OPENINGS TO A LAKE
Historical Approaches
to Sumas Lake, British Columbia

by

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Abstract of Thesis
Openings To A Lake
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In order to explore the dynamic between history and place, I consider four methodological issues within the historical space of Sumas Lake, B.C., a large lake that was drained in the 1920's. The first "Opening" reflects on the connection between historical and technological frontiers, while critiquing my creation of the attached HyperCard stack "Disappearing A Lake: A Meditation on Method and Mosquitos." The stack documents the creative process of history-making, allowing the "reader" to review and record comments, to see examples of cartography and photography, to hear oral interviews and to read selections of narrative tradition either inside or outside the logic and context of an essay format.

The written document flows from the stack. "Listening For Pleasure" discusses the process of oral history as it relates to the negotiated and contested space of the Sumas Lake commons. Diving into archives from Victoria to Ottawa, "Margins and Mosquitos" recycles written records to explore federal, provincial and local involvements with a flood lake. "Memory Device" moves into the archive of land and waterscapes, looking for connections between place and history, mindful of both Native oral tradition and written historical accounts of the lake.

Interactive history is located not only in the interface between people and computers, but also in the process of making oral history and in the creative transformation of archival documents. Most importantly, interactive history is alive in the links people forge between stories and the actual places around them.
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OPENING

Opening, n. 1. an act or instance of making or becoming open.
2. an unobstructed or unoccupied space or place. 3. a hole or void in solid matter.
4. the act of beginning: start. 5. the first part or initial stage of anything.
6. an employment vacancy. 7. an opportunity; chance. 8. a. the formal or official
beginning of an activity, event, presentation, etc. b. a celebration marking this.
9. the statement of the case made by legal counsel to the court or jury before
presenting evidence. 10. a mode of beginning a game: chess openings.

The word "opening" has many possible meanings. In certain contexts, many
levels of meaning may be alive simultaneously. One such context is the moment when a
woman or man sits down at a computer to begin to write a history concerning a place in
the West, the North American West. Here is an opportunity to open a new document
electronically; to open the mind creatively; to make a first move in the academic game; to
start to make a case. Diving into the void — the future of the past — with anticipatory
celebration, the historian surfaces sometime around June, 1808. Gasping and sputtering
for air, lo and behold, trembling hands grasp a folder of written documents. The sea
parts, the folder opens to reveal the journal of Simon Fraser, the European searching for
liquid openings to the Pacific via Sto:lo, the river that soon would carry his name. The
opening to new frontiers! To boldly go!

The project within, from start to open-end is a brief reflection on a lake: an
opening between water and history, the interplay linking the stuff of nature and its
historical representation within culture. The entry point is specific, local and currently
non-existent: a southwestern British Columbian lake whose name, Sumas, translates as
"big opening." Sumas Lake, a large, sometimes shallow lake in the Lower Fraser Valley

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of British Columbia, was drained in the 1920's and a complex, costly drainage system continues to pump the valuable agricultural and residential lands. The engineers report that if the artificial drainage ceased, most of the 22,000 acres of this lake bottom would be covered with water. To imagine that possible future is to recall the area's past, which was, I am reminded by the Chilliwack man who developed my Sumas Lake Bottom photographs in 1994, "a different country."

Openings can be treacherous. In the planning stages, my introduction explored roots in European theory, crossed to North American historiography, went westering and tied up with an attempt to legitimize a pioneering hypertextual approach to history. I belatedly realized that my direction and attitude placed me firmly on the bottom of Simon Fraser's canoe. Canoeing downstream on the chronological paper trail, we pass a place where "the river expands into a lake." No matter how loath we are to share in Simon Fraser's colonial venture, the desire to find or create openings may lead us to make and honor the same strokes as the white explorers and settlers who went westering in the territory of the Sto:lo not so long ago. We reify the irreverent and ignorant claim that what makes B.C. history interesting — ideas, colorful characters, change — came from elsewhere. The time of the river, the traditions of its people are reduced, in the words of the prolific Canadian storyteller, Harold Adams Innis, to an "absolute nullity." As the "big opening" of Sumas Lake is probed with new theory or computer technology, it must also be approached with new respect.

Self-examination is thus in order. A focus on objects, a lake and a computer, may reflect an instinctive need to connect with physical "things" to mitigate increasing

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3 In terms of monetary value only, a 1993 Abbotsford District report states that Sumas Prairie has "an estimated agricultural invested value of some two hundred fifty million dollars. Return on investment per annum is around fifty million dollars Canadian." D. F. Wright, "Barrowtown Pump Station," (District of Abbotsford, 1993), 34.

4Ibid.


disorientation in one of the most rapidly changing landscapes of Canada. Putting a lake (typically seen as a part of nature) in the same category of things as a computer (a supposed item of culture) might appear somewhat mixed up. But both really are mixtures of nature and culture. As Bruno Latour, a European scholar who often teaches in the North American West, tells us, "the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off."7 People interact with a lake, a computer, shaping them with real matter, discourse, and collective action.8 Simultaneously, these things alter people, the real world, language and politics.

I must admit that in terms of reorienting one's perspective on history, a disappeared lake may appear to be something akin to Alice's looking glass, the stuff of dreams and imagination. Yes, that which is tangible is lake bottom. But this experiential realist is adamant that her mirror, Sumas Lake, once was encountered by living, experiencing bodies in the very real world. We can no longer swim in Sumas Lake, but its past material reality permits other living bodies a chance to lovingly recover a sense of history and place. We interact with lake reflections that are not simply unreal or distorted: rather, the documents, photos, maps and oral records are mediations, events of creation and translation, which continue to shape local stories and landscapes.

But why acknowledge the computer? Surely it is only a writer's tool and is not, in the study of history, immanent. Yet here I try to write an environmental history while immersed intellectually in theories and information technologies that appear to have the potential to push storytellers far from the non-virtual (real) world where people actually chew vegetables and drink water. Now I am questioning the usage of drainage technology as I employ powerful computer technology, with enthusiasm and without question, to process words and search data bases in order to replenish the lake with story. Paradox looms large and to paraphrase Stewart Brand, "invention is the sincerest form of

8Ibid., 6.
self-criticism."9 I authored in hypertext, "an information medium that links verbal and nonverbal information."10 in order to make visible and audible some of what I experienced in the creative process of historical research. My hypertext stack made with HyperCard software attempted to show how archival materials were convincing me, how existing photographs and maps, oral histories and narratives were changing my ideas about the lake.

Despite my cautious beginning, this interaction drew me as a spectator into the much vaunted electronic frontier and made me, in the depths of my involvement, more pro-technology than I ever dreamed possible. Only my history books advised me to look around carefully. What was this heady world promising freedom and adventure? What did "pioneering" entail? A hard copy examination of the relationship between the electronic and historical frontiers is not just a vain attempt to find a privileged place from which to survey the form of hypertext. The present work occupies middle ground. But how else may one critically examine the frontier and simultaneously communicate with those people who have not yet been persuaded to go there?

The result may be frontier advertising for new open space, but it comes with a large warning for would-be pioneers drawn from recent work of students of the West: "connections matter."11 Even if the stories which support the glorious frontier have been challenged, their consequences — the conquest of people and place — have been real. And now we seem to have the possibility of extending the stories visually, aurally and textually. In effect, we may make them "hyper-real." Hypertext may actualize and embody many exciting ideas of contemporary historical theory, but new historical inquiry also serves as a refreshing critique of this much-hyped technology.

The word "opening" is evocative within the history of the West. With connotations of empty and unoccupied, Western Canada has long been interpreted as an open frontier, waiting for the presence and labour of colonizers. B.C. historians, until recently, have done little to change that notion. As Allan Smith notes of the major B.C. historian, Margaret Ormsby, "Ormsby's general history gave [Indians] scant attention, and her 1960 appeal for new work made no reference to them at all." This "sense of unoccupied timelessness" persists not just in the popular press but in the law courts where Justice McEachern judged a "vast emptiness" to exist where the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en saw named and occupied homelands. If we privilege the written account and the "contact" experience as the beginning of the West, we re-narrate the discovery pageant and repeat the refrain that once earned me full marks in grade ten social studies. "B.C. has lots of geography but little history."  

Strong resistance to the theory of historical emptiness comes from those who are increasingly sensitive to the legal and political context of Native history, and who assert the anthropological and historical knowledge that British Columbia was neither "empty" nor "timeless" prior to newcomer occupation. Although the "New Western History" as a named genre comes from American historians of the West who still tend to ignore Canada, the 49th parallel does not stop ideas, elk, air pollutants or relatives from moving back and forth across the border. Scholars concerned with changing environments and First Nations are writing international history. The open frontier was a shared myth, not

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15 Unit Exam on Canadian history, Chilliwack Junior High School, 1982.
16 "New Western History" builds on the thoughts of many critics of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis that an area of free land and its constant recession through settlement explains American development and the American character: see, for instance, the work of Patricia Nelson Limerick, William Cronon, Donald Worster and Richard White. Examples of Canadian histories which question the idea of free land/water and
simply in the sense of a falsehood, but in terms of a story that, for a time, explained to Westerners who they were and how they should act. For many, that particular story is no longer coherent and we search for new openings into more powerful, more inclusive stories.

Some suggest windows may be found in new conceptual structures. In Under An Open Sky, Sarah Deutsch urges historians to envision "an interactive multifaceted model," a framework more appropriate to diverse concepts of history. She does not speak of a technological solution, but following George Landow who has written recently of the convergence of computer hypertext and literary theory, we may be tempted to see hypertext as the fulfillment of such requests for major renovations in historiography. Hypertext advocates like Landow argue that we should stop thinking in terms of linear arguments, of hierarchies, centers and margins and instead expand our vocabulary and mindset to recognize "mutilinearity, nodes, links and networks." Hypertext, as conceived by computer theorist, Theodor H. Nelson in the 1960's, is "text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen." Interactivity, diversity, choice; the buzz words of new gender, ethnic and class conscious history also click with the theory of hypertext.

The computer is familiar to many historians as an information storage device and word-processor, perhaps because they are prepared to characterize themselves as retrievers and processors of data. The computer is unfamiliar as a facilitator of creative and qualitative thought, not just because the software is new (HyperCard has been around for only a decade) but because historians, unlike students of literature, do not give themselves enough credit for being creative and qualitative creatures. My HyperCard

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the image of settlers dwelling in harmony with new possessions include Robin Fisher and Kenneth Coates, eds, Out of the Background (Toronto: Copp-Clark-Pitmann, 1988) and Dianne Newell's study of the indigenous B.C. fishery in the Tangled Webs of History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

18Landow, Hypertext, 2.
19Ibid., 4.
stack is a variation on Nelson's non-sequential model. Although I maintained a linear essay component, the "reader" is provided constant opportunities to branch off to other materials both visual and aural. Allowing recorded voices to speak while one reads my analysis destabilizes one privileged standpoint and adds static to a monophonic authority. The ability to link to other materials formalizes multiple connections and allows complexity in a very messy West. The stack is cyclical and, because of the capacity to accept reader or additional writer comments, it is potentially open-ended. Emphasizing generation rather than reduction, my intention was to expand my understanding of Sumas Lake aided by others who might make new links and extend the "reader" fields.

The content of western history may thus interact with form. The very experience of reading hypertext becomes an exploration of the idea of westering. Like the men and women western historians write about, the "readers," given the opportunity and the tools, can "pick and choose between the known and the unknown" shaping the text, new goods, "new settlements" — an experience which can "carry with it an unexpected feeling of empowerment."20 The "reader" can listen to recorded voices and privilege the slowing-sensation of listening to other viewpoints and experiences of life. Or like Landow who prefers "more bang for his buck,"21 she can choose not to. If the hypertext is formatted for the Internet's World-Wide Web,22 she may partake in the simultaneous remoteness and connectedness that undermined hierarchy in the West as she seemingly creates, not inherits, the structure of her society. Most compelling of all, the software provides open fields for experimentation apparently limited only by imagination and computer power.

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20Cronon, Miles, Gitlin, "Becoming West," Open Sky, 10.
22With nearly ten million users, this "superhighway" for information is an ever-expanding network which uses telecommunication lines to send large amounts of data between "sites" around the world. See Howard Rheingold, The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 8.
Early Twentieth Century pump technology offered agriculture science several thousand acres of Sumas Prairie on which to experiment, and, thanks to hypertext, we have the opportunity to "discover" frontiers all over again. In an intellectual sense, the frontier was a new or unexplored area of thought or knowledge. Geographically, Sumas Lake was a frontier, lying along the border of another country; in fact, the Sumas river valley extends into Whatcom County in the United States. In Richard Slotkin's mythical sense, the frontier "was the border between a world of possibilities and one of actualities, a world theoretically unlimited and one defined by its limitations." 23 The historical sense of Sumas Lake contains all of these meanings, but it also insists that the "big opening" was also a unique place, an ecosystem and a community characterized by interdependence and interchange. As we define what we want from new openings, such as wealth, pleasure, or new understanding, we learn that such places alter us as we change them.

This process may attune us to the dynamics of power, particularly to the action of our words. When we attempt to rethink history by using the voices, images or stories of others, the result may represent collaboration or exploitation, sharing or silencing. More likely, they reveal both possibilities at once. 24 Hypertext may appear to offer a technological solution to bothersome authorial responsibility, but historians would do well to think again. Landow writes "The main reason I think hypertext does not appropriate alien points of view, and thereby exclude them under the guise of pretending to include them, lies in the presence of the (politically) responsible, active reader: because the reader chooses his or her own reading paths, the responsibility lies with the reader. In linking and following links lie responsibility — political responsibility — since each reader establishes his or her own line of reading." 25 But ultimately, of course,

25Landow, Hypertext, 185.
the possible links and choices have been created by the individual writer. As reader you have the sensation of choosing, and, provided the opportunity, you may respond, but you are aware that you are exploring someone else's moral universe. Freedom from creative responsibility is always a dangerous illusion.

The notion that serious problems of human relations are best solved by technical solutions, such as hypertext for cultural appropriation and I.U.D.s for family planning, is hardly obvious. Just because a computer can do something like hypertextual history, we must not assume that it necessarily should. When we cuddle up to the computer to reap its benefits, we are vulnerable and we should be prepared to lose something, perhaps even something critical. For those storytellers concerned with the quality of place, the place of learning and the place of home, the opening provided by computers might begin to appear as appealing as an ozone hole.

At a 1994 hypertext conference, I was struck by the prevalence of geographical and spatial metaphors in the speakers' language. Hypertext authors were persuading us to enter new "environments," "landscapes," "open space," to open up new "windows" as we sat in a dark, windowless, Barco-equipped hall. Experiencing the frontier through their fingertips, we were able to envision something that our awareness of the environment "out-there" and recognition of an historically occupied West advised us to stop dreaming about. Behold empty space for free, unlimited discovery! Is the success of the propaganda dependent on some connection we are making between real environments and hyper-environments? Or is it effective simply and ironically because a link to reality is no longer required?

We just might be buying into the void. With so little sensory stimulation except from that which came from the screen and the speaker, we are mesmerized by Edward Tufte and those who remind us that our brains can absorb great amounts of information
and thus require the highest degree of resolution on the screen.\textsuperscript{26} The more information you display, the more credibility you will have. The question "to what purpose?" tends to get lost in the persuasive novelty, which urges us to follow the prophets and open our wallets for further adventure to someplace, any place but here, in this limbo of now.

In the worst scenario, we may just wind up any place. Electronic media, especially in the forms of television and radio, has the potential to destroy that which is special about place and time.\textsuperscript{27} If information from everywhere can be downloaded anywhere at anytime, what special knowledge will actual places — libraries, lakes — be understood to contain? Neil Postman warns that new technologies "alter the nature of community, the arena in which thoughts develop."\textsuperscript{28} Certainly when I first heard about Sumas Lake, I dramatically envisaged the disappeared body of water as a powerful metaphor for all the wrongs perpetrated on community by drainage and information technology. My deepest fears about the fallout of the global information explosion — cultural breakdown and erasure of local identity — were confirmed by my "discovery" of a disappeared and widely forgotten lake on the outskirts of my city. Admittedly, local history was not a strong component of my schooling inside classrooms in the 1970's and 1980's. But even now, as children learn more about the place where they live in more diverse media, the forum of learning is inextricably linked to what we learn.

