

**Fort Langley Cranberries and a San Francisco Market: A Transition in the Role of Natives  
from 1827 to 1858**

*By: William Bethune*

Report prepared at the request of Metro Vancouver, in partial fulfilment of GEOG429: Research in Historical Geography, for Dr. David Brownstein.

27/04/2016

## **Abstract**

*Early Canadian Native-newcomer relations and interactions are important for painting an accurate picture of the times. The changes that were made to Native lifeworlds are numerous. This paper discusses an example of one of these changes: a transitioning Native economic role in the context of the cranberry trade out of Fort Langley. It briefly examines the susceptibility of Native populations to Newcomer influence. The initial participation that they had in every step of resource trade processes is also touched upon in order to provide contrast to their newfound role. A narrative of the cranberry trade is used to illustrate how shifting markets, a changing Newcomer presence, technological advancements, and Fort Langley as a centre of production for the cranberry trade affected the economic role of the Natives. The paper finds that the Native population was in transition from having close involvement in every or many steps of the resource trade process in a more localized economy to being a supply of labour for a new Newcomer economy. It demonstrates that changing economic scale and Native-newcomer economic dynamics were inextricably linked.*

## Introduction

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Native involvement in the trade economies of British Columbia is often discussed in the context of major resources such as fur, timber, and gold.<sup>1</sup> However, there lies within less prominently discussed resources a wealth of understanding regarding marked changes to Native lifeworlds. Fort Langley was the first Newcomer settlement in the interior of British Columbia in which Native-newcomer interactions were ubiquitous.<sup>2</sup> The fort also existed during a time in which resource trade dynamics were in transition to a more globally integrated and arguably capitalist system. Its inception in 1827 introduced a Newcomer presence to coastal British Columbia, while 1858 is argued to signify a major transition in the economy as a result of the gold rushes.<sup>3</sup> This allows Fort Langley between 1827 and 1858 to be a prodigious source of insight into the role of Natives in the economy and the effects that transitioning economies had on it.

The cranberry trade is an impactful example of a seldom discussed resource in which Fort Langley and its population played an integral part. This paper will therefore use a narrative of Fort Langley and its cranberry trade to illuminate a period of economic transition for Native people in British Columbia. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for in depth analysis of Native-newcomer power dynamics. However, some scholars argue that Natives held more control in trade than was traditionally recognized. Therefore, it will argue that the changing economic environment of the cranberry trade in Fort Langley between 1827 and 1858 marked

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<sup>1</sup> C. Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> C. Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*. Vancouver, 1997.; M. Maclachlan, The Founding of Fort Langley, *B.C. Historical News* (1999): 4.

<sup>3</sup> J. Barman, Family Life at Fort Langley, *B.C. Historical News* (1999): 16.; R. Boyle and R. Mackie, The Hudson's Bay company in Barkerville. *BC Studies* (2015).; R. Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930*, Vancouver, 1978.

and facilitated the transition of the Natives' close involvement in every or many steps of trade processes to their role of being a supply of labour for a Newcomer economy. First, the Native populations that inhabited the area prior to the inception of Fort Langley will be touched upon in order to demonstrate their susceptibility to change due to Newcomer economic influence. Their relationship with the Newcomers after the inception of the fort will then be examined with the purpose of depicting initial Native involvement in trade. Next, a narrative of the cranberry trade will be presented to illuminate a transition in the role of Natives in the economy. Fort Langley's role as a place of resource acquisition and production in this narrative will be emphasized to illustrate the requirement of an unskilled labour force. Shifts in the location of markets and technological advancements that were implemented will also be examined to further demonstrate the cranberry trades effects on the narrowing economic role of Native people at Fort Langley. Comparison to other settlement and resource economies will be utilized in analysis in an attempt to forge an understanding of the implications of larger-scale patterns and outcomes of this transition period.

