: a History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000).
  - 22 Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999); Carlson, *The Power of Place*; Naxaxalhts'i, Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us” In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 82–130.
  - 23 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 175. See also Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 55, for similar point about Coast Salish tribal-based collective activism.

- 24 For example, Carlson, *Power of Place*, 168–71, 236–41, and 250–55. See also Gilbert Malcolm Sproat cited in Harris, *Making Native Space*, 102.
- 25 This observation is Carlson’s, which he explores at length in *Power of Place*. Carlson is careful to note that supra-tribal organization among Stó:lō communities and their neighbours occurred prior to European contact, and thus cannot be interpreted solely as a “product of colonialism”; rather, the move towards broad regional identities seen in this period is better perceived as the resurrection of earlier existing patterns of political organization in response to the generalized threat presented by colonial society. See especially, Carlson, *Power of Place*, 270–1.
- 26 Keith Thor Carlson, “Orality About Literacy: The ‘Black and White’ of Salish History” In *Orality and Literacy: Reflections Across Disciplines*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Rose Fagan, and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 43–72.
- 27 Carlson, “Orality About Literacy,” 54.
- 28 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 2010; Ravi de Costa, “Identity, Authority, and the Moral Worlds of Indigenous Petitions,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 3 (1 July 2006), 669–98; Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006); Penny van Toorn, “Authors, Scribes and Owners: The Sociology of Nineteenth-century Aboriginal Writing on Coranderrk and Lake Condah Reserves,” *Continuum* 13, no. 3 (1999), 333–43; Foster and Berger, “From Humble Prayers,” 240–67.
- 29 This paper emerges from research conducted for my doctoral dissertation, which seek to historicize Indigenous engagements with the state around the so-called ‘Land Question’ by paying particular attention to the narrative dimensions of Aboriginal-state relations. Later chapters will explore themes similar to those discussed in this article, but with respect to more recent moments of encounter, including the McKenna-McBride commission hearings of 1912–1916, conflicts over logging in 1980s Haida Gwaii, and ongoing modern treaty negotiations.
- 30 van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives*, 226.
- 31 David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-modern England*, Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 32 For example, see the digitized collection of Black Loyalist petitions: Archives, Atlantic Canada Virtual, and Archives virtuelles du Canada atlantique, “Black Loyalists in New Brunswick, 1783-1854,” <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/blackloyalists>, <viewed 30 August 2013>. Kathleen Brown also discusses early African-American petitions: Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 223–25.
- 33 There are rich opportunities for international comparisons of Indigenous petitioning in settler colonies; unfortunately these are beyond the scope of

- this paper. De Costa's 2006 article (cited in fn. 28) is an earlier step in this direction.
- 34 van Toorn, "Authors, Scribes and Owners"; van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives*, 5–6, 208, 218–9.
- 35 Foster and Berger, "From Humble Prayers," 2008; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 55–6.
- 36 As van Toorn correctly observes, "[n]ow, as in the past, individual textual collaborations are symptomatic of political and economic inequality." Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives*, 228.
- 37 Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 56.
- 38 van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives*, 137.
- 39 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 215.
- 40 Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Library and Archive, Chilliwack, B.C. (hereafter SRRMC Library and Archive), *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Vol. 4, 1865, 301. (English Translation by Lara von Waldenburg for Stó:lō Nation Department of Aboriginal Rights and Title, 10 March 2001.)
- 41 The first Roman Catholic missionaries who would play major roles in shaping Stó:lō people's access to land arrived in 1859. They established the first mission school for boys, St. Mary's, in what is now Mission, B.C., in 1863. See Carlson, *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, 68–9.
- 42 SRRMC Library and Archive, *Missions*, 301.
- 43 See Carlson's insightful discussion of Oblate programs for 'rehabilitating' Stó:lō people, and the subsequent effects of these efforts on fracturing community identities. Keith Thor Carlson, "Familial Cohesion and Colonial Atomization: Governance and Authority in a Coast Salish Community," *Native Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (December 2010): 1–42.
- 44 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 181–208; Carlson, "Familial Cohesion"; also Blake; Harris, *Making Native Space*, 79–84,
- 45 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 227.
- 46 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 31 August 1864.
- 47 Xwelitem is roughly translated as "hungry to the point of starving" or "the starving ones" in Halq'eméylem, and is often used to denote non-Indigenous people, especially those perceived to be of European descent. This term derives from Stó:lō peoples' experience of early explorers and gold miners in the late 1950s gold rush, and describes a people who were often quite literally starving. But the metaphoric evaluation of the character of the incomers cannot be overlooked — a people whose approach to land and the things on and in it appeared to be driven by an insatiable and, perhaps especially in the case of the gold miners, obsessive appetite. See Carlson, *Power of Place*, 161.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Carlson, *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, 94.
- 50 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 31 August 1864.
- 51 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 19 February 1867. The 'certain actions' Seymour mentions were likely in reference to a motion by the Legislative