If community is constituted, as philosopher David Carr suggests, by a shared story,\textsuperscript{29} we should also be attuned to how computers may alter the way we transmit history. Lewis Mumford quotes the philosopher A.N. Whitehead: "historical tradition is handed down by the direct experience of physical surroundings' provided of course," he

\textsuperscript{26}Edward Tufte, "Inaugural Address: Cognitive Arts," \textit{Beyond Gutenberg Conference}, Personal Conference Notes, Yale University, May 13, 1994.
\textsuperscript{29}David Carr, \textit{Time, Narrative and History} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 169.
adds, "that these surroundings remain coherent and stable." For some writers, the hypertext allure has nothing to do with the offer of stability: its pull is more like the fascination of watching water swirl down the drain. As Michael Joyce relates, we are in "flowspace." With the universal metaphor of water, hypertext is universalized. "Print stays itself, electronic text replaces itself."  

The poststructural landscape may be shifting, but connections between words and things are still what must nurture us if our histories are to remain vital. The Hornby Island Official Community Plan begins with the idea that the "hardest nut to crack, of all the difficult nuts of environmental deterioration, is the very real human capacity to forget something not now present that was once of considerable importance to our lives, and the obvious inability to miss something we've never experienced. And so from generation to generation the environment becomes less interesting, less diverse, with smaller unexpected content." The obvious solution to this human condition is not a costly simulation of what we are losing but a costly attempt to protect and preserve our real treasures, our real West Coast rainforests, our real water supplies — our real memory devices that link us, remind us, reinforce in us the stories of the Western past in a way that no computer can. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive but involve people's lives so that sometimes we must choose where we engage our time. And how we persuade ourselves to think about time.

Metaphors are often used rhetorically. That is, we may use metaphor to ensure a favorable reception of an idea by asserting that things we thought were difficult, unusual or impossible to comprehend are actually very much like things we do understand. Not surprisingly, we often depend on spatial or geographical metaphor to discuss time, a

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31 Michael Joyce, "(Re)Placing the Author: "A Book in the Ruins," *Beyond Gutenberg Conference, Personal Conference Notes, Yale University, May 13, 1994.*
difficult concept that may be easier to grasp with a tangible referent. Hayden White suggests that metaphor "does not give us either a description or an icon of the thing it represents, but tells us what images to look for in our culturally encoded experience in order to determine how we should feel about the thing represented."33

Time is a highway. Progressing up from Vancouver on the TransCanada highway over the Fraser Valley floodplain we pass, in about an hour and a half, a funpark called Wonderland. This is not Alice's territory: we tail a Rabbit but it checks its rearview mirror not its pocketwatch. The strip malls containing fast food outlets, and services dedicated to the automobile are anchored not to local and beloved landmarks, for they are fast disappearing, but to the open universe of international commodity trading. You are driving through what Brian Fawcett has called an "anti-memory device"34 wearing away a sense of place by telling you that you are any place. This is the true West, but it is hardly the romantic experience of visiting an abandoned ghost town. We pass Indian Reserve lands, but stereotypes are vanquished in the Kilgard Reserve. Here is a band-owned brick factory, there we view the products of a plastic pipe manufacturer, the artifacts of a gravel company.

We now drive on pavement supported in places by the Sumas Lake Bottom. Not too far along, we cross the Vedder Canal which redirects a river which used to pour into the lake. The vista opens to the south past the green sod of golf courses. Many tiny openings for little white balls in some of "the most fertile soil in North America," the "Green Heart of B.C." For the time being we can be assured the lake bottom "proper" mainly supports dairy, hog and poultry barns, sod farms, vegetables, neat and tidy rows, sturdy yeoman agribusinessmen, all reinforcing images of where we came from, why planners were pushed to encourage hillside development, why the New Democratic Party

34Brian Fawcett, Cambodia: A Book for People who Find Television Too Slow (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1986), 58.
of British Columbia created the Agricultural Land Reserve, why locals celebrate
"Country Living Days." Good, honest, healthy living in open spaces. The lake bottom is
over but the highway continues on, money too is time and the billboards beckon, "We're
open for business. Phone the mayor."

Time could be a "information highway." Speeding down the onramp we log onto
an Internet node in Abbotsford called "Sumas." Appropriate name; here is another kind
of opening — another kind of innocent optimism, another territory to name and occupy.
In an anarchic reordering of people and place, history may be debated in the unlikeliest of
community forums. On newsgroup alt.sex.bondage we read in somebody's post: "The
Internet was started in the United States but has grown to be truly global in nature. Many
people today join the Internet today for the same reasons people came to America:
freedom, choice, democracy, rich resources, opportunity to grow, room to expand,
diversity on many levels, tolerance and respect of differences." Just find a port of entry
and begin.

Or maybe time is a river. In Halkomelem, the Coast Salish language of the Sto:lo
territory, the tidal flows of river water may connect to concepts of both space and time.
Fernand Braudel of the Annales school of history structured time as a sea divided into
depths, tides and surface ripples. Structure, the geographic time of his *longue durée*, is
likened to the sea depths. Conjuncture, the rhythms of "groups and groupings," is
rendered as "swelling currents." Events of individual, short-term significance are surface
waves, "crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs." Time may
also be quite different, for as Michel Foucault argued, time may be discontinuous,
connected in what White points out is the imagery of an archipelago, "a chain of

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36Wayne Suttles, "Space and Time, Wind and Tide - Some Halkomelem Modes of
Classification," *Coast Salish Essays* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 68.
37Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of
epistemic islands, the deepest connections among which are unknown — and unknowable. ³⁸

Yet if time is not entirely continuous nor made of such radically separated places, time might be a flood lake. Something goes and something stays, reminding us of links between past and future. If, as geographer Anne Buttimer suggests, water "lubricates, emancipates, renews and recreates human existence through time,"³⁹ a flood lake with both unpredictability and pattern may be like that time. We are in time as we are in space and the challenge of a lake is that what has happened inside it is invisible to the casual observer. ⁴⁰ Although the past retains mysteries, Sumas calls us to reinvigorate our relationship with time. To accept its invitation is to dive right in, all senses open.

Our histories of the West may extend coherence and meaning to the environment and that continuum may sustain us though we deodorize the sensory realm, fill our ears with traffic noise and reduce our positive metaphors of time to thoughts of highway distancing and material accumulation. As the world rapidly is reordered, we are slowly beginning to appreciate the knowledge that the destruction of environment entails the destruction of culture. Like any new opening to a way of seeing the world, we need to examine new technological openings warily. Something like hypertext may vitalize the creative practice of history. But as Howard Rheingold warns, "The late 1990s may eventually be seen in retrospect as a narrow window of historical opportunity, when people either acted or failed to act effectively to regain control over communications technologies."⁴¹ In order to control our lives and gain knowledge about our place in western Canada, to frame the answer to "where is here?" in the long term of inhabited

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⁴¹Rheingold, Virtual Communities, 300.
territory, we need to explore time and place in ways that extend our awareness and that help our stories to thrive.

Sumas Lake was, in the imaging of its drainers, a marginal place "left behind" in the race towards modernization. We may now be drawn nostalgically to such an image of Sumas Lake, however we must not forget that one person's "margin" may have been a vital link in another's interconnected universe. Each of the following chapters represents a methodological opening to Sumas Lake, an exploration of the categorization of Sumas Lake through space and time in which my "I" is an active participant. "Listening for Pleasure" tests the waters, assessing concepts of value with the thoughts expressed in oral interactions. Might we locate an opening to community? "Margins and Mosquitos" plunges into the paper documents of the archives, emphasizing links between histories local and national, vernacular and official. Back on solid ground, "Memory Device" reflects on narrative traditions and the connections between actual place and staying power of story. In a monologue by this project's muse, "One More Byte" attempts to distance this project from the work of modernization while assessing the value of interactive history.

A question that students of environmental history always must confront is the importance and relevance of history to the present. As I.G. Simmons challenges, is change so rapid that "all knowledge of all pre-existing conditions is obsolete"? This question, unresolved like that of aboriginal title in B.C., must hang over the following discussions. The study of rapid change and the replenishment of desertified historical experience may well be an employment opportunity for tomorrow's historian. But an aim of this thesis is to model that the honoring of place, no matter how changed, provides one positive opening for interconnected and engaged history. History is in the books and mouths of storytellers, inside private homes and in the public archives. Diversity and

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interaction in the places of history makes for sustainable history. History is also out there and encountering and expressing it can be a process involving community, field and lakework. "Openings To A Lake" is a sharing of endeavors to move body and mind to care about local changes in the wider world.
Chapter One
LISTENING FOR PLEASURE

In simplistic terms, people who live in the same place form a community. To suggest further that communities also hold a common history in that place might appear to forge a definition that excludes more local people than it includes. Oral historians hoping to create community history based on place thus involve themselves in a hazardous enterprise. A person who experienced Sumas Lake as a child would not necessarily have the same story as that of his parent. A woman living on the Sumas Band's Kilgard Reserve in 1915 may have had an understanding of how she occupied the area of Sumas Lake that was incompatible with the convictions of someone involved in the Upper Sumas Women's Institute. Just because people lived in the same place does not mean they occupied the same world.

But cozy notions of community aside, we ought to remember that holding places or stories in common does not mean that they must be understood or used by all community members in the same way. Before it was drained, Sumas Lake and its marginal land was a commons: an area unofficially but effectively open to the use of all inhabitants. Like many public spaces, the area was actively contested and negotiated by people who lived near each other in relations of power. If community history is something like public property, community members perhaps have the right not to be excluded from that history's possible uses and benefits.1

How do we write this history that provides the means of creating opposite interpretations and yet reflects a community of shared experience? Recorded communications between individuals and groups, in both public and private spaces, then and now, are complex processes of cooperation and translation. Doing the oral history of a place like Sumas Lake includes the straightforward matter of asking "what do you

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1For this helpful definition of public property see Ursula Franklin, "Silence and the Notion of the Commons," *MusicWorks* 59 (Summer, 1994), 42.

Crew of the *Argo*: Ida, Clytie, and two others on Orion Bowman's sailboat on Sumas Lake, ca. 1897. Neil Smith Collection.
remember about it?" But in order to articulate a commons of oral history — an authentic domain of lake possibilities — we must also begin to address the oral records with questions like "which people spoke?" "In which forum?" "For which reasons?" And "to which ends?"

Hoping to locate some orally transmitted lake knowledge in time, I chose to follow the relatively recent stream of oral history back to documents that are neither typically linked to this methodology nor commonly connected to Sumas Lake. These transcriptions of government commission testimonies are not the products of oral history. But immersed within the context of the creative, engaged process of oral history, such records may help to enlarge and enliven Marc Bloch's definition of history: "a thing in movement." Admittedly, oral history, with notable exceptions, still is located within a marginal area of the academy's activities, a zone flooded by local museum societies and enthusiasts. Many academic historians — like speculators gazing anxiously at the field during freshet — stake their claims on written documents, their semblance of solid ground. Yet, upon entering the adjacent field of anthropology, the oral historian is encouraged to understand her research as a fluid community process, not simply as material to be mined for fact. Such an approach brings to community history a healthy awareness that the process of oral communication is not something that can be separated from nuggets of truth.

As the oral historian interacts intimately with records, real people and places, assumptions may shift, compelling her to confront the dynamics of historical construction. The identification of "our" stories becomes important as we explore "their" stories, looking for links between them. Convinced by the arguments of feminist, socialist and ethnic historians, I initially felt that my own oral history would raise or

salvage voices that dominant narratives lacked or ignored. Yes, Sumas Lake had been 
drained, but this action hardly proved that Sumas Lake was valueless to all the people 
who lived there. My own love of nearby lakes, Cultus, Lindeman, Harrison and Hicks, 
predisposed me to prick up my ears at any mention of lake value, particularly as a source 
of pleasure. A lake means the "beach" and it certainly means swimming. In Western 
culture, the liminal zone of the beach is linked to new codes of behavior for women as 
well as men. Despite my suspicion that popular notions of the beach would change a 
great deal across time, the photographs of families and joyous young women swimming 
and boating at Sumas Lake — snapped, of course, prior to drainage — continued to feed 
synchronic notions of recreational "Super Natural" British Columbia.

Only when I finally began to listen for pleasure, in my own oral histories and in 
the oral records of others, did my categories of Sumas Lake's benefits begin to blur. I did 
not locate the high ground where the "unprivileged" spoke for themselves. But listening 
for value in that lake, I encountered descriptions of an enjoyed resource base that was not 
always partitioned into useful and useless areas. The divisions that individuals do make 
perhaps answer more clearly why the ecosystem was destroyed rather than why people 
lived with it. The oral record of Sumas Lake is extensive and this study does not attempt 
to be comprehensive: rather it reflects a belief that a more inclusive reconstruction of the 
lake must challenge the boundaries which enclose rigid notions of community, by 
actively exploring values.

The oral histories of those who seek to rethink the past with an awareness of First 
Nations sometimes contain the disturbing assumption that Indians and whites can only be 
portrayed in antithetical terms. As George Miles remarks of much ethnohistory in 
general, "the plots render Indians more interesting and important as foils for white history 
than as significant participants in it." Oral histories involving Indians as interviewees

5Rob Shields, "Ritual Pleasures of a Seaside Resort," Places on the Margin: Alternative 
6George Miles, "To hear an old voice," Open Sky, 55.
Sumas Lake 1913: Miss Katie Walker and Miss Maitland.
Neil Smith Collection.

McConnell sisters, May and Myrtle, at Bellrose, B.C., July 1920.
Photo by Jean Candlish. Neil Smith Collection.
may be subject to similar problems. Imbert Orchard's absorbing 1982 *Floodland and Forest* features testimonies of Natives and settlers from the 1960's, gathered by them into sound bites which reflect their original use in a CBC Radio series. We see none of Orchard's questions but we can get some indication of the assumptions of his moral fable from his description of the area's first white settlers.

"For them, it was a country without legend or tradition. They had left their ghosts behind them. A lake, however beautiful, was just a lake, a mountain a mountain, waiting for some surveyor to give it a name and measurement. A tree was just a tree — and probably in the way. As for animal life, they brought much of it with them, seeing it largely as a soulless commodity to be bred and slaughtered for profit. And whereas the aborigines filled their homeland with a throng of meaningful presences, white people, finding it was used only for hunting, fishing and gathering, simply saw an empty wilderness, awaiting the day when such as they would make it over — as a matter of right — in their own image."7

Orchard's description is a powerful indictment of the settlers whose comments he proceeds to edit into generally celebratory passages about hardy and resourceful white men and women. If a book is an environment in itself, then this book has two separate spheres. Focusing on separation rather than interchange after the fur trade, Native people do not mingle freely with whites on the page. No Native, for example, is given space to describe their stories of Sumas Lake beside the edited lake memories of white settlers.8 Native ideas are respected but, like the static museum piece, supposedly take us "back into a very different world."9

Oral histories of Sumas Lake, told by the white settlers of the Fraser Valley, were created as early as 1945 when Major J. S. Matthews of the Vancouver City Archives traveled out to Huntingdon on the B.C. Electric commuter railway to interview Mrs. Thomas Fraser York. The transcript does not list the Major's questions, but York's transcribed answers show that she spoke of the "millions and millions of mosquitos" on

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Sumas Prairie, "lots of deer, grouse and duck" and the old Indian who got the mail for her family by taking a canoe across Sumas Lake, a man who "called himself 'Jim York' after us."  

The Chilliwack Museum Society and the Matsqui-Sumas-Abbotsford Museum Society have been involved in collecting, transcribing and archiving local oral histories for over two decades. Here, in the spring of 1993, I began listening to the gentle questions of men and women and the entertaining answers of gifted storytellers. The tapes of Oliver Wells, an amateur ethnographer and a third generation descendant of a local settler family, constitute a major source of Native oral histories. A recent compilation of his interviews with Sto:lo friends in The Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors is a warm story of Native-white collaboration. In the 1960's, Wells could speak to men and women who had adult memories of the lake such as Mr. and Mrs. Kelleher, elders living in Matsqui, west of Sumas Lake.

*Oliver Wells:* The draining of Sumas Lake made a difference in the country, didn't it?  
*Mrs. Kelleher:* Oh, my, yeah. My, we used to have a good time up on that lake, when we had the gas boat, and we'd get a crowd and go way up there to get out of the mosquitoes.  

While making community history about a world that existed long ago, the question of who speaks for the oral record is largely determined by who is left to speak. In 1994, a person who recalled Sumas Lake as a young adult would be in his or her nineties. Edward Kelly, born in 1900, spoke to Janelle Vienneau of the M.S.A. in 1987. He spent some time at the lake as a child before he was sent away to the Coqualeetza Residential School. His mother and father lived northwest of the lake at the Kilgard (Sumas #6) Reserve.