### **Susceptible Native Populations**

Before the inception of Fort Langley the Fraser River Valley was occupied entirely by "Sto':lo," Native populations, or directly translated to mean "river" or "river people". Two bands of the "Sto':lo," are now known to have settled in the Fort Langley area: the Katzie and the Kwantlen. Specifics, such as locations and dates, of their settlements in the area of discussion are not known due to a lack of evidence.<sup>4</sup> These populations were going through a period of

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<sup>4</sup> W. Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*, Victoria, 1952.; R. Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian European Relations in British Columbia*, Burnaby, 1980.

turmoil prior to the arrival of Newcomer settlements. It is estimated that there were around 15000 “Sto’lo,” people living in the Fraser Valley, and that those populations dropped by 62-75%.<sup>5</sup> The most prominently cited reason for this marked decline in population is Cole Harris’ argument of a massive small-pox epidemic in 1782 which was then followed up with other virgin soil epidemics such as measles, influenza and tuberculosis.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars also state that violent conflict between Native groups such as the Letwiltok, a principle enemy of the “Sto’lo,” also contributed to this decline as well. Due to their dwindling population they began to concentrate their people into smaller areas thus changing the pattern of their settlements.<sup>7</sup> We have seen similar effects of Native populations being susceptible to this type of change elsewhere in early Canada. For instance, the adoption of Newcomer technologies and fur trading in the Hudson Bay region resulted in the same type of violence between Native groups, changing settlement patterns, and an eventual reliance on the fur trade for subsistence.<sup>8</sup> We even saw a narrowing of the Native role in the fur trade economy with the removal of middlemen in the commodity chain. However, unlike the cranberry trade that will be discussed below, the Natives maintained a certain degree of involvement in fur trade processes.<sup>9</sup> All of these different changing patterns of settlements and lifestyle were common in Native lifeworlds at the time and this could be argued to demonstrate that these populations were susceptible to change. Furthermore, a significant amount of the change that occurred was as a result of Newcomer

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<sup>5</sup> K. Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, Chilliwack, 1997

<sup>6</sup> C. Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> J. Cherrington, *The Fraser Valley: A History*. Madeira Park, B.C: Harbour Publishing, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> C. Harris, The Pattern of Early Canada, in: Wynn, Graeme, *People, Places, Patterns, Processes: Geographical Perspectives on the Canadian Past*, Mississauga, 1990, 358-373

<sup>9</sup> C. Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

influence which allows the Natives to be viewed as being susceptible not only to change in general, but more specifically to change as a result of Newcomer influence.

### **Initial Native Economic Involvement**

The inception of the original Fort Langley as the first Euro-american settlement in mainland British Columbia in 1827 is often described as being the first meaningful contact that the Natives in the area had with Newcomers. Previous contact between these two groups was through disease contraction and short-term coastal trade which are argued to have been remote and ephemeral.<sup>10</sup> Description of the interactions between the two groups at Fort Langley within the literature and in the Fort Langley journals is that of an intimate and interdependent relationship. The fort relied on the Natives for the natural resources and local knowledge they supplied, while the natives were interested in intimate relations to ensure acquisition of exotic resources and protection from inter-Native violence.<sup>11</sup> The Native people living near the fort are known to have had significant involvement in many steps of the trade process that was to occur there. It is even argued by Carlson that the Natives were involved in the trade to such an extent that they imposed their own salmon trade economy on the fort. Not only were the Natives fishing for the salmon themselves, they were also bartering and trading the salmon in the local trade market at Fort Langley. The fort was initially created with the intent of it being a fur trade post, but due to salmon being a larger part of the Native lifeworld present the economy became quickly dominated by the trade of salmon.<sup>12</sup> This close involvement in every step of the trade

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<sup>10</sup> K. Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, Chilliwack, 1997

<sup>11</sup> R. Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian European Relations in British Columbia*, Burnaby, 1980.