- Council to reduce the reserve lands originally laid out by Douglas.
- 52 van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives*, 335. Tennant also briefly notes the distinction between a mailed and publicly presented petition by a team of delegates. Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 56.
- 53 Seymour is also remembered in Stó:lō oral history as having broken what is known as the ‘Crown’s Promise,’ a pledge with no known documentary record, in which he told Stó:lō people that they would receive 25 to 30 cents from every dollar earned from use of their lands: “‘Si:mo’: I used to hear my granddad talk about Si:mo. They didn’t say Seymour, they said Si:mo ... Wel qel mestiyexw, that’s all he said, qel mestiyexw, means a bad person, I guess cause he wasn’t keeping his promise for them. The way I heard it was that a, Queen Victoria was the one, gave it to the government to make sure that we get it. And hey, out of every industry, is that what they call it, and a, we were supposed to get that kind of percentage for the native and there was lots of money in there, so I hear, but where is it, where is it? ...” Mr. & Mrs. Albert and Mathilda Gutierrez, quoted in: SRRMC Library and Archives, Jody Woods, *The Crown’s Promise*, Report Submitted to Stó:lō Nation Aboriginal Rights and Title, 30 November 2001, 5.
- 54 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 19 February 1867.
- 55 van Toorn, “Authors, Scribes and Owners,” 335.
- 56 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 19 February 1867.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Carlson, *Stó:lō-Coast Salish*, 163
- 59 Ibid., 164.
- 60 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG10, Black Series, Vol. 3602, File No.1794, Reel C-10104, I.W. Powell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs to Secretary of State for the Provinces, 25 June 1873.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 227, also in fn. 36, 334.
- 63 See Harris, *Making Native Space*, 45–69; Hamar Foster and Alan Grove, “‘Trespassers on the Soil’: United States V. Tom and a New Perspective on the Short History of Treaty Making in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia” In *The Power of Promises: Rethinking Indian Treaties in the Pacific Northwest*, edited by Alexandra Harmon, 89–127 (The Emil and Kathleen Sick Lecture-book Series in Western History and Biography, Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest: In association with University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2008).
- 64 LAC, Powell to Secretary of State, 25 June 1873. The chief he mentions was likely Ayessik, the petition’s first signatory.
- 65 Carlson, *Stó:lō-Coast Salish*, 172.
- 66 LAC, Powell to Secretary of State, 25 June 1873.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 178.
- 70 See Carlson, *Power of Place*, 235 and fn. 16, 336.

- 71 Carlson, *Power of Place*, 235.
- 72 Ibid., 167.
- 73 As Carlson describes, what the generic designation ‘Chief’ meant to Stó:lō peoples at the time versus what it may have meant to settlers did not always connect. In some instances, the term and the new authority it conveyed after the institution of the Indian Act (and prior) was used to promote people to positions of authority they may not otherwise have been able to achieve. In the case of Ayessik and Alexis, however, we see examples of people with new skills (and elite ancestry) being internally promoted to act in accordance with the same responsibilities as leaders of earlier generations: “to look after community interests as best they could.” See Carlson, *Power of Place*, 235–236, also 194–208, and 232–6.
- 74 Wolfenden, Petition to Superintendent, 14 July 1874.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid. Carlson makes the same observation in “Familial Cohesion,” 22.
- 77 Wolfenden, Petition to Superintendent, 14 July 1874.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Lutz, *Makúk*, 24–5. Several scholars, most notably Foster, have expertly discussed Indigenous peoples’ attempts to access British justice from a legal history standpoint. For example, see Hamar Foster, “‘We Are Not O’Meara’s Children’: Law, Lawyers, and the First Campaign for Aboriginal Title in British Columbia, 1908–28,” in Hamar Foster, Heather Raven, and Jeremy Webber (eds.), *Let Right Be Done: Aboriginal Title, the Calder Case, and the Future of Indigenous Rights* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2007), 61–84.
- 82 Furniss, *Burden of History*, 1999.
- 83 Harris, *Making Native Space*, 51.
- 84 B.C. Archives, Seymour to Cardwell, 31 August 1864.
- 85 LAC, RG10, Vol. 1001, Reel T1455, Also located in RG10 Vol. 3612, file 3763, Letter to Mr. Lenihan signed by Alexis, Chief of Cheam, in the name of the other Chiefs of the Lower Fraser, 15 May 1875.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Harris, *Making Native Space*, 86.
- 88 See Harris, *Making Native Space*, 104–135, 136–166; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 39–52, 53–67.
- 89 Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 112.
- 90 This has been well documented by Tennant, who also notes the renewal of Indigenous peoples’ legal pursuit of their claims after section 141 was unceremoniously dropped from the Indian Act in the early 1950s.
- 91 Harris, *Making Native Space*, 36
- 92 B.C. Archives, British Columbia Colonial Correspondence, P. Durieu, F503/2, Durieu to Seymour, Petition of the Whonuck Indians, 6 December 1868.

- 93 B.C. Archives, British Columbia Colonial Correspondence, P. Durieu, F503/2, Durieu to Seymour, Petition of the Matsqui Indians, 6 December 1868.