*Vienneau:* Well (laughs) amazing huh. What do you remember about Sumas Lake?

11Wells, *Chilliwacks*, 189.
Sumas Lake, 1901. A picnic party and sail boat at Sumas Lake Ridge.

This photo was presented to the City Archives in June 1945 by Mr. Thomas Fraser York, of Huntingdon, pioneer of Port Douglas, Harrison Lake. March 1860.

City of Vancouver Archives, Out P. 840, N. 391.
Kelly: Uh, Sumas Lake...I mentioned about the sturgeon and all varieties of salmon and trout and the ducks were out there by the millions way out, ducks and the geese and uh the people had the small canoes in those days, and uh they like for a Sunday outing they would go out like from the small slough into the big slough then into the Sumas Lake and uh they would have a picnic just family affair. I'm referring to my family. Mother used to make up the lunches and uh my dad would bring his uh rifle along and uh if we needed deer he'd kill a deer and uh, but the deer had to be down right near the water if the deer was up a little up on the side of the mountain he just won't he just overlooks that deer because there's always deer all around, but the deer must be near the water before he would shoot it then he would bleed a deer and put his rifle away and and dad always brought his fishing line and dad would be trolling around up and down mother would be knitting and us kids would be swimming in the lake. That's a Sunday outing.

Childhood memories told to me include those of a man who cycled by the lake on an adventurous trip to Cloverdale,12 a woman who went to the lake for summer vacations where "we swam before breakfast, we swam before lunchtime — well dinner at noon, we swam again in the afternoon and had a swim before we went to bed."13 These two descendents of the first white settlers perhaps had more romantic and exciting images of the area than their parents. Speaking to Imbert Orchard in 1963, Mrs. Fadden's daughter read extracts from her mother's journal regarding the flood of 1894. Mrs. Fadden had lived at the far end of Sumas Lake for almost 10 years: she was very pregnant and had three small children yet she wrote laconically of the expected high water — no panic...the day they start building the boat, the water is "spreading over garden, over orchard, quite high. Fine day."14 For the daughter, both danger and beauty were acute: that high water was "a beautiful sight. Wild roses used to bloom just at the top of the water. And there

12Mr. T, interview at his home, March 22, 1994.
was the very lovely perfume that came from them as the water came up to them — a sight that was pretty, even though it was disastrous."15

As people spoke of Sumas Lake as recreational spot, the persuasive visual images of lake pleasures were confirmed. But something else emerged in the oral interviews that the camera failed to capture. Many speakers developed the concept that the flood lake provided an unofficial commons, the undivided land that, in practice, belongs to the members of a community as a whole. Management was local not national. As the writer Gary Snyder describes it, the commons is "necessary for the health of the wilderness because it adds big habitat, overflow territory, and room for wildlife to fly and run. It is essential even to an agricultural village economy because its natural diversity provides the many necessities and amenities that the privately held plots cannot. It enriches the agrarian diet with game and fish. The shared land supplies firewood, poles and stone for building, clay for the kiln, herbs, dye plants, and much else, just as in a foraging economy. It is especially important as seasonal or full-time open range for cattle, horses, goats, pigs, and sheep."16

Several men spoke about grazing cattle and sheep by Sumas Lake: people from as far away as Chilliwack would bring their animals to feed on the grasslands in low water time.17 Kelly talked about this particular use of the lake edges with Vienneau.

Vienneau: Would you know the value of the land when the lake was drained?

Kelly: The value?

Vienneau: The value, how much it would sell for.

Kelly: Uh, when I was a boy the land was one dollar an acre and uh my dad said when he was a boy it was fifty cents an acre and the people were not interested in because the

16Gary Snyder, "The Place, the Region and the Commons," The Practice of the Wild (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 30.
Sumas Lake, B.C. 1905. Skating party on one of the swamps.
Orion Bowman, Mary Bowman, Ida Bowman, Nora York.
This photo was presented to the City Archives, 10 June 1945, by Mrs. Thomas Fraser York, of Huntingdon, pioneer of Port Douglas, Harrison Lake, March 1960.

City of Vancouver Archives, Out P. 841, N. 392.
people would say why buy it? Why buy the land? When we could use the land for free — said there are no fences. The cattle all the stock ran out on Sumas Prairie oh say when they uh uh my dad now when it's milking time in the evening would go out looking for the cows the milk cows if we see one cow we know our cows are there and same with the horses the needing any of the horses for any type of work we would have to go out on the Sumas Prairie if we see one horse we know our horses are there then then for milking cows then my dad when through milking he would let the cows out of the barn then the cows would go out with the rest of the cattle and then in the morning we had to look for them again.

In reference to the commons' rules, Fred Zink spoke of the "gentleman's agreement" people followed in order to share the space and wild fodder peacefully. No one spoke of tensions or competing interests. In the interviews with white settlers, comments about Native people were rare and unsolicited such as Charlie Power's remark about Sumas Prairie: "There was an Indian trail down there. They didn't bother us too much. They were pretty good." Similarly, First Nations men and women rarely spoke of non-Natives. And yet, the recreational area enjoyed by local whites was also the beach enjoyed by local Natives: the Native fishing grounds were in same the lake where non-Natives caught their fish. But this information was not on the same tape.

In these archived interviews, conflict was not mentioned, perhaps, in part, because the goal of the community history interviewers and interviewees was to create harmony. The "one-on-one" or "one-on-a few" method of oral interviewing did not originate with oral history, but in its ideological attempt to widen the range of voices in history, the necessity of creating a comfortable atmosphere conducive to the establishment of trust and support has long been recognized. Since the widespread use of taperecorders and the blossoming of public history projects in the sixties, oral history has

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18Orchard, Floodland, 21.
19Charlie Power, CHSA, Add MSS 401.
often been championed as the egalitarian method par excellence of creating history by and for the people. The sessions become feminist encounters, social and socialist meetings, "shored up by liberal amounts of coffee and cookies."20 The memories that reinforce ideals of community cooperation are credible expressions in the friendly encounter provided by the serious excuse of history making.

For evidence of discord, I needed to look no further than commission testimonies. The interviews conducted in hearings and Royal Commissions form what oral historian Paul Thompson has called "a peculiarly intimidating form of interview, in which the lone informant was confronted by the whole committee."21 Who speaks is not just a question of who has the right to speak — but who has the nerve to speak. Although often couched in polite or official language, I found that the Native-white conflict which was so muted in oral history interviews formed a large part of the dynamic. For instance, in the government's bid to quell a farmer's threatened tax revolt after the lake drainage, landholders were called to testify before the Agricultural Committee of the Legislative Assembly of B.C. in December 1925. Mr. David Chadsey, an ex-dyking commissioner, was on the stand:

Patterson: You know the conditions as they are now; would you rather pay this tax, or would you rather go back to 2 years ago before the dyke was up?

A. I did not need the dyke, but I was public-spirited enough to vote for it so that the community would come under it, so that we could live, and not live like Indians.22

We go then to a forum that existed when Sumas Lake still existed, when the context is provided by a watery place and the historical background of government officials passing through, seeking order.

22BCARS, GR 929, box 48, file 8, Sumas Dyke Evidence, Agricultural Committee, Mon, 7th December/1925, 152.
Edward Kelly at Sumas, B.C., 1912. Matsqui-Sumas-Abbotsford Museum Archive, P1554.

Sunday school picnic at Belrose Station, ca. 1918. MSA Museum Archive, N512.
An oral culture created meaning in the Sumas environment millennia before any European visited and wrote home about it. In the context of colonization, fences and survey markers tangibly demonstrate the links between the spoken word, the written word and things. Isabel Hofmeyr, in her study of boundary-making in the Transvaal region of South Africa, suggests, "fences, for example, "write" certain forms of authority into the countryside, and by representing the thin fixed line of the boundary in the earth, they imprint the textual world of maps, treaties, and surveying on landscape." fences are unnecessary intrusions for oral or paraliterate societies whose boundaries are more fluid and negotiable as they conform to a dynamic and seasonal landscape. Avoiding negotiation, invading powers could manipulate boundaries with the tangible authority of fence and paper.

In one extreme case, the colonial official, Joseph Trutch, disregarded oral instructions concerning the allotment of what he considered overly generous Indian Reserve acreages in the Lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Oral communication for Trutch, even if delivered by a previous governor, was an "indefinite authority." Native people could remove survey markers and they likely did. But markers were simply replaced and in the Fraser Valley fences and survey lines remained, as Cole Harris puts it, "pervasive forms of disciplinary power, backed by a property owner, backed by the law and requiring little official supervision."25

Yet a lake is difficult to pin down. Flooded two months of the year, even the lands surrounding Sumas Lake were remarkably resistant to fencing and accurate printed maps and consistent measurements. The lake and its marginal land was in the Railway Belt and after Confederation, title was retained by the Dominion government until 1924.

Sumas Lake was not a cooperative feature of the new colonial possessions that translated easily into much desired farmland. The idea of selling the 10,000 plus acres of lake bottom lands to recoup the construction cost of dykes had been in the pages of the Victoria *Colonist* as early as 1873. Nearly fifty years later, people still were canoeing and sailing across the lake.

After European settlement in British Columbia, the Province continuously blocked recognition and settlement of Aboriginal title. As of 1912, the federal government, though dissatisfied, remained willing to accommodate the Province's refusal to extinguish Aboriginal title. In September 1912, Victoria and Ottawa agreed to participate in the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission, the joint provincial-federal venture created to "finally adjust all matters relating to Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia," except that overriding concern of Native people — title to their homelands and waters. The Commissioners traveled for three years, from 1913-1916, visiting most places where Natives lived, hearing testimony and making land reduction or addition recommendations. Certain bands, such as the Kitwanga of the Nass Agency, refused to deal with the Commission because their question of Native title could not be discussed.

In its attempt to forge a final solution to the "Indian problem," the Commission was to fail. The Commission lied to B.C. Natives that no reductions in reserve acreages would be made without band approval. Although the Commission spent three seasons in the New Westminster Agency, it effectively was just another visitor passing through. Like any transcription of an oral exchange, the written record is no substitute. The Commission testimonies certainly were filtered and must be read with an awareness that not everything that was said was transcribed. A cynical approach to the Commission

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records is appropriate: nevertheless, the gathered testimonies of those men and women who chose to cooperate with the Commission must not be dismissed in 1994. The transcripts, reprinted by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, constitute an important public record and confirms, in a written form privileged by a literate culture, that Native people understood and were extremely concerned with what was happening to them and to the places where they lived.

In contrast to the reluctance of Indians to jump on the Commission bandwagon, groups of white settlers, Boards of Trade, Women's Institutes were keen to have their opinions regarding appropriate land and water management considered. Their wide range of ideas for reducing Indian Reserves were based on shifting concepts of public pleasure as well as private monetary gain. When writing about pioneer perceptions of the West, Roderick Nash stated that these newcomers did not love or aesthetically appreciate the wilds but craved to destroy them. "They conceived of themselves as agents in the regenerating process that turned the ungodly and useless into a beneficent civilization."29 Sumas Lake, surrounded by lush prairies, populated for centuries but largely preempted by newcomers in the late Nineteenth Century, may not have fit popular notions of "wilderness." Indeed the established Native labour pool was integral to the success of white settler "improvement" projects. Any contention that these workers were to move aside from their own territory to make room for ever more "improvements" required reinforcement at an official level to make dispossession legal.

At a meeting with the Municipality of Sumas, the Farmer's Institute and Women's Institute on Jan. 11, 1915, white settlers asked the Commission to release one of the Sumas Reserves for a public park. Giving her speech the weight of an official written document and infusing the sort of "homefront" rhetoric which found particular resonance in the midst of World War I, Mrs. Fadden read her petition aloud:

...Our Motto is "For Home and Country." We feel like we would be taking nothing from the Indians that they really desire or need...It does not appear that their race will multiply to any extent where this land would be necessary to them, and I am sure it is much better to have them congregated in the one location at the mountain-side rancherie than to have these small holdings of land scattered here and there among the farms of the white settlers. They merely improve their farms to any extent — their habits of living are quite different, and their success as neighbors to us, I am doubtful to. Personally I have lived by this reserve land for over twenty-eight years, and I would enjoy seeing that tangle of underbrush and worthless timber removed, the valuable timber — which may be consumed by careless fire at any time — bring its value and a beauty spot created here in time, which would be an inspiration to many.30

The following day the Commission moved on to the Sumas Reserve (#6) at Kilgard. Ke Ha Jim, wife of Old Man (Jim) York, the same man who worked for Mrs. Thomas Fraser York, claimed title to the potential park, Reserve #7. "My husband is dead and I own the land and my boy is unable to work because he is an invalid."31 York's daughter stated that she did not want anyone else to work the land. But hearings of white and Native concerns formally were separated and Mrs. Fadden's complaints about unsuitable neighbors went uncontested. Perhaps Mrs. Fadden's Women's Institute might have retracted a request for this Reserve if they had witnessed Ke Ha Jim's testimony. But maybe not. Because the status of women was in a state of transition during and after the war, the need for educated, white women to define and demonstrate their own public worth as civilizers simultaneously required a definition of the worthless and uncivilized.

The male Chief of the Sumas Band, Selesmiton (Ned), was called as the primary witness. A confident oral speaker, he attempted to establish his own agenda and his own

30BCARS, Add MSS 1056, Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of B.C. 1913-1915 (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs), 137.
31Ibid., 163.
Chief Ned (with cane) greeting visitors to the Smokehouse, Kilgard, B.C., ca. 1915.
Sumas Band Education Center.
standards of trust at the outset of the public hearing. "I am glad to see you people come into this house, and I am going to tell you the truth of what I am going to say." He went on to place the contemporary situation in a historical framework, noting change over time and reduced access to food resources. "That is the land and that is what the old people know, that is what they used to say. The Indians have always been poor, that is the reason I have always been worrying because I know the old people used to say that the White people will be shoving you around all over this open prairie to get our food, we used to get our meat, ducks and fish out in this lake (Sumas) and on the prairie." The transcripts do not indicate whether Chief Ned pointed towards his territory, but certainly "this open prairie" and "this lake" to which he referred were physically apparent to the Commissioner's on their approach to the Kilgard Reserve. His words were statements of connection, of ownership, reinforced and constituted by the surrounding territory where his people made "half our living" from the "fish and ducks and things like that."  

In the process of ascertaining the band's success as agriculturalists in an area seen as prime arable land, the Commission encountered farmers with many head of cattle but extreme reluctance to transform places of water into places of land.

Q "Do you get plenty of hay?"
A "We don't get hardly any timothy hay — we depend upon the wild hay.

Q "Could there be any land reclaimed here by dyking?"
A "I could not say. I am against they dyking because that will mean more starvation for us."

Q "Why do you think that you would be starved out if this land were dyked?
A "Because the lake is one of the greatest spawning grounds there is and this dyking would cut it off and in that way would cut off our fish supply."  

32 Ibid., 152.
33 Ibid., 157.
34 Ibid., 155.
The Commission's inability to sustain relations of trust with Native people, rebuffing questions as basic as the Chief's query, "I want to find out what is the meaning of this commission?"35 is on record. Significantly, Chief Ned's word was not the highest authority to the Commissioners who tested the Chief's facts against those of the Indian Agent the following month. In this common practice of the Commission, Indian Agents were not necessarily advocates of Indian ideas, but asserted their own values.36

Q "I suppose the wooded hillside and the portion of the land that overflows contributes largely to the feeding of their stock?"

A "Yes, they depend upon the land on the Reserve for feed for all their stock. When the high water comes the low land is of no value to them and they have to shift their cattle up to the high land and they remain there until the water subsides, and two months after the water goes off the land it is possible to cut a fairly good crop of hay. The growth is very rapid and it is on this second growth of hay that they winter their stock."

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Q "About the duck-hunting — they complained that white men shot ducks there at night and sometimes killed the Indian's tame geese — the Commission stated that the matter would be looked into — has anything been done in that respect?"

A "In regard to men hunting in the night?"

Q "Yes."

A "No. I have heard nothing further."

Q "Have they an Indian Constable on that Reserve?"