<sup>12</sup> K. Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, Chilliwack, 1997

process of salmon that they exhibited within the economy of Fort Langley characterized the early years of life at Fort Langley due to the localized nature of the economic interactions. However, it will be argued below that this close involvement in multiple steps of the trade transitioned as new Newcomer economies were forged and expanded in scale. The expansion of these economies stemmed from Newcomer initiatives which are demonstrated above to have large effects on Native populations.

### **Cranberries and a Transitioning Native Economic Role**

The economy at Fort Langley in the earlier years of its existence was typified by the dominant and localized salmon trade in which the Natives participated closely from acquisition all the way until the fish traded hands. But, the Newcomers would discover new economies that would grow in scale and facilitate the transition of the Native economic role to being simply a supply of labour. There exists in the literature arguments about the control maintained by the Native people during the time of their transition of their economic role. For instance John Lutz argues that the Natives did not exist as exploited labourers, but instead entered into the burgeoning capitalist Newcomer economies as a means to their own Native cultural ends.<sup>13</sup> Indeed it is evident that the Natives did benefit from the Newcomers in a myriad of different ways. However, this does not mean that they were not experiencing a transition in which components of the trade process they were involved with. The Natives purpose may have been to benefit from the newcomer presence. But, their role in how they were benefitting from them was still in transition from being closely involved at every step to having a narrowed down role

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<sup>13</sup> J. Lutz, *After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890*, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1992): 3.; J. Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations*, Vancouver, 2008.

as a single-cog labourer. Whether the Natives' were in control of their changing role or they were forced into this role reaches outside the scope of this research. It will be discussed below how their economic role was changing and that it was inextricably linked to the changing economic environment that was present.

This paper will use the cranberry trade as an example of one of these new Newcomer economies that permitted this transition. Cranberries economic potential was not immediately discovered by the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Langley. The bitter tasting berry was, at first, simply a part of the local Native diet that the Newcomers of Fort Langley readily adopted. Newcomers would often eat these berries with sugar due to Newcomer taste-buds not being accustomed to the bitter taste. They also found many other uses for the berry which included making syrups and liqueurs.<sup>14</sup> The first recorded economic use of cranberries was later on in the spring of 1852 when James Cooper, a trader out of Fort Victoria, acquired Cranberries from the Katzie Natives near Fort Langley. He is also the first to have found an available market for cranberries in San Francisco, California.<sup>15</sup> James Douglas of the Hudson Bay Company became aware of the transactions and determined the cranberry trade to be a potentially lucrative economic endeavour. The company decided that it wanted to be involved in the trade, and ended up completely monopolizing the trade by invoking their exclusive right to trade with coastal Natives.<sup>16</sup> This immediate action within the trade displays the extent of influence that the Newcomers already had coming into this trade. Although Newcomers came to occupy almost all roles and steps in the trade processes of other economies such as the fur trade (other than

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<sup>14</sup> N. Turner and P. Aderkas, Sustained by First Nations: European Newcomers' Use of Indigenous Plant Foods in Temperate North America, *Acta Societatis Botanicorum Poloniae* (2012): 4.

<sup>15</sup> JMS, Careless, The Lowe Brothers, 1852-70: A Study in Business Relations on the North Pacific Coast. *BC Studies* (1969): 1.

<sup>16</sup> M. Cullen, *The History of Fort Langley, 1827-96*, Ottawa, 1979.



acquisition), those trades were not forged upon Newcomer monopolization as is the case with cranberries.<sup>17</sup> The monopolizing influence of Newcomers on Native people would then facilitate the transition of Natives being closely involved in the trade at Fort Langley to eventually having a single-cog role of labour supply in the production process.