A "No... for the reason that I don't think there is any member of that tribe that would be suitable."37

35Ibid., 163.
37Canada, Commission on Indian Affairs in General 1913-1915, (B-1457) "Testimony of Indian agent for Sumas Indians in response to questions of Commissioner Mckenna on Tuesday February 8th, 1915," 570.
*Beaver #2 tied up at Fook's Barn, Sumas Lake, ca. 1905. Neil Smith Collection.*

Besides creating an undeniable record of Native dissatisfaction, the McKenna-McBride Commission politicized Native individuals and groups. Andrew Paull, a translator for the Commission, became, along with Reverend Peter Kelly, leaders of the newly formed Allied Indian Tribes of B.C. which worked to oppose acceptance of the McKenna-McBride recommendations and forward claims to title as well as water, hunting and fishing rights. In a meeting of the Executives of the Allied Tribes and the head of the Indian Affairs Department of the Canadian government on August 7, 1923, Peter Kelly asked, "Is it possible at all to get more lands, where lands are needed? And it is granted, I think, that in the New Westminster Agency, especially in Chilliwack Valley, Fraser Valley and the other parts of that Agency, where people will be forced to make their living by agriculture—following agricultural pursuits, they will have to have more land if they are going to be able to compete with their white brethren at all."

Kelly and Paull anticipated the negative response — only open Crown lands were available for additional reserves under the Commission's terms of operation. The only time Sumas Lake apparently was mentioned at this conference was when George Matheson, representing the "Sardis group of Chilliwack Indians" defined his tribal territory in relation to the lake. "The Chilliwack tribal territory is right to Sumas Lake, that is the tribal territory, there was no boundary at that time, it runs beyond the boundary right down to Fraser River." The lake was still a lake during the Commission. But by the time the Ottawa government affirmed the McKenna-McBride report as the final adjustment of B.C. Indian Affairs in 1924, the lake bottom had been transferred to the Province which in turn quickly offered the land to private buyers.

Together with the Reverend Peter Kelly and their attorneys, Paull was ready to advance the Allied Indian Tribes' cause all the way to the British Privy Council. In 1927,

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38Newell, Tangled Webs, 113.
39Conference Minutes Between the Allied Indian Tribes of B.C. and Dr. D. Scott, August 7-11, 1923 (NESIKA), 47.
40Ibid., 45.
the Canadian Parliament averted this possibility by holding, in Ottawa, the "Special Committee Hearing to Inquire into the Claims of the Allied Indian Tribes and British Columbia, as Set forth in their Petition submitted to Parliament in June 1926." The extremely unpleasurable environment of this committee is evident even in the filtered transcript.41 Integral documents were withheld from the Allied Indian Tribes and the statements and demands of their chief consul Mr. O'Meara were called "rot" "nonsense" "piffle" and a "scandalous waste of time." Secretary Paull brought up the issue of water rights. "The reason the Indians claim foreshores on reserves in tidal waters is because the foreshore is just as necessary to the Indians as the reservation is." 42

Definitions constituted a great deal of the debate. A House of Commons member mused about the spatial ramifications of a foreshore: "Presumably what they want is the riparian rights and the water lots, whatever they might be, in front of the reserves. There is no such thing as foreshores on lakes; there might be, I suppose, between high and low water, but really the term does not apply to a lake or a river."43 The B.C. Indian Commissioner located the idea in a temporal framework: "An Indian could not take up water in the olden days, and the Commissioners did the best they could with the water allotments with the allotment of land. It was taken for granted that they had some value, but under the British Columbia Water Act these water allotments had no status whatever, and the only way an Indian can get water is by way of license under the provision of the British Columbia Water Act." 44 But this culture of argument regarding the value of both water and land to Native people — still in early stages in the development of shared vocabulary and respectful conduct — was destroyed after the hearing. The committee

41Canada, Parliament, "Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons Appointed to Inquire Into the Claims of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia, As Set Forth in Their Petition Submitted To Parliament in June 1926,"(Ottawa: King's Printer, 1927), 66. Even Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, complained of the "lack of distinctness in the stenographic report" in his own statements.
42"Special Joint Committee,"125-6.
43Ibid., 126.
44Ibid., 127.
found no factual basis for unextinguished Aboriginal title. Changes were made to the Indian Act which prevented Native people from seeking legal redress until the section was repealed in 1951.

Over the decades since the lake was disappeared, comments about Sumas Lake have, as historian Joy Parr once wrote about a strike, "worn smooth, standardized in order, diction and cadence; shorn of dissonance in pursuit of a guarded social peace."45 Seated around the History Circle in Chilliwack's old City Hall, the comments I already had heard on archived tapes and in oral history books were repeated: lots of mosquitos, good for duck hunting and picnics. When I privately posed the same questions to the people who I had listened to earlier on tape, I would hear the same tone, sometimes the same words. Promising anonymity, I tried to work against the sympathetic, standard questions of interviews past. The results were silences, dissonance, disruption and even a request to stop the tape — a request always fulfilled. Yes, a lot of pleasure, a lot of resources were gone, but emotion was mixed: it had happened long ago and people had tried to adapt to the changes. The entire world had changed in seventy years, not just this one part of the valley.

Having read the bitter words of commission testimonies, I returned to the process of interviewing Native elders with a new awareness of personal and political ties to water and landscape. One man, after speaking fondly of blowing across the frozen lake using his jacket as a sail, mentioned that he had been a driver for Andrew Paull. He had no photos of the lake but began the interview by searching for the morning newspaper, excited by an article that he wanted to show me. The front page story began: "A prominent B.C. native leader tore into Greenpeace and the German people here Wednesday, accusing them of hypocrisy and of having a patronizing and romantic view of Aboriginal people."46 He wanted to know what I thought of the article before he

45Joy Parr, The Gender, 97.
HAMBURG, Germany — A prominent B.C. native leader tore into Greenpeace and the German people here Wednesday, accusing them of hypocrisy and of having a patronizing and romantic view of aboriginal people.

George Watts stunned a packed auditorium of students, environmentalists and curious on-lookers as he launched a bitter attack on what he considered to be an extension of colonialism and paternalistic attitudes toward natives.

"That room flowed with hypocrisy," he said in an interview afterwards, his voice still shaking with anger. "What they're doing is so damn typical. They're using Indian people for their cause. And they're going to be gone, and we're going to be left with all the problems."

Watts said his anger had been building for the past few days, as he took part in meetings between Premier Mike Harcourt and other B.C. government and industry representatives and German industry and political leaders, and as he watched constant Greenpeace demonstrations.

Watts was invited along on the trip by Harcourt. His expenses may be picked up by the government, but that has yet to be decided.

He said aboriginal questions have essentially been ignored during the trip by environmentalists and German industries.

"They're talking down to us. It's the same old story — we're going to tell you what's best for you, we created this mess for you and we're now going to create the solution," Watts said.

"I'm really amazed at how these people really think they're so god-damned right. I can't believe how sanctimonious they are with all their ideas and that. They have this romantic view of Indian people."

Watts, a former chair of the Nuchah-Nulth tribal council on Vancouver Island and a leading native representative for the past decade, launched his attack during a debate at the University of Hamburg between Harcourt and environmentalists over B.C. forestry practices.

About 150 people squeezed into

Please see WATTS, A2
began to speak about Sumas Lake. As the interviewee, I learned that the commons of Sumas Lake oral history remained alive and contentious.

Oral history is a place of mediation, where events are created and translated, where concepts of nature and society are generated. What provided pleasure at Sumas Lake? To my initial satisfaction, I located the beach. But pleasure was also in eating, working, hunting and fishing: pleasure meant having some sense of control over your life. Pleasure is about being listened to. The few but cherished volunteers who spend large quantities of time interviewing men and women in their community is testament enough to the enjoyable aspects of oral history. But in order to develop the potential of the oral record, whereby we avoid a simple condemnation or celebration of dominant narratives, we must find ways to widen its scope. By separating Native and white values, neither are open for discussion. Oral history is created compassionately with living people. The next challenge is to envision a culture of argument involving a living ecosystem.
Chapter 2

MARGINS AND MOSQUITOS

From the public archives in Ottawa, Victoria, Vancouver, Abbotsford, Bellingham and Chilliwack to the private archives of Band Councils and private citizens, repositories of Sumas Lake documentation contain, amongst strong odors, facts and fragile papers, some startling imagery. These representations of the unique and the unusual, drawn persuasively in words, fill the imagination of the novelist and the scrapbooks of the antiquarian. But they also challenge the historian to value the local and unique in a broader and more inclusive space-time framework.

John Keast Lord, an English naturalist on the International Boundary Survey which mapped the Northwest region from 1858 to 1860, describes a village out on the waters of the lake built by people he calls "savages."

"Endowed with an instinct of self-preservation, mosquitoes seldom venture far over the water after once quitting their raft — a fact the wily savage turns to his advantage. Rarely can an Indian be tempted ashore from his stage during mosquito time; and when he is, he takes good care to whip out every intruder from his canoe before reaching the platform. These quaint-looking scaffoldings, scattered over the lake, each with its little colony of Indians, have a most picturesque appearance. Fleets of canoes are moored to the poles, and the platform reached by a ladder made of twisted bark. To avoid being devoured, and to procure the sleep requisite for health, I used very frequently to seek the hospitality of the savages, and pass the night with them on their novel place of residence."

One also may read the vivid expressions of rancher, horsewoman, poet, mother and big game hunter Barbara (Bowman) Beldam who was born on Sumas Prairie in 1904, the granddaughter of a surveyor who took control of land by Sumas Lake in the late Nineteenth Century.

"...the vast warm waters of Sumas Lake were covered with thousands of wild ducks of every kind. Every evening they left the lake in large flocks to feed on the sloughs and pot-holes to the south. From the time I was able to hold a gun it was my greatest delight to ride out on the prairie and sit waiting by some slough for the evening flight. If I came

Barbara Beldam (L.) and Muriel McPhail (R.), on way to Chilliwack River lodge, 1921.
Neil Smith Collection.
home with three or four fat ducks how pleased every one was, and how good they tasted.\textsuperscript{2} 

The archives preserve boxes of letters, petitions and engineering reports regarding the short, dramatic event — the elimination of Sumas Lake. But Beldam's duck hunting and the seasonal migration to the stilt village are events within a longer and equally relevant story — that of the living with Sumas Lake. Unable to write the ruin of timeless nature or to avoid the unresolved debate regarding Native land title in British Columbia, my reweaving of the other Sumas story into the land reclamation project is a somewhat risky narrative exercise in lake reclamation.

Sumas Lake was a community of creatures, making up one of the watery places on this misnamed planet. Rendered as "drainage project," the lake story is absorbed easily into the international colonial theme of Western history, transforming local conditions into mere local colour. Again and again, outside powers have taken control of places and organized their new possessions to benefit and enrich mainly themselves, i.e. the "public good." But upon closer political and environmental on-site inspection, the old story is also — likely always — new. Located spatially inside the Railway Belt of Canada, Sumas Lake was a national, a provincial and a local concern. Positioned on a time-line of wetlands denudement, the drainage of Sumas Lake represents one of the major losses of wetlands along the Fraser River in the last century. But a delicate and complex web of relations links margin notes to attempts to marginalize people, a British Columbian lake to some Great Men of Canadian history and mosquitos to modernization. Tracing the web may help to reconnect the social and natural realms within which Barbara Beldam assures us she was able to thrive.

Maps and Motion

Beldam concludes a story of the Sumas area with a tone of frustration and a flat description of one of its archival traces — a map. "It is interesting to note that Sumas Lake, long forgotten by today's generation, is shown on a 1914 map of New Westminster and Yale published by the B.C. Department of Land and now unobtainable." 3

Unfortunately, even when individuals know where to copy maps in the public archives, two-dimensional maps reinforce the prevalent idea that space is static, flat and dead, unlike time, which provides life and richness to historical and geographic analysis. 4

Moistened with imagination and other archival resources, maps presenting synchronic spatial relationships yet may be enlivened within an historical framework. But a map — a selection of geographic reality no more accurate than words — is perhaps a better place to begin than to end an encounter with a disappeared lake.

Perusing the Boundary Commission map, we see that Sumas Lake connects up to the Pacific Ocean eighty kilometers away — and thus the Pacific Rim — via a river which empties into the Fraser River. The map was made partly to assert authority over the area and the 20,000 miners from the south who surged into the mouth of the Fraser in the spring of 1858, rushing for gold. Sumas Lake felt the pull of the ocean tides and was part of the route and rearing habitat of migratory salmon and other international fish.

Lord's subject is local but his description of the harvesting of "Round-fish" 5 on Sumas Prairie is written in a romantic style popularized a continent and an ocean away in Britain.

"One may journey a long way to witness a prettier or more picturesque sight than Round-fish harvesting on the Sumass prairie. The prairie bright and lovely, the grass fresh green

5 Grant Keddie in "The Archeology of Mosquito Victims: A Unique Settlement Pattern on the Lower Fraser River," British Columbia Provincial Museum, Unpublished, 1980, takes the Round-fish for oolahan. Bob Joe, interviewed by Oliver Wells suggests that the fish were "q'oxel" small fish "they came in schools...full of bones, small bones."Wells, Chilliwacks, 117.
and waving lazily; various wild flowers, peeping coyly out from their cozy hiding-places, seem making the most of the summer; a fresh, joyous hilarity everywhere, pervading even the Indians, whose lodges in great numbers lie scattered about. From the edges of the pine-forest, where the little streams came out from the dark shadow into the sunshine, up to the lake, the prairie was like a fair. Indians, old and young; chiefs, braves, squaws, children, and slaves; were alike busy in capturing the round-fish, that were swarming up the streams in thousands: so thick were they that baits and traps were thrown aside and hands, baskets, little nets and wooden bowls did the work; it was only requisite to stand in the stream and bale out the fish. Thousands were drying, thousands had been eaten, and as many more were wasting and decomposing on the bank.6

In a map representing the time after the 1894 flood, the Chilliwack River takes over the Vedder Creek and flows west as the Vedder River into Sumas Lake.7 Plans to redivert the river into its northward channel were resisted strenuously by those whose farms were now safe from river action.8 Students of Sto:lo history and geomorphology assert that the Nooksack River also once emptied into Sumas Lake.9 The American end of the Sumas Valley in Whatcom County is 24 metres higher than the bottom of the prairie in British Columbia. The rising ground water levels and the flooding Nooksack periodically overflow into the Sumas Basin, unregulated by the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.10 Perhaps we can envision the contours of this tense area of the International Boundary and the furrowed brow of the Mayor of Abbotsford.

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7Native tradition speaks of the Chilliwack River once flowing into Sumas Lake before a log-jam diverted it towards the Fraser: Wayne Suttles, ed. Northwest Coast, Vol. 7 of Handbook of the North American Indians (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Press, 1990), 455. According to Horatio Webb's observance of Mr. Vedder's lost diary, the Chilliwack River in freshet began taking over the bed of Vedder Creek on March 8, 1873, which in recent memory had been a small stream pouring into Sumas Lake: CHSA, Horatio Webb, "History of the Chilukweyuk River with the Vedder and Luckukuk as I saw them in 1870."


10 The Nooksack flooded the western edge of Sumas Prairie in 1986, 1989 and 1990. The Americans refuse to build dykes or dredge deeply, insisting that the Nooksack is simply following a natural course.
The shape of the lake is rarely constant from map to map. Set in a very large
time-frame, such variation in any lake is expected. All lakes are being filled in by sand,
gravel, sediments and in the absence of human or divine intervention, Sumas Lake
eventually would have become land, filling up to the height of the Fraser River
Floodplain. But this post-glacial, perhaps ancient lake had some special features. For
those locals who occupied the region of Sumas Lake during the last 2500 years, seasonal variations in the depth and area of the lake were events that changed their nature
as the people related to them: as the locals innovated and adapted or periodically moved,
the freshets could be understood as blessings or threats. Before the drainage commenced,
Canada's resource inventory team, the Commission of Conservation, regarded the lake as
something to measure. They did not attempt to conserve the lake but during brief visits,
their pre-mortem examinations of the body of water related that it was 9 feet deep at low
water and 36 feet at extremely high water. Deeper than the high altitude Lake Myvatn
in Iceland (famous for its diverse waterfowl population), with much less variation in area
than the flooding and evaporating Lake Chad in West Africa, Sumas Lake was — and the
lake bottom still is — situated close to sea level in the floodplain of several North
American rivers.

Space need not become the fixed surroundings for the tale, as lifeless as the
chapter on "environment" full of forgettable descriptions of flora and fauna that rarely
intersect with the action to follow. Environmental historian William Cronon counsels
that "Any geographical description, no matter how static, can be set in motion by asking:
how does this place cycle?" Such a question may reanimate the century-old specimens

1Cameron, "Geomorphic History," 111.
12Ten registered archeological sites ring the Sumas Lake region. Gordon Mohs in his
"Sumas Lake: Review of Reclamation & Native Use," (Sto:lo Tribal Council), notes that
"undoubtedly there are many more as a systematic inventory of the area has never been
conducted."
13Arthur V. White, Water Powers of B.C. (Dominion Commission of Conservation,
1919), 45, 233: the book also reports that the lake is 6 miles long and 4 miles wide at 9
foot elevation.
of Sumas Lake birds and mammals stored in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology down at Berkeley, California,\textsuperscript{15} reduce the stings of mosquitoes to a seasonal, intermittent experience, and render Sumas Lake not as part of pristine, timeless wilderness, but a human resource base in the Pacific Flyway of migratory birds that was showing signs of strain before the turn of the century. An examination of documents concerning the first attempt to dyke the Sumas area and drain the lake links the federal and provincial governmental powers to the agency of a local ecosystem.

Defining the Margins

The margin depends not only on who is doing the defining, but also when it is defined and why. Marginal land is, in economic terms, "land so poor as to remain unused until the lack of more desirable land forces its development."\textsuperscript{16} Desirability is, of course, a relative concept, but to be sure — a lake and surrounding wetlands is poor land. I.G. Simmon's environmental history text defines wetlands as a marginal land-form "where the substrate is subject either to periodic (diurnal, seasonal, unpredictable) or permanent inundation."\textsuperscript{17} Because the wetlands covering approximately six percent of the Earth's land surface\textsuperscript{18} generally are dispersed in relatively small areas, the conversions of these places to land by people — often for profitable agricultural purposes — remain attractive though open-ended projects. Wetlands around the North Sea have been claimed for centuries; although, due to the shrinkage of the Fenland once it dries, such areas must be pumped and thus are now linked closely with industrialism.\textsuperscript{19} Thousands of hectares of wetlands have been destroyed more recently through dyking and drainage in the Lower

\textsuperscript{15}According to Ned Johnson, Curator in Ornithology & Professor of Integrative Biology, the Museum holds 59 specimens of birds and 3 specimens of mammals taken by the celebrated naturalist, Allan Brooks, in the Sumas Lake, British Columbia region.
\textsuperscript{17}I.G. Simmons, \textit{Environmental History}, 118.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 119.
Mainland. Without its powerful pumps transforming the "margins" into valuable agricultural land each year, Sumas Lake would begin to refill its old lakebed like it did when the dykes burst and the pumps could not handle the flood in 1935, 1951 and 1975.

The human experience of Sumas Lake shifted profoundly through seasonal time. Records of certain short-term observers provide insight into a range of local activities which varied as the earth changed its position in relation to the sun. Winter temperatures in the Fraser Valley seem to have been irregular. The journals of Fort Langley report a relatively mild November in 1828. On the 5th, Hudson's Bay employee, Francois Noel Annance (a Metis nicknamed "The Scholar") and his party navigated up the Sumas river where they found "300 or 400 Indians of the different tribes from this neighborhood encamped — leaving them, taking a couple with him as guides, he continued a short distance through a large lake." Annance left hurriedly as the villages were preparing for attack from a Coastal tribe and returned to the Fort with two beaver from "the Indians at the Lake." The weather was rougher upon their return in December, but the rivers remained clear: "their course was up the main river for about 25 miles, and ascended the Smoise [Sumas] River the distance of about 5 miles; when they arrived at a Lake of 10 miles long and 6 wide [Sumas Lake] — at the extreme end of this lake they found a considerable extent of low clear country, intersected with a number of little creeks & ponds well adapted for wild fowl — here they spent the best part of three days, and killed 4 Swans — 3 Cranes — 10 Geese & 40 Ducks."
As Sumas Lake receded to its lowest water level, floodwater mosquito eggs dried out and passed the winter waiting for the good chill that would allow them to hatch out in the summer. Charles Wilson, another member of the Boundary Commission, recorded in early November 1859 that everything was frozen: "we have to thaw our bread over the fire before eating it, beef, vinegar, ink all the same way." They adopted the local custom of wearing blankets. Communications both on the river and on the page became difficult during a freeze-up. At Camp Sumass, Wilson wrote "the process of thawing the ink is to stick your pen into your mouth after every 5 or 6 words and keep it there till it thaws."25

Although the work of reorganizing Nature would be advanced by a largely Protestant ethic that began to dominate the area in the Nineteenth Century, the work of separating the human from the non-human at Sumas Lake was also aided by men of science like the naturalist Lord. He made several observations about the wildlife of the Sumas area in notebooks that are punctuated by the squashed remains of several mosquitoes, identified by later entomologists as the dominant floodwater species *Aedes sticticus* and *Aedes vexans*.26 Understanding himself and his mission of documentation to represent a radical break with the Aboriginal people he encountered, Lord freely mingles descriptions of native life with the insects and animals he studied. As he reports on the lifecycle of the mosquito, Lord notes that eggs are laid on ground that is due to be flooded, or in small "canoes" on water.

Lord and Wilson each proclaimed the Sumas-Chilliwack area "a Second Eden" and despite the mosquito menace that also drove the greatly distressed Wilson to sleep

with a dozen men, women and children "in the middle of the lake upon piles...after
smoking no end of pipes of peace" with the chief,\textsuperscript{28} both men registered claims for land
in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{29} They saw lush grassland to graze cattle "rapid beyond anything i have
witnessed elsewhere" growing, in two months, to a height of "four and seven feet."\textsuperscript{30}
The grasslands of the Fraser Lowland are almost completely gone and thus the species
that astonished the surveyors are difficult to identify. But before the lake was drained,
"wild" grasses were still being harvested by local farmers. Barbara Beldam reflected that
"I believe Canadian blue-grass to be the most undervalued of all grasses; when the waters
receded it sprang instantly back to life so that there was always time for a good crop of
hay. I have seen droughts that Canadian blue-grass has taken in its stride, cowering under
the sun until the first rain brings it back, green and eager again."\textsuperscript{31}

Lord was recording an abundant and well-used food resource as the osprey and
bald eagle fished in the lake with their claws. The anthropologist Wilson Duff, in his
fieldwork of the 1950's, relates the past existence of a weir that crossed the Sumas River
at the point where the river left the lake at a width of 200 feet and a depth of up to 20 feet.
The weir was owned by the Sumas people but they allowed outsiders to use it: after
catching what sturgeon they wanted, they opened the weir.\textsuperscript{32} The wild potato,
\textit{xwogw'ois}, the wapato or arrow-leaf, was gathered around the shores of Sumas Lake
and provided a good source of carbohydrates eaten raw, boiled or roasted.\textsuperscript{33} The
Nooksacks, now living south of the imposed border between the United States and their

\textsuperscript{28}Stanley, ed., \textit{Mapping the Frontier}, 61.
\textsuperscript{29}BCARS, Add MSS 700, F.W. Laing, "Colonial Farm Settlers on Mainland, B.C. 1858-
71.
64.
\textsuperscript{31}Beldam, "Sumas," 32.
\textsuperscript{32}Wilson Duff, \textit{The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, B.C.}, Memoir no. 1
(Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1952), 69, 77.
\textsuperscript{33}"Upper Stalo Fraser Valley Plant Gathering," (Coqualeetza Education Training Center,
relations in British Columbia, came up to use the west and southern shores to hunt and fish: if they wanted to make sinew-backed bows, they could also obtain sturgeon glue.34

Lord wrote of the tremendous numbers of birds that arrived "as if by magic,"35 to devour the insects as their numbers grew in the summer, including flycatchers, white-bellied swallows and sedgebirds (warblers). Sumas Lake was also attractive to the Sandhill Crane, Great Blue Heron, and the American Bittern.36 Lord hunted what he listed and was particularly annoyed by the "disagreeably bold" behavior of the Bald Eagles when they flew off with his kill: sometimes he gave the robber "the benefit of a second barrel, as punishment for his thievery."37 "Immense flocks" of the now rare White-fronted Goose, as well as Whistling Swans and Hutchin's Geese also spent part of their life cycle at Sumas Lake.

He was hardly alone in the hunt. One way the locals captured birds was to string nets between 15' to 20' high poles each attached to a canoe, with which they would slowly enclose a raft of ducks.38 With the improvement of guns in the Nineteenth Century and increasing trade and use of them, hunting methods changed. Lord described the use of firearms by unnamed Indians on White-Fronted Geese:

"They arch light sticks by fixing the ends in the ground, just high enough for a man to crawl under, and about six feet long; this they cover with grass, to resemble a mound and rushes; having crept in, the Indian lies still until a flock of geese pitch within shot; then, bowling over as many as he can, he loads again; the geese just circle round and pitch as before, and so he continues to fire until enough are slaughtered; then out he creeps, to pick up the dead and wounded."39

37Ibid.
39cited in Leach, Waterfowl, 22.
The wary White-Fronted Geese already were seriously reduced by 1888. Hunting seasons and bag limits would be a new concept for some hunters, including the increasing clouds of newcomers whose object in the hunt was often to kill as many birds as possible.

Short-term visitors began to stay for the long term. Migrants like the Chadsey brothers moved into the lake country not long after the Colony's Pre-Emption Act of 1860 that granted 160 acres of unsurveyed Crown lands to those who would take possession, pay no more than 10 shillings per acre and register title. In 1864, William McColl surveyed Indian Reserves between New Westminster and Harrison River. According to the oral instructions of James Douglas, all lands claimed by the Indians were to be included and, in no case was a reserve to be under 100 acres. The government engineer mapped the area at the beginning of freshet season and he notes that the two Sumas Reserves (Lower Sumas with 6400 acres and Upper Sumas with 1200 acres) were both mainly flooded at high water. Three preemptors had already moved onto the Lower Sumas Reserve where McColl listed a Native community of 93 people. In 1867, Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, acted to reduce the size of the Lower Fraser reserves for

"the Indians regard these extensive tracts of land as their individual property; but of by far the greater portion thereof they make no use whatever and are not likely to do so; and thus the land, much of which is either rich pasture or available for cultivation and greatly desired for immediate settlement, remains in an unproductive condition — is of no real value to the Indians and utterly unprofitable to the public interests." Trutch proceeded to allow forty thousand acres to be made "available" by taking it from people he once compared to dogs. The surveyor sent out that year to carry out the reductions reported that "in our reconnaissance in the Chilliwack District [east side of

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40Ibid.
41Papers Connected, 43.
42Legal Surveys, Department of Lands, Victoria, New Westminster District, Chilliwack Plan Number 31T1, Map of Government and Indian Reserves, W. McColl, 16 May, 1864.
43Papers Connected, 42.
44Paul Tennant, Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), 43.
British Columbia. Provincial Land Surveyors. New Westminster District, Chilliwack plan number 31T1, Map of Government and Indian Reserves, W. McColl. May 1864. Legal Surveys, Department of Lands, Victoria B.C.

Blue highlights Sumas Reserves. Map is oriented with north at bottom.
Sumas Lake] we were accompanied by nearly all the settlers, some sixteen in number, who were very useful and obliging in pointing out surveyor's posts. As the political scientist, Paul Tennant, notes, the surveyor was innocent of any suspicion that the settlers may have previously moved the posts they knew so well.

Although the white settlers were still in the minority in the Fraser Valley, they were Trutcht's "public interest." Between 1861 and 1871, their numbers grew from 300 to 1,292. The imported smallpox virus was killing many Native people in British Columbia during the period, but the Sto:lo numbered at least 1,720 people in 1864.

Some government outsiders were more sympathetic than others towards the Sumas who were actively being separated from their territories. Surveyor J.B. Launders was unable to satisfy some very disraught Sumas Band members within the scope of his surveillance duties. Sumass No. 2 on the Sumas River "is chiefly wet prairie with a belt of stunted willows along bank of river. The Indians were not well satisfied: they wanted all their original claim..." After British Columbia joined Confederation, the Province and the Dominion had difficulty merging their conflicting policies towards Native people. Sto:lo grievances filled petitions. The Province's refusal to recognize Aboriginal title and reluctance to extend existing reserves led to the formation of the Joint Allotment Commission in 1876. Three Commissioners were given the task of conclusively settling the Land Question for British Columbia. Band populations were noted as well as individuals' names, numbers of livestock and implements.

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46Tennant, *Aboriginal People*, 43.  
47Leach, *Waterfowl*, 57.  
48Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians*, 28  
49Aylechootlook on Capt. Jemmett's 1881 survey.  
50*Papers Connected*, 57.  
51See for instance the 1874 Petition of the Lower Fraser Chiefs: "Sumas (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;" "Special Joint Committee," 103.  
53Sumass tribe listed with 126 people and 78 cattle on 6 Reserves. "Stalo Bands List. An Early Census of the Sto:lo Villages, Yale to Katzie," Department of Indian Affairs, RG
By 1878 Gilbert Sproat, the most enthusiastic member, was the only
Commissioner left on the job. Prior to the Commission, Sproat had been absent from
B.C. for nine years, but his earlier observations on B.C. Indians during his life in Alberni
showed him to be a remarkably thoughtful settler.\textsuperscript{54} Geographer Cole Harris writes that
Sproat met with Lower Fraser Chiefs in 1878 to hear their complaints that the incoming
settlers were claiming land the Natives wanted, but nothing was done to remedy the
situation.\textsuperscript{55} Harris is right to say that the situation remained dire, but Sproat's lengthy
written attempt to argue for fairness is a story that has special relevance to Sumas Lake as
it magnifies the interdependent relationship of its water and ground. After the passing of
the Sumas Dyking Act that same year, the unsatisfactory situation for the first inhabitants
of the area worsened.

Engineer Edgar Dewdney was one of the first to survey the Sumas District and
scheme to drain the lake.\textsuperscript{56} In April 1878, the first legislation relating to Sumas was
written and adopted, enabling Ellis Luther Derby "to drain Sumas Lake and other lands"
in the Chilliwack, Sumas and Matsqui districts.\textsuperscript{57} Derby did not begin construction until
November, waiting perhaps for low water. Just after Christmas, Derby received a dark
warning from Gilbert Sproat.

\textit{To E.L. Derby}

\textit{Dec. 26, 1878}

\textit{Sir},

\textit{I have to inform you that it is the intention of the Dominion Government to take legal
steps against you as a trespasser upon the Indian Reserve at this place and to restrain

\textsuperscript{54}Fisher, \textit{Contact}, 189.
\textsuperscript{55}Harris, "Lower Mainland," 59.
\textsuperscript{56}Guide to the Province of British Columbia for 1877-8 (Victoria: T.N. Hibben & Co.
Publishers, 1877), 117-125.
\textsuperscript{57}British Columbia, \textit{Sumas Dyking Act} Statutes of B.C. 1878, c. 6.
you from further similar proceedings with respect to Indian reserves at Sumas and Chilliwack.

It is considered that the Sumas Dyking Act cannot give you any authority to touch Indian Reserves, that can be given by the Superintendent General of Indians alone acting with the consent of the Indians.

I have the honour to be Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Gilbert Malcolm Sproat

Commissioner

Derby protested and Sproat countered with a volley of angry letters. Sproat apparently had sent a letter of protest against the Sumas Dyking Act the previous spring, but he noted that such a letter would hardly seem necessary based on the province's knowledge that the lands in the Derby grant had not been examined by a Reserve Commission.

Authorized by the Act, Derby began his dyke in Matsqui and planned to run it across the Sumass Indian Reserve. All the Crown lands near the Matsqui, Sumass and Chilliwack Indian reserves were granted to Mr. Derby and Sproat was outraged that the question of "sufficiency of these reserves" had thus been resolved. "Derby now pleads that the general effect of the dyking could be beneficial to the Indian reserves" but the crucial question remained. How could sufficiency be judged when every acre of Crown land beside and near the Indian Reserves was granted to Mr. Derby?

Sproat challenged Ottawa on behalf of the Matsqui people who "had been told by white men that if they or their cattle injured the dyke they would be put in prison..." The people felt not only that the dyke was useless, but that the reserve was unsuitable. "The effect of draining lakes and diverting the course of streams touching or near the Indian

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58NAC, RG 10, Vol. 7538, file 27, Sproat to Derby, 26 December 1878.
59Ibid., Derby to Chief Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 31 December 1878.
60Ibid., Sproat to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 January 1879.
reserves has also to be considered: in short, the whole question preeminentely requires the well considered sanction of the Dominion Government and requires it now.\textsuperscript{61} For the short-term stay of Sproat, the time to act was slipping away. He thus recommended the disallowance of the Sumas Dyking Act.