The cranberry trade is seldom discussed in the literature when compared to other resource trades such as fur, timber, and fish. Even so, the trade is still argued to have been one of the most lucrative economic endeavours on the coastal region of British Columbia at the time.<sup>18</sup> Large economies such as this required a massive amount of manpower at the time and Natives were the only source; bar shipping more HBC men in. The extent of the trade can be seen in primary source material recording shipments of the berry to the newfound markets of San Francisco. For instance a ship was chartered “...to San Francisco with a consignment of... 250 barrels (6,000 gallons) of cranberries” .<sup>19</sup> Ships such as these would later visit Fort Langley very often to acquire cranberries for trade. Fort Langley became a place and centre of resource acquisition and production as a result of these new Newcomer economies that were being discovered and expanded. Places and centres of resource acquisition such as Fort Langley needed a supply labour to do tasks such as pick the cranberries. Natives were already doing so and continued to supply labour in a more narrowed down form as a result of the expansion of the trade. Later economies such as the gold rush in Barkerville followed suit and immediately utilized Native people as a supply of labour.<sup>20</sup> The cranberry trade can therefore be viewed an economy that was

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<sup>17</sup> C. Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> J. Cherrington, *The Fraser Valley: A History*. Madeira Park, B.C: Harbour Publishing, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> JMS, Careless, *The Lowe Brothers, 1852-70: A Study in Business Relations on the North Pacific Coast*. *BC Studies* (1969): 1.

<sup>20</sup> M. Jorgenson, "Into That Country to Work": Aboriginal Economic Activities During Barkerville's Gold Rush, *BC Studies* (2015).

part of the Native economic role transition that was occurring at an even greater scale. Most of these cranberries that were shipped to San Francisco ended up in the interior of California as a source of nutrition for the gold rush miners.<sup>21</sup> This provides an economic link of the Natives in the Fort Langley area to the relatively far off place of California. Furthermore, it shows the continuing integration of Natives into a capitalist globalizing economy. The spatial structure of this economy no longer permitted Natives to be involved in the multitude of processes they took part in at Fort Langley. They were, as a result, no longer directly involved in many components of the cranberry trade. The type of economy that these people were now inextricably linked to was one much different from the more localized economies they were accustomed to. It was one of greater scale with the shifting of markets to more distant locations. It was one that was in need of supply of labour. And therefore, it was one that would facilitate a transition in the Native economic role.

The trip down to California from Fort Langley that was required for the trade of cranberries was extremely long and strenuous. Technological advancements were made in order to allow for this journey to be made much easier without losing product to instances such as wood-bound barrels exploding. These technological advancements further allowed for Native people to have a narrowed economic role in the cranberry trade. Wood-bound barrels began to be replaced with iron-bound barrels in order to avoid losing product over the arduous journey.<sup>22</sup> These barrels were mostly, if not all, produced at Fort Langley itself which further illustrates the fort as a place or centre of production in need of supply of labour. These iron-bound barrels were

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<sup>21</sup> M. Cullen, *The History of Fort Langley, 1827-96*, Ottawa, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> J. Douglas to J.M. Yale 6 April 1854 James Murray Yale Fonds BC Archives, MS-0105, Box 1, File 1-4

made by a cooper by the name of William Cromarty who was employed at the fort.<sup>23</sup> This would then leave a significant amount of labour in the production process of cranberries unaccounted for with less Newcomer labour available. It was also reported by James Douglas in 1853 that “a great part of the agricultural labour of the colony, is at present performed by the means of natives”.<sup>24</sup> The shifts in markets to distant places and the subsequent need for technological advancements can therefore be viewed to have facilitated the economic role of Natives to transition into a supply of labour. This is especially evident when viewed in contrast to the multifaceted role they played in earlier economies such as the salmon trade at Fort Langley.