B.C.'s Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, G.A. Walkem wrote Sproat to tell him to drop the issue and in a telegram assured Prime Minister John A. Macdonald that he would "immediately protect Indians from contribution for benefits by an ammending act."\textsuperscript{62} Walkem's record in regard to Indian interests was hardly exemplary. As Premier in 1875, Walkem opposed the motion to publish all papers relating to the Indian Land Question and, in the end, successfully suppressed the report. Sproat had agreed to continue as the only Reserve Commissioner only after being assured that the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works would not interfere in his work unless the case was extreme.\textsuperscript{63} A letter from Walkem provided Ottawa with "some important facts." He had it "upon good authority that the land [under the lake] is a rich loam" and that its value, to Indians as well as whites, would be increased by drainage.\textsuperscript{64} Again, he asked that the Act, which still could be disallowed by the Dominion Government before the 8th of May, continue to stand.

The question of land sufficiency for the Indians remained open due, as ever, to seasonal considerations. Sproat was unable to answer the question in January because of the snow on the ground. Sproat was instructed to "proceed at once to Chilliwack, Sumass and Matsqui — ascertain if Reserves sufficient, when drained, if not what further required and report the result by telegraph."\textsuperscript{65} Strangely, the words "when drained" were added as

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 25 January 1879.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., Walkem to Macdonald, 6 March 1879.
\textsuperscript{64}NAC, RG 10, Vol. 7538, file 27, Walkem to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 17 March 1879.
\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., Vankoughnet to Sproat, 3 April 1879.
a marginal correction on the telegraph: in a corresponding letter to the Prime Minister the same day which explained the instructions to Sproat, the concept sufficient "when drained" was omitted. The May deadline passed and the Sumas Dyking Act remained in place.

Surveying in the June freshet of 1881, Captain Jemmett noted willows, crabapple, fir, cedar, maple, hazel, vine maple, berry, fern, spruce, alder, grass on the Upper Sumas Reserve. As his handwriting becomes messier and messier, he also notes over three feet of water, hardhack, a beaver dam, a swamp, and unearthed survey markers. As early as 1879, the sufficiency of land for Indians in the Lower Fraser was tied to a drainage scheme that cyclically stopped and restarted repeatedly for the next forty years as white farmers argued and capital remained elusive. Although Sproat raised the distinct possibility that lake drainage may not be in the best interests of Native people, the debate was cut short. He stated that the Indians "must have winter and summer grazing land ..., reasonable area and their fishing places" and asked, "is this unreasonable for a law abiding people whose land title is inextinguished?" But the Dominion, the fiduciary guardian of Indians, was mute. Sumas and Chilliwack Natives would not have to pay for drainage or dyking: but Indian agents would thereafter assume that the Indians, on their increasingly tiny pieces of dry land, not only favoured but required drainage.

The Railway Belt, 20 miles on each side of the promised Canadian Pacific Railway, was transferred from B.C. to the Dominion in 1883. 45,000 acres of the "Sumas Dyking Lands," excluding Sumas Lake, Indian Reserves and certain "marginal" lands, were reconveyed to B.C. in 1896 to facilitate the administration of settlement.

66 Ibid., Vankoughnet to Macdonald, 3 April 1879.
67 Canada, Surveyor General, W. S. Jemmett, 1881, Yaalistrick Indian Reserve No. 1, Lakaway Indian Reserve No. 2, Timber Reserve No. 3, Aylechootlook Indian Reserve No. 4, Upper Sumas Indian Reserve No. 6, Sumas Indian Reserve No. 7, BC Field Books, No. 9.
68 NAC, RG 10, 7538, file 27, Sproat to Vankoughnet, 17 March 1879.
69 NAC, RG 15, Vol. 778, file 540515, Extract from a Report of the Committee of the Honorable, the Privy Council, approved by His Excellency on the 21st October, 1896. The Dominion actually had title to the lake bottom as the Province administered water
Send the following telegram, without repeating it, subject to the above terms and conditions:

To, Mr. Sprout, Esq., 3 April 1879

 heroin, Revenue Commissioner

 New Westminster

 British Columbia

 Coos or acres Children's

 Sumas and Malahat. - Ascertain

 of Records. Sufficient, if not

 what further required, report the result by telegraph.

 Telegram, Vankoughnet to Sproat, 3 April 1879.

 rights in the Railway Belt: however, this issue is controversial. For further reading see
 Claudia Notzke, Aboriginal Peoples and Natural Resources in Canada (York: Captus
The 1884 lynching of Louis Sam, a 15 year-old Sumas boy, by U.S. citizens in cooperation with white Sumas Prairie residents, indicates that the relationship between Natives and newcomers was strained. The great grey owl stopped coming to Sumas Prairie in the winter; birds of prey, the gyrfalcons, became the prey of market hunters. New settlers occupied most of the available agricultural land by 1888 and successive dyking commissioners felt justified in urging a revision of the amendment which "unfairly" prevented the taxation of Indians for dyking projects.

But apart from any discussion of land rights and use, let alone actual control of water and land, Indians could be portrayed by white settlers quite sympathetically.

Charles Evans, a farmer who grew up in the area, wrote in the local paper in 1904 of the "Fraser Indians" as they appeared to him in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century:

The only obtainable help at that time was the Indian. He was the pioneer's live capital. He was the man who cut down the bush and the trees. He cleared all those first fields; he helped cut the hay and grain that grew on them. He baled hay, made roads and bridges, and did all manner of farm work. In some cases the rivers were our thoroughfares at that time. The Indian took the produce down the streams to the Fraser, where he could have it loaded on the steamer. Large or small, he could take it just the same in his canoe, and sometimes for heavy articles two or three canoes side by side. He was always reliable.

In the early Twentieth Century, the same farmer seems to have employed the services of growing numbers of migrant labourers and local farmers, both Asian and white, much more often than the "reliable" Indian. The Indians to depict favorably were the Indians of the past — not contemporary holders of valued land and competitors for resources.

But certainly, qualities of sensitivity and insensitivity may coexist in one person.

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70 MSA, Louis Sam Papers, S.A.M..  
71 Donna Cook, "Early Settlement in the Chilliwack Valley," (MA), Department of Geography, UBC, 1979, 12.  
72 NAC, RG 10, Vol. 7538, file 27, Memorandum from S. Bray to Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, 19 January 1907; G.W. Chadsey to Daly, Minister of the Interior, 6 June 1995.  
73 CHSA, Add. MSS 27, file 13, Charles Evans, "Reminiscences of the Fraser River Indian." Published in the Progress 24 February 1904.  
74 CHSA, Add. MSS 27, files 1-2, Charles Evans, "Account Book and Stock Breeding Records, 1896-1904. See Dianne Newell's Tangled Webs of History for more information on this general trend: Newell analyzes the increasing obstacles to Native participation in the Pacific Coast fishing industry.
In Beldam's poem "The Return of Chief Sumas" the Sumas Indians have disappeared completely from the valley, struck down by land dispossession, alcoholism and disease. The Chief, upon returning from the spiritual realm, remembers the valley and is horrified by its present reality: "O my Father, I am ready to return unto my people, I have seen my old-time homeland / but the land is mine no longer, for the great white hand has killed it. / Once the Garden of My People, it is now the White Man's Burden / I will leave it now forever..."75 Beldam reflected that her father, W. C. Bowman, sheltered two families of Indians in a driving north wind storm and froze his cheek and some toes in the process of saving their team.76 She did not note that her father was also a dyking commissioner who traveled to Ottawa to advance drainage. In 1910, Bowman complained to Indian Affairs that the existing Reserve land was "practically unused," the "Indians were diminishing in number....not suited for intensive farming" and suggested that they be confined "in as small an area as reasonable and possible."77 Out of sight and out of mind: a timeless and empty place shared with the diminishing wild spaces, and one day, hopefully, attendant bits of troublesome nature like the mosquito pest.

Mosquito Rhetoric

Regardless of what local or federal officials had in mind for the Sto:lo and the lake area, neither of which had disappeared by World War I, they had clearly defined plans for mosquitos. Most information written about mosquitos has been gathered with the intent to eradicate them. For instance, before the lake was drained, *Aedes aldrichi* (*A. sticticus* Meigen) 78 was the most significant species in the Fraser Valley in terms of abundance and vicious biting behavior towards mammals, especially in the evening. But

75NSC, Barbara Beldam, "May to December (Looking Backwards), Beldam, 1979, 57.
76Beldam, "Sumas." p. 34.
77RG 10, Vol. 7538, file 27, W.C. Bowman to Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 2 March 1910.
Aedes vexans was the most important mosquito for entomologist mammals near Sumas Lake itself.\(^{79}\) This species still irritates many people in the Lower Fraser Valley around July and usually it is considered to be the worst mosquito pest in Canada. No malarial outbreaks are known to have occurred in British Columbia; the only diseases carried by indigenous mosquitos are the encephalitides which on rare occasion have been known to affect horses, people and wild rabbits.\(^{80}\) In the perceived war between man and mosquito, mosquito science is not neutral. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of science and the Laws of Nature produced by entomologists in the laboratory, offered a persuasive means of plucking the drainage debate from the fabric of Sumas society. The scientific remedy of drainage, promoted intensively after World War I, produced new knowledge as it helped to destroy wetlands — and a way of life — in the Fraser Valley.

Locals had long developed mosquito-coping manoeuvres. Although the platform houses seem to have been out of use by the late 1860's, smudge fires remained important. A surveyor on the Boundary Commission was soothed by a Native woman's application of vermillion onto his face and hands. Sto:lo historian, Dan Milo spoke of "t'ehm-eh-KWIY-ehl," an important campsite east of the lake where the Sto:lo came to get away from the mosquitos.\(^{81}\) Later locals put screens on windows, swished themselves with sticks, applied creosote to the walls and repellents like oils of lemon grass and lavender to their skin. Packaged relief was sold at the drugstore. Common control measures included pouring crude oil on mosquito breeding areas, a practice detrimental to fish, fowl and other insects. Some people, women especially, could simply work indoors. As a young person, Ms. Bellrose spent a considerable amount of time inside the family house

\(^{81}\)Oliver Wells, "Vocabulary of Native Words in the Halkomelem Language," (Vedder B.C.: Wells, 1965), 27.
by the lake, all year round. Her diary of constant indoor chores and her daughter's oral
reflection on the loss of a "scene" and a "view" rather than a lake, reflect a domestic
existence — a stark contrast to the experience of Barbara Bowman (Beldam) whose
hunting and horseback riding enabled close and constant contact with the outdoors.

Beldam writes, "How glorious it was when spring came, and how short! For, with
warm weather came literally clouds of mosquitoes, especially if it was a flood year. My
sister and I wore long black stockings lined with paper. Heavens! No girl wore pants in
those days! The haymakers wore big straw hats with mosquito-netting veils that could be
suffocatingly hot. All the animals suffered but particularly the horses. I remember
running my hand down my horse's neck and seeing the blood run off my elbow. Then the
dragonflies came and that meant the beginning of the end for the mosquitoes. How I
loved them and how beautiful I thought they were. I still think so." Though Beldam
does not underrate the irritation caused by mosquitos, she also focuses on attendant
beauty, thus underlining the point that making life more pleasant in the valley meant
accomodation to the mosquito, not necessarily extermination of habitat.

Mosquito imagery, however, is suffused with the violence of war. A title passed
on within the Sumas Band is kwal, meaning mosquito, which was the name of a warrior
famous for his quick "in and out" style of attack. Extensive studies on mosquitos,
especially concerning disease vectors and control through pesticides like DDT, were
carried out during World War II; a renowned fighter aircraft was dubbed the Mosquito.
Storytellers searching for historical causality often connect the political will to complete
the Sumas Reclamation with the outbreak of World War I, the demand for agricultural

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82 CHSA, Add. MSS 435, Effie Jane Bellrose, "Diary January 1898 to December 1902." See also CHSA, Add. MSS 435, Myrtle Ferguson.
83 Beldam, "Sumas," 34.
84 Duff, The Upper Sto:lo Indians, 82, 96.
85 DDT is now banned in North America but the United States exports as much as 18 million kilograms each year for use in developing countries. David Israelson, Silent Earth (Markham: Penguin, 1990), 34.
products and later, the need of arable land for soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{86} Oddly enough, even the official protectors of migratory wildlife were strong advocates of wetlands drainage in the Lower Fraser Valley. Framed in wartime rhetoric, this irony becomes less curious. The campaign to drain the lake was aided considerably not just by the war waged in Europe but by the civil war against the mosquito. The operative word was "control."

From 1887 until 1898, the region of Sumas Lake was, due to the hunting and recording skills of Canada's esteemed naturalist-artist, Major Allan Brooks, "more thoroughly worked ornithologically than any other portion of the Province."\textsuperscript{87} Brooks, "eighteen and chuck full of enthusiasm" first came to the area in May 1887 with his father, the late W.E. Brooks who had bought a farm close to the village of Chilliwack. Like other naturalists of his generation who focused more on structure than behavior, Brooks killed to know, and he shot and trapped many of his listed 253 species of birds in the area, as well as 60 species of mammals.\textsuperscript{88} In late fall of 1894, Brooks noted a dozen large flocks of Whistling Swans on Sumas Lake and he also recorded many changes during these years and thereafter, especially due to harrassment and over-hunting. Brooks, himself, was a market hunter for museums in Europe and North America: his Sumas Lake specimens of Sandpipers in the Berkeley Museum (Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper and Western Sandpiper), all now vanished from the Sumas area, are in groups of threes and fours, several females containing eggs, shot mainly in late summer and early fall.\textsuperscript{89} In 1917, he wrote that many species such as

\textsuperscript{87}Allan Brooks, "Birds of the Chilliwack District, B.C." \textit{Auk} 34 (1917): 30.
\textsuperscript{89}Museum of Vertebrate Zoology collection holdings data (not viewed personally and not to be considered primary data) University of California Berkeley, printed March 16th, 1994. Brooks notes in "Birds of the Chilliwack District, B.C." that he sent "numbers" of the Semipalmated Sandpiper "to the large eastern collections." The Semipalmated
Hutchin's Goose [Taverner's Canada Goose] "mostly pass over now, as they are too much disturbed."90

The lake full of Dolly Varden trout, salmon and sturgeon continued to provide "happy and profitable hunting grounds"91 for locals, but fish were a prized and contested resource. Terry Glavin recently called sturgeon "living dinosaurs that emerged in the Upper Cretaceous period of the Mesozoic era 98 million years ago and have remained unchanged for the past two million years."92 But he also noted that the Indian Superintendent Vowell declared in 1905 that these fish, known to grow over 12 feet in length, were practically extinct through commercial overfishing. That April, the Fisheries Department seized the nets of Indians fishing for sturgeon in Sumas Lake, apparently because their nets were blocking the passage of salmon to the spawning grounds.93

A concern with regulations and wildlife conservation in Canada originated — on a federal level — with civil servants, not elected officials, and not until very late in the Nineteenth Century. Janet Foster, scholar of Canadian conservation, blamed this belated interest to "an uninhabited frontier, the myth of superabundance, an era of exploitation and lack of knowledge about wildlife, the political climate of the National Policy and the division of powers under the British North America Act."94 Questioning several areas of Foster's "uninhabited frontier," the rapid flooding of British Columbia with people who devalued the local land and waterscape, and those who first lived there, also encouraged disinterest in local habitat conservation.

Sandpiper is also extinct in the Chilliwack/Sumas district according to naturalist Denis Knopf in his 1992 list of "Birds of the Chilliwack District, B.C."

90Brooks, "Birds," 34.
91cited in CA, Sto:lo Source Book:, 200. "Rod fishing is being injured," Chilliwack Progress, 30 April 1913.

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Protection of land by the federal government meant strict control and a high degree of management. Divided into seven small parcels of seasonally dry land, the Sumas Indian Reserves were vulnerable to further reductions. One Sumas Reserve southwest of the Lake, was considered for surrender as early as 1903 to a farmer in Abbotsford, B.C.. The Indian Superintendent asked the local Indian Agent to enquire and he reported that [while] "It is true they are not making a great deal of use of their ground, [one old man plants potatoes there each year] but we expect better from the younger generation growing up.... I have not called the Indians together to discuss the surrender of this Reserve as knowing their sentiments on this matter I know it would be useless."95 A lingering irritant to the Sumas newcomers, the issue of sale was again raised during the McKenna-McBride Commission. Although lands were reduced from the Upper Sumas Reserve (Reserve #6, Kilgard)96, this particular Reserve (#7) was not sold at this time either. However, the notorious Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, pressuring the sale with the cause of "Returned Soldier Settlement" persisted, and he succeeded in obtaining a surrender on Hallowe'en 1919.97

The extension of the net of control over land, fish, fowl and mosquitos, required a specialist, a manager — a new breed of person altogether. Dominion Entomologist Gordon Hewitt was the most energetic and influential of the civil officials interested in conservation. Hewitt secured the momentous Treaty for International Protection of Migratory Birds signed with the United States in 1916. The federal government thus was empowered to make rules enhancing the protection of migratory birds, establishing closed seasons, issuing hunting permits and designating endangered species.

95NAC, RG 10, Vol. 7545, file 29, MacAdam to Minister of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 12 January 1904: Devlin to Vowell, 6 February 1903.
96Under Interim Report no. 17, the Maclure Tramway of the Victoria, Vancouver and Eastern Railway & Navigation Company claimed a 32.6 acre right-of-way from the Upper Sumas reserve in the New Westminster agency. Abandoned in the 1940's the land was sold and subdivided, without compensation. Reuben Ware, The Lands We Lost: A History of Cutoff Lands and Land Losses from Indian Reserves in British Columbia (Vancouver: Union of BC Chiefs, 1974), 21.
Sumas Lake, mainly used by wildfowl as a stopping place or wintering area on flights to and from Arctic breeding grounds, 98 was a prime candidate for regulation. Unfortunately, these geese, ducks and swans who needed undisturbed habitat for feeding, loafing and preening were aided very little by the Treaty. Although it ignored Aboriginal rights to hunt, British Columbia representatives were intransigent on their frontier rights to hunt wherever, whenever and whatever they wanted. Hewitt negotiated major concessions for the province which became major concessions for the market hunters at Sumas Lake. Wildfowl could be shot by sportsmen with permits after March 31 "if injurious to agriculture" which Hewitt admitted was an unlikely occurrence; the 5-year closed season on wood duck was rescinded and B.C. was specially exempted from a 10-year closed season on cranes, swans and curlews.99

Vancouver's small armies of weekend hunters, who had used the B.C. Electric Railway since its completion in the fall of 1910, continued to stop off at the Sumas Lake shooting range until the Lake was divided into private fields in which soon even the grazing geese were diminished by good aim and gunshot. The B.C. Electric Railway "brought the first radical change" to the sportswoman Beldam's "security" and "privileged isolation" — not new regulations. Hewitt also revised Northwest Game Act, 100 sat on the interdepartmental Wild Life Protection Advisory Board with Scott 101 and transformed the Dominion Entomological Service into a major branch of the Department of Agriculture with twelve laboratories spread across Canada. He even managed to squeeze in a visit to the Lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia to address the burgeoning mosquito issue.

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98 Leach, Waterfowl, 32.
100 Foster, Working for Wildlife, 141. See Northwest Game Act, Statutes of Canada 1917, c. 36.
A change in government in 1916 at the provincial level prioritized "progressive" agricultural strategies and land settlement. Prior to the war's end, Premier "Honest" John Oliver, a farmer from Delta, encouraged the drainage in his plans for the employment and reestablishment of returning soldiers. His Minister of Agriculture, the farmer-politician from Chilliwack, "Honest Abe" E.D. Barrow would consider the Sumas Reclamation Project his finest political achievement. In 1917, the locally-elected dyke commissioners were deposed and the government's Land Settlement Board assumed their debts and responsibilities. The cost of dyking and drainage was to be shared between the sale of the lake bottom lands and the taxation of the local farmers. Thus any proposed scheme required cooperation from the Dominion government, as well as the Sumas landowners. The Advisory board meeting in July, 1918 concluded, according to The Abbotsford Post that "the district did not want a political dyke, it wanted a scientific dyke, and it was generally conceded that unanimity was the essential factor in success and that discussions on engineering schemes led to nothing."104

Barrow needed to sustain the project's momentum and what had been a particularly intense mosquito season in 1918 provided both a political and scientific opportunity. As in 1859, the July of 1918 was an abundant month for mosquito populations. The papers lamented and blamed as female mosquitos searched for the protein blood meals that would mature their eggs. A newspaper article argued in favour of drainage that "had it not been for the mosquito pest, the Fraser Valley would have had hundreds more settlers."105 That September, Barrow organized the first conference ever held to specifically discuss the mosquito. The newspapers, with headlines declaring "Mighty Mosquito Must Migrate," to the "wilds of Potsdam" exuded the battle rhetoric of wartime and quoted Barrow's honoring of women who, acting as courageously as the

102Ormsby, British Columbia, 407.
104MSA Sumas Lake Papers, The Abbotsford Post, 18 July 1918.
105The Fraser Valley Record, 5 September 1918.
women of Great Britain, "stuck to their fruitpicking despite the fierce offensive of the mosquito."106

Barrow declared that "to further delay action looking towards the eradication of the mosquito pest in the Fraser Valley, is nothing short of criminal neglect." The following speech of Hewitt, quoted extensively in the local newspaper, supported the experiential knowledge of the popular farmer, Barrow, with the rhetoric of specialist scientific authority. He advised that the "best policy would be to obtain a small commission, covering the whole mosquito area, but lifted out of local interests and party politics. An independent body should be responsible for this work getting the advice from an expert. This would give authority of action." The fewer locals to be involved in giving orders, the greater the extent of the mobilization.

Amongst the assembled was the dairy farmer, Sam Smith, "whose cows eat the grass even if the oil was on it and he thought it did them good." Hewitt informed the crowd that oil "is not a cure-all. Reclamation and drainage were the only true remedies for the mosquito." Hewitt's chief assistant in B.C., who until 1917 was in charge of the Entomological Laboratory at the Dominion's Agassiz Experimental Farm, urged full cooperation. A year earlier he also had advised biological control measures, including the measure of stocking permanent bodies of water with small fish to keep the mosquito population in check.107

In October 20th, 1917, Sumas Lake fish were identified as important creatures in themselves by the head bureaucrat in the federal department responsible for fisheries "as this lake, together with Sumas river, Vedder river and Cultus lake, — all of which it is understood would be affected, — form an extensive and valuable spawning area for the different species of salmon, it is important to know, before such work is undertaken,

106 MSASum, Lake Papers, The Abbotsford Post, 13 September 1918.
107 Belton, Mosquitoes, 30.
whether it would be detrimental to the fisheries...." The Department of the Interior replied that

With the diversion of the Vedder directly into the Fraser, the spawning grounds on this stream should not be interfered with, as the salmon would be able to swim up the new channel and spawn in the upper reaches of the river. Cultus lake, to which you refer in your letter, would not be affected by the scheme. Sumas Lake, however, would be entirely drained and the lands forming the bed and shores thereof transformed into most valuable agricultural land. With the intimate knowledge of the Province of B.C. which you possess, you will readily realize the value a level tract, comprising approximately 30,000 acres, possessing soil as fertile as any in the Province, and which is situated practically at the door of two of our largest coast cities... It is necessary to appreciate the tremendous value of this area and effect the agricultural development of the same will have on this whole district, when considering the case." Subsequently, save for a telegram from the Chief Inspector of Fisheries to the Land Settlement Board in 1922 asking "when action may be expected to permit ascent spawning salmon to Sumas Lake," fish do not appear as a major topic of drainage considerations.  

The political discussion was not about keeping expansive bodies of water for natural mosquito control, not about maintaining wildlife, fishing places and hunting grounds, but about reclaiming and controlling land for agriculture and mosquito extermination. If Gordon Hewitt, touted as Canada's Father of Conservation, had taken the time to gaze out onto the wetlands surrounding the lake, what would he have seen? Perhaps he saw a foregone conclusion: the indigenous willow, rose, cranberry bushes and crabapple were increasingly cleared away and the over-hunted Dominion grasslands dedicated to pasture were not ideal habitat for wildfowl. Two years earlier, the hunter-naturalist Brooks wrote of the Chilliwack-Sumas area that "most of the marshes have been drained so the region will never accommodate breeding waterfowl to any extent."

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109Ibid., S. Maber to Desbarats, 3 November 1917.
110BCARS, GR 929, Box 52, file 1, JA Motherwell, Chief Inspector of Fisheries to the Commissioner, Land Settlement Board, Victoria, B.C. 11 August 1922. The Land Settlement Board answered, "Your wire eleventh. re passage salmon into Sumas Lake. Our Engineer Sinclair fully authorized to take any possible action."
111Brooks, "Birds," 29. Allan Brooks changed his opinion in 1945 after visiting the bird sanctuary established by farmer-historian Oliver Wells in Sardis: He told Oliver that
But if Hewitt, the man supposedly most sensitive to the need for wildlands and bird habitat was struck with mosquito myopia — who would represent Sumas Lake?

That year the Dominion government extended more than a helping hand in the Provincial government's propaganda effort to drain Sumas Lake. United against the mosquito, the scientific and strategic resources of the Dominion and the Province joined forces in a post-war geopolitical campaign that helped to eliminate Sumas Lake efficiently, profitably and finally. The control of the water and land under the auspices of the "mosquito pest" became an extension of the war effort. In 1919, the National Research Council in cooperation with the Dominion Department of Agriculture, sponsored an investigation of the Lower Fraser Valley mosquito populations. The study continued to 1921 when the Canadian Air Board and the Department of Agriculture sent aircraft to conduct one of the first aerial entomological surveys in Canada's history. The completed report of Eric Hearle, Assistant Entomologist in charge of Mosquito Investigations for the Dominion Department of Agriculture, became grist for his Master of Science degree, as well as the basis for the eradication of the mosquito, through the draining of their breeding places, throughout the Fraser Valley.

Hearle centered his campaign, not at Sumas, but at Mission, the area of the worst mosquito problem. Hearle flew over Sumas Lake and the local paper reported that Hearle announced, upon landing, that "the draining of a mile of the lake shore would result in the elimination of the greatest mosquito breeding ground in the Lower Mainland."112 Hearle advanced the education of the public with exhibits, lectures, magazine and newspaper articles, for "Until recently, very few people in the affected area had any idea that mosquitoes were controllable, and the pest was suffered as a necessary evil. Like the tide

"duck shooting might be increased by establishing areas of complete protection for holding birds in the valley. Otherwise (there is ) not enough water for loafing grounds." Leach, Waterfowl, 25.

and the weather it was considered to be unaffected by human intervention."  

Dr. H.G. Dyar of the Washington National Museum, one of the world's leading experts on mosquitos, came to visit Hearle in mid-July in 1920, and, as a newspaper article reported, collected many specimens and reinforced Hearle's recommendation that the only way to get rid of the pest was through dyking and pumping. At this time, Hearle made what he felt to be an important discovery — a new specimen of mosquito in the Fraser Canyon — and he named it *hewitti*, probably after Gordon Hewitt who died at age 36 in 1920.  

Curiously, in Hearle's tabulation of information since 1910, mosquitos proved to be troublesome in only 50 percent of the summers. Hearle's report admittedly pays only incidental attention to natural predators of the mosquitos. Nevertheless, he notes that considerable numbers were eaten by other insects in permanent bodies of water. Controlled tests showed one dragonfly consuming 195 mosquito larva in 19 hours. The fry of trout and other fish were noted by entomologists "on several occasions destroying great numbers of mosquito larvae. Large shoals of fry were sometimes seen following each other in constant succession around the edges of flood water, wherever it was fairly deep and free from much vegetation." Shore birds at Sumas Lake were observed destroying great numbers of mosquitos. Although no examinations of stomach contents were made, he notes that in New Jersey, the stomach contents of one species of shorebird was found to consist of 53 percent mosquito larvae. Hearle also briefly mentions bats, salamanders, and a recent damaging infection of parasitic worms in *Aedes Vexans*, but again, few tests were made and no follow-up suggested.

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116Ibid., 81.
PLATE XI. Fig. 1. Map of Lower Fraser valley showing main flood-water breeding areas at 21 foot river level.
Compiled from aerial photographs and observations, 1921.

His final report was on the mosquito, not an ecosystem and the remedy — drainage — had already disappeared the lake by the time his report was published in 1926. Specializing, zeroing in on the topic, he exterminated as many needless words as possible and ignored the whole. The major work of dyking and dredging was completed by the fall of 1923. When thoughts about a flood lake are reduced to one of its tiniest and most irritating members, answers are straightforward. Hearle's conclusion was to guide dyking and drainage policy for the next several years. The Sumas Lake sphere of alternatives was drained, in part, by the farmer-politician's experience and the expertise of entomological science, a combination producing powerful suasory discourse.

For the engineers and the white drainage supporters who in the winter of 1919 voted 144-21 in favour of the Frank Sinclair plan — the one that would finally drain the lake — Sumas Lake simply was part of a "great and intricate problem" that had found its solution. The anxious letter of the Director of the Reclamation Service for the Department of the Interior, complaining of the "difficulty of accurately defining the marginal lands" that were under federal control and due to be transferred to the province after drainage, has a bleak poignancy. Writing during a blizzard on February 15, 1923, he repeats the advice that, "the bed of Sumas Lake has never been subdivided and if required this work could not be done until the water has been drained away." What became clear was not the definition of the "useless" marginal land, but the uselessness of this mission of cartographic translation.

Although hidden by eighteen inches of snow, the lake was indeed disappearing. Twenty-seven acres of the forty-nine acre Aylechootlook (Sumas Reserve #5) had been "wiped out" by the dyke constructed by the authority of the Land Settlement Board to

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118 Vancouver Province, 24 November 1919.
divert and contain the Vedder River — an integral part of the lake drainage project. In this instance of land reduction, permission was not even requested. The L.S.B. chairman admitted to the Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies that the Board had failed to make an application for the land as they were instructed to do, but he felt that he owed nothing to the Indians whose remaining twenty-two acres obviously was improved owing to the construction of the dyke.120

After almost a full year of pumping with the largest pump facility in the Dominion of Canada, the last waters of Sumas Lake were drained into the Fraser River in June of 1924. The Cultus Lake Park Committee formed and in May was tendering boat and ice-cream concessions in their bid to promote and manage the nearest existing lake as a public park.121 Beldam writes that after the drainage, "the peaceful, leisurely times were gone."122 Slowed by the first glorious crop of willow trees, the lake bottom land was cut up and the sandy soil eventually began nurturing clover, hops and tobacco. The wild sweet potato that grew beside the lake could no longer be harvested by Sto:lo families. Stories are told of giant sturgeon that remained in the marshy areas of the fields, met by the plow rather than the returning waters of the lake. A local farmer reports that flocks of ducks maintained their landing patterns onto the "lake" for many years. Seventy years after the "Reclamation Project," small fish get stuck in the drainpipes, salmon are found in the drainage ditches and sturgeon are sighted swimming back and forth in front of the pumphouse. They move along ancient routes to homewaters, caught in the mechanisms of eradication.

120NAC, RG 10, Vol. 7886, file 36153-13, Ditchburn, Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies to Secretary, Dept of Indian Affairs, 31 Oct. 1923.
121CHSA, Acc. 992.35, Cultus Lake Park Board General (1924-1926).
Sumas Lake, as seen from the B.C. Electric substation on Vedder Mountain, ca. 1916. MSA Museum Archive, P5005.

Sumas Prairie, also from the substation, ca. 1926. MSA Museum Archive, P4998.
Chapter Three
MEMORY DEVICE

The landscape and the waterscape — what my mother calls our homescape\(^1\) — is full of stories. Sometimes encountering these stories is simply a pleasant matter of walking outdoors with a knowledgeable elder. Sometimes, because not all narrative traditions are passed down and people die, and the land and water have been altered so much that the story perhaps is lost, our access to homescape history is restricted. Today, if you drive east between the rapidly growing cities of Abbotsford and Chilliwack, you would have little sense that your car travels over land that was once covered by water, past lakefront beaches and ridges that for a few decades bore settler homesteads and settler names like York, Bowman and Michaud. There is a government "stop of interest" plaque beside the road describing the benefits of the Reclamation Project and thus reflecting the general thrust of official history. You would know Sumas Lake only as water thankfully gone, unless you were fortunate to learn a few good stories which help you to care about where you are and what was there.

Sumas Lake images are forms of restricted access to the lake. Yet they play an important role in reminding us of life in the community before drainage. When visiting the homes of men and women that remembered the lake, I was struck by the presence of Sumas Lake photographs and paintings. Mrs. M led me down her hallway and pointed to a framed photograph. "There it is," she burst out, "that lake."\(^2\) And by its shore she sat, gazing at a camera almost three-quarters of a century ago. Later she showed me a painting of Sumas Lake, composed in warm blues and yellows, by Louie Alexander, a young woman from Winnipeg who would visit every summer and allow Mrs. M to watch her work, if she was quiet.