As more and more cranberries were being shipped to San Francisco the Hudson Bay Company encountered complaints of the quality of the berries that were being received. A trader named Lowe in San Francisco complained that the berries were not clean and were "... mixed with leaves, moss and other substances".<sup>25</sup> In order to combat this problem the company implemented an intermediate process of washing the berries with the help of a winnowing machine; yet another subsequently required technological advancement. Cullen states that the Newcomers of Fort Langley were instructed to “get as many more cranberries as you can, and try to make the savages wait till they are ripe before they pick them”.<sup>26</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that they were performing any other role within the process other than picking the cranberries. The Natives were seemingly being funneled down into a narrower economic role. The implementation of a new technological intermediate process facilitated their transition into a

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<sup>23</sup> J. Singh-Aujla, How the Macroeconomic Undercurrent of Trade Influenced the Lives of the Historic Cromarty Family through Immigration, Employment, and Family Building: a Representation of the Time, *cIRcle: Undergraduate Research* (2014)

<sup>24</sup> J. Lutz, After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1992): 3.

<sup>25</sup> M. Cullen, *The History of Fort Langley, 1827-96*, Ottawa, 1979.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

very simple role in the economic production of cranberries. They were simply a labour force supplying unskilled labour to procure a resource which then went through a multitude of other processes at the hands of Newcomers before reaching the markets.

Further problems were found in managing such an extensive spatial cranberry trade network which had a limited market in San Francisco. These problems required immensely close management and cooperation between three main places: Fort Langley as the place of production, Fort Victoria as the entrepot, and San Francisco as the market.<sup>27</sup> The majority of the components of the trade process were being done by Newcomer entities. The Natives were no longer taking part in the bartering, trading, and transport of the resource in the same way that they were initially with the salmon trade. There exists correspondence between the Newcomer entities, but there is no mention of Natives participating in any major part of the trade process other than being a supply of labour. Their involvement wasn't substantial enough to have required any cooperation for the management of the trade which could be testament to their role as a supply of labour. Eventually the cranberry trade was infringed upon by a growing American presence. Douglas reported in 1857 that "the cranberry trade would have yielded even a greater amount of profit had it not been for the active competition of the American buyers".<sup>28</sup> The subsequent competition that Douglas wrote of would lead to decline of the cranberry trade in 1858. It is evident that most of the economic and market effects on the cranberry trade were made by Newcomer entities. The Natives having a very narrow role as a supply of labour took no part in directly impacting international competition, yet they were heavily under the influence of

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<sup>27</sup> J. Douglas to J.M. Yale 6 October James Douglas Correspondence Outward 1854-1857 BC Archives, B/40/1 Book; J. Douglas to J.M. Yale 12 October 1855 James Murray Yale Fonds BC Archives, MS-0537

<sup>28</sup> J. Douglas to Smith 2 April 1857 Fort Victoria Correspondence Outward BC Archives, A/C/20/Vi3D

the changes that would happen as a result of it. They had transitioned into a supply of labour within a Newcomer economy.

## **Conclusion**

Resource economies of early Canada allow for an understanding of the extent of influence that the arrival of Newcomers had on the New World. The changing economic environment that was demonstrated in the cranberry trade contributed further to the changing economic role that the Natives experienced from 1827 through 1858. Natives did, at one point, have an intimate closeness to the resource economies of Early Canada. However, they were also populations that were extremely susceptible to change, specifically change from Newcomer influence. With a discussion and close analysis of the cranberry trade in this context this paper illustrated well the transition the Natives experienced as a result of the changing economic environment. Further research could be done into other resources that aren't prominently discussed in order to foster a better understanding of larger scale patterns. Resources such as sturgeon and hazelnuts could prove fruitful in this endeavour as a comparison to an economy that didn't expand and remained localized. The extent to which Natives complied with Newcomer initiative and how readily they adopted their new role could also help in understanding early Canadian resource economies as well. Ultimately, cranberries were part of a newcomer economy that was superimposed on existing native networks of trade that was subsequently redirected to markets that were further and further away. It was the where the market was located, rather than the means of production that was in transition during this time. So in the end it was this shift in the markets and its resulting effects that had such an impact on the Natives role in the economy

and society. As the markets shifted further and further away, so did the natives involvement in a multitude of economic components.

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