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\(^{2}\) Mrs. M, interview at her home, March 8, 1994.
Stop of interest, TransCanada Highway. Photo John B. Cameron, August 1994.
Mr. G was reluctant to be pegged as a lake lover. "It was just a lake," he would say, perhaps reminding me that my subjectivity was becoming too apparent. His living room deeply impressed me; not only did his picture windows offer a view of the lake bottom lands, but a large painting of Sumas Lake, in golds and greens, took the place of privilege in his living room. Yes, it matched the furniture; but what came first, the painting or the couch, I failed to ask. Mr. G had painted it years after the drainage, working from a photograph and visiting the spot where the picture had been taken.

At home, Mr. G modestly denounced his own talent and memory. But, later, as he drove me around the lake bottom, he displayed great knowledge of absent landmarks: community halls, roads, altered ridges. He said he often drove the route on his own — though it was "just a lake." Mr. G's memory tour formed a clear pattern in an admittedly small sample of interviewees: when those who remembered the lake accompanied me to the place where the lake used to be, when they gestured to familiar yet altered sites, memory and story flowed.

Mrs. M pointed out a remnant of the old Yale Road which used to take her to her grandparents' home by the lake. She asked, "Can you just see yourself in a horse and buggy trotting along here?" Beside her, I could. "There's the cliff where the waves used to splash up." Mr. H was quick to say he had little to offer me because he was so young when the lake was drained. But then he gestured across the road at the Kilgard Reserve. At the site where his brother had drowned in Sumas Lake, he had constructed and encouraged a small pond. As men and women invested painting, photographs and drained landscape with story, they offered not only new content for history, but new eyes.

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3Mr. G, lake bottom tour, March 9, 1994.
5Mr. H, interview at his home, July 21, 1994.
Mr. G at home, looking towards Sumas Prairie. Photo L. Cameron, March 1994.

Painting of Sumas Lake by Mr. G. Photo L. Cameron, March 1994.
The former interurban tracks, and still used today to haul freight to and from Chilliwack, run along the south shore of Sumas Lake. This photograph was taken in 1916 at "Beirose Station", now an area of lush farmland in the southeast corner of Sumas Prairie where Beirose Road rises from flatland to the Majuba Hill ridge of Vedder Mountain.


Painting of Sumas Lake by Louie Alexander, owned by Mrs. M. Photo L. Cameron, March 1994.
The American environmental historian William Cronon recently stated that stories are our "chief moral compass in the world." To extend his metaphor a little, stories help to orient us in respect to our lives and, in no small measure, in respect to the places in which we live. Our storytellers invest places with meaning, and reflexively, these places orient the stories they tell. In the context of the debate regarding the value of oral tradition for historical research, such a provocative idea poses many questions. One of the most challenging is posed by Julie Cruikshank when she says, "all societies have characteristic narrative structures that help members construct and maintain knowledge of the world." If historians affirm this view from anthropology — and I think they should — can the stories about the same place told by people with potentially very different narrative structures be effectively compared? And what happens to stories, these moral compasses, when places change?

In order to diversify ways of knowing Sumas Lake, I have chosen to focus on stories that were told to me indirectly. They all come from the 1950's and early 60's when I was not alive and Sumas Lake had been dead for thirty years. Some were written into history books, some were told orally to another person who taped or transcribed the story. These latter stories were told by men and women who composed in an indigenous narrative tradition, a tradition of storytelling that first made this lake meaningful to people. Sto:lo oral tradition thrives in certain places. But one reason for my analysis of the archive rather than my own fieldwork is perhaps best summed up by a woman who told me "I went to school before the lake was drained and when I came back, it was gone." I was trying to learn stories about the rupture of community through lake drainage, but I was made to understand that being sent away from home to residential schools was an experience that often removed the opportunity to learn stories about

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home. I understand many of the political and methodological dangers of considering oral and written narrative in the same discussion, but I seek a place of warmth, a gathering together, in the midst of shifting and disputed intellectual territory.

The question "how deep, how big was Sumas Lake?" is not irrelevant but here I want to stress that each measurement of the lake comes with its own story. Note that the lake is measured in acreage (a unit of measurement relating to land) that the drainage project is termed a "reclamation" of land, not a "draining of water." Water is something superfluous, something floating on top. To reclaim something is to assume you somehow lost it. Can one lose a lake bottom? But a reclamation is also a redemption — a turning from sinful ways. To reclaim is also to bring something like a desert or a marsh into a condition that can support crops or life. I am not interested here in making two separate piles of reliable versus non-reliable descriptions. I aim to learn from — not simply debunk — different ways of storytelling while asking, what makes certain stories stick?

A blatant and localized example of what I tend to worry about might be my experience of listening to the thirty year-old reel-to-reel tapes of a Fraser Valley historian and radio broadcaster named Casey Wells. One tape made in the 1960's was an educational acousti-guide — an audio tour of valley history — using designated places to tell a story about the past. As Wells promised his student-listeners, "We will visit the actual places where many exciting and important events took place — where disasters occurred and where there were achievements by both native Indians and white pioneers. You will visit the exact locations; you will hear the authentic stories; and you can say, 'it happened here,'" a statement that Wells always solemnized by striking a gong. But despite his clear voice and crisp directions, the experience of listening to these stories today, in our present landscape, is a disorienting experience. Only thirty years later, many of his designated places are gone or are significantly altered. The stories, though preserved on tape, have lost their moorings and the tour becomes semi-incoherent.

9Casey Wells, Old Chilliwack River North (School District #33, ca. 1968).
Now as the Fraser Valley continues to be one of the fastest changing places within one of the most rapidly growing regions in Canada, similar Wellsian accounts of incoherency become commonplace. And the practicing historian's job becomes more difficult though as necessary as ever to the community to which she or he belongs. Sumas Lake historiography offers insight into how historians have made dramatic change understandable and perhaps surviveable. An English naturalist on the International Boundary Survey dubbed Sumas Lake a "Second Eden"\(^{10}\) romantic and beautiful beyond compare; a chief of the Sumas Indians called it "one of the greatest spawning grounds there is"\(^{11}\); a UBC geographer wrote of Sumas Lake as "the great impediment to east-west transportation through the Lower Mainland."\(^{12}\) These descriptions are not merely right or wrong. For as we stand in the ironic position of knowing that Sumas Lake no longer exists, each phrase implies a different possible environmental history of the area, each articulating a particular origin and destiny.\(^{13}\)

Written histories about Sumas Lake have two basic plotlines. Unilinear, these plotlines are extensions of the understanding that continuous narrative helps to lend coherence to life. Recent ecological histories and personal memoirs have the form of a downhill slope — a degression into a life that is less satisfying, less abundant and less free. But by far the dominant plotline is that of increasing human progress: the reclamation of Sumas Lake serves to illustrate another step in Civilization's growing control of the place it had come to inhabit. The story is one of the most compelling stories of the West: sturdy farmers turn undeveloped vastness into an abundant garden. In 1948, George White concludes his article on the "The Development of the Eastern Fraser Valley" with the following: "Looking over the whole reclamation project after a period of twenty years, one cannot but feel that it was well worth while and that it will repay all

\(^{10}\) Lord, *The Naturalist*, 315.


\(^{13}\) Cronon, "A Place for Stories," 1376.
the time and money spent on it. For countless years there lay an 8,000 acre area of mud and water that was too shallow for navigation and probably too deep for the comfort of duck-hunters, who were the only ones to get even a few day's use of it. In addition, it was probably the finest breeding-ground in the whole Dominion of Canada for mosquitoes. Today there exists as fine a stretch of farming country as one could wish to see, with excellent soil, ample water-supply, a splendid system of drainage, and only 50 miles from an urban community that already contains nearly 400,000 people. It is difficult to conceive of any farm lands in North America more favorably situated.\(^\text{14}\)

Repeating almost word for word the official report of the Provincial Land Settlement Board that was in charge of the drainage project\(^\text{15}\), the phrase "probably the finest breeding ground for mosquitoes in the Dominion of Canada," continues to appear in Sumas Lake histories.\(^\text{16}\) The beauty of the final pastoral image is underlined by White's assertion that the lake was worthless, deserving to be transformed.

The lake was also a formidable opponent and thus its drainage reinforces the magnitude of mankind's accomplishment. Bruce Hutchinson, in his 1950 book *The Fraser*, linked the taming of the formidable Fraser River, "forever mad, ravenous and lonely,"\(^\text{17}\) with the drainage of Sumas Lake. The Fraser River, "the prodigal waste of

\(^{14}\)George White, "The Development of the Eastern Fraser Valley," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 12 no. 4 (1948), 290.

\(^{15}\)BCARS, GR 929, Box 48, file 3, W.S. Latta, Director Land Settlement Board, "Record of Events - Sumas," 31 December 1926, 37.: Latta writes: "Looking over the project now that it is completed, and taking into consideration its past history and future prospects, there can be no question of the tremendously beneficial affects this reclamation work will have on the Fraser Valley in particular and the Province in general. Where 4 years ago there lay an 8000 acre area of mud and water too shallow for navigation and too deep for the comfort of the occasional duck hunter who was the only one to get even a few days use out of it, and which formed probably the finest breeding ground for mosquitoes in the Dominion of Canada, there now exists as fine a stretch of farming country as the eye could wish to see; excellent soil, level land, ample water supply for stock and domestic purposes, splendid system of drainage, close to transportation, less than 50 miles from an urban community of nearly 300,000 people, combined with an equable climate and adequate rainfall. It is difficult to conceive of any farm lands more favorably situated on the North American Continent."

\(^{16}\)"Drainage of Sumas Lake: the dream that took 50 years," *Valley Magazine*, 26 May 1982.

\(^{17}\)Bruce Hutchinson, *The Fraser* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1950), 5.
energy," would often flood into the tidal lake during the spring freshets and Hutchinson lauds Ed Barrow, the politician/farmer who pushed for the lake's drainage for realizing "the dream that has become one of British Columbia's proudest possessions." Even when it enters the gentle and open Fraser Valley where "man now grows his crops and feeds his dairy herds" on its silt, "still the river is not to be trusted. It continually threatens and often overflows the dikes he has built against it."18 Putting the Vedder River in a "straitjacket" and pumping out Sumas Lake was, in Hutchinson's analysis, the greatest work of man's Fraser River mastery. The madness was tamed — wrongs were righted — due to strong faith in a technological dream.

The words of older general histories weave into the most recent histories. Margaret Ormsby's highly influential 1958 *British Columbia: A History* very briefly recounts the reclamation of the "marshy lands of Sumas Prairie."19 In her 1991 *The West Beyond the West*, Jean Barman similarly chooses the word "marsh" over "lake" when she writes, "the Sumas reclamation project drained thirty thousand marshy acres of the fertile Lower Fraser Valley for mixed and dairy farming."20 Sumas Lake is drained and framed in policy cause and effect, within the linear logic of print and the spatial expansion of a young province. And the agricultural communities like Yarrow, that extend their roots onto the claimed lakebed, are indebted to these scholarly stories and to the disappearance of the lake as they, in their local histories, write of their origins and destiny.

The success and coherence of these local histories is also indebted to disappearance of First Peoples: passing descriptions of static native cultures simply set the stage for the dramatic action of reclamation that follows. Named landscapes and waterscapes are recognized but absorbed. Obviously my tone indicates derision for this white-washing of history, but I must stop to point out that at one time most newcomers

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18Ibid., 12.
believed these stories, *lived by* these stories. That many still do is perhaps reason enough to analyze and deconstruct their "mythical" status, but we are not obligated to deride settlers' myth while we uphold others' myth. By focusing on the lake in the same time period, we may — through listening to tapes and reading transcripts — begin to appreciate how the productions of oral and written knowledge are not unrelated, but indeed help to interilluminate each other.

Not all non-Native storytellers ignored Native voices and ideas. In part, these people reinforced the notion of peaceful Native-newcomer relations, removing any culpability of Native dispossession from the hands of honest and decent Christian folks. But despite the potentially uneven power dynamic, non-Native interest in Native history qualified the garden myth with voices that did not belong to Adam nor Eve. That particular story did not capture all imaginations perhaps because, as the historian Donald Worster suggests, it was "filled with all the unresolved contradictions of innocence."²¹

The garden story optimistically affirmed the story of progress through economic development; nevertheless, the same story was a celebration of man's successful escape from "civilized" development.

Under the auspices of the investigative expertise of a modern and more advanced culture, ethnographers have been recording and transcribing indigenous stories of the Fraser Valley for several decades. Charles Hill-Tout declared in the 1890's that the areas around Sumas "seem to possess but few folk-tales, or else they have forgotten them."²² But later students of oral tradition and oral history in the 50's and 60's were more fortunate listeners. In the summer of 1950, Norman Lerman, an anthropology student from Western Washington, listened to large numbers of stories from Native people in the Nooksack/Sumas/Chilliwack region and analyzed their plots and motifs.

Oliver Wells, brother of Casey, was intent to discover the location and meaning of place-names in the Fraser Valley and recorded many Native friends in the 1960's. CBC Radio's Imbert Orchard traveled around the Fraser Valley recording stories for a radio documentary in the early 1960's. All these stories exist as fragments, some written into books, some archived on cassette and reel to reel tapes, pulled from their fieldwork context to exist in the world of libraries and archives around the region.

To explore these stories by focusing on place — just as I explored the stories of White and Hutchinson — is to risk misrepresentation and misuse once again. I am likely to underestimate the story's complexity. Further, the oral traditions that I have listened to on tape and read in books from the 50's and 60's are mediated by the ethnographer's documenting techniques and driven by the ethnographer's questions. But they have value beyond the mere fact they exist. By attending to how these stories may help contextualize and understand contemporary events, we yet may find an authentic opening to historical knowledge of Sumas Lake.

As I listened to the voices and read the transcriptions aloud, I began to understand the highly physical significance of a generalization asserted by scholars who study oral culture in North America and Australia.23 While written narrative tends to rely on time — the time line of dates — to talk about events in space, oral traditions tend to employ the place names of space to talk about events in time. Books contain stories but in a world of lakes and mountains there are many other possibly durable visual loci capable of holding, reinforcing and retaining stories. Within Lerman's field notes, he gives some indication of how his informants used the land and waterscapes around them to reinforce particular points of a story, to show how and where it happened.

23see for example, Julie Cruikshank, Life Lived Like A Story (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992) and Keith Basso, Western Apache Language and Culture (Tucson, Ariz: The University of Arizona Press, 1990).
For instance, as Gus Commodore told the story of Thunderbird, Lerman notes how Commodore "pointed to the hills above Kilgard" (the Sumas #6 Reserve) to show where a young man had a dream-vision in which he is told how to become Thunderbird. A 1993 field-trip with Sonny McHalsie of the Sto:llo Tribal Council drove home to me the continuing importance of pointing, touching and witnessing tangible landscape features in the present to ground oral tradition transmitted from the past. Story thereby was and is attached to territory and anyone listening can never look at the hills in the same way. What I knew only as a strip of highway heading up the TransCanada to Hope became a named homescape full of story and strong relationships. One oral narrative says a great flood occurred in the Fraser Valley and the people saved themselves by climbing up on Sumas Mountain — which they then called Kw'ekw'e'iqw (meaning head sticking up out of the ground). You can still see the caves where they stayed dry. A local perhaps can point them out.

Not surprisingly, the place name Sumas appears in many stories from the Sumas area in the 1950's. All the storytellers were old enough to remember the lake and its drainage. In 1950, Mrs. Agnes James, born at Matsqui, west of Sumas in 1885, tells the story of Mink to Lerman: the scene is set at Sumas Lake and the mention of the toponym allows the opportunity to explain that Sumas Prairie was recently covered by a large lake. Food gathering activity is described as Blue Crane digs for wild vegetables at the lake's edge. Gus Commodore tells the Mosquito Story (similar to a plot used by coastal groups) placing it at a beach at Sumas Lake. In condensed form, the young people who go there to swim, fail to share the best parts of their lunch with their friend Humpy salmon; Humpy hollers for the giant, Saskts, who hears and comes with a basket to

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24CA, Norman Lerman, Lower Fraser Indian Folktales, 1950-51 (Unpublished Transcript, Coqualeetza Education Training Centre), Gus Commodore, "Thunderbird I (Sumas Lake)."
25For one version of the story see Wells, Chilliwacks, 88.
26CA, Lerman, Lower Fraser Indian Folktales, Agnes James, "Mink I - 3rd Version (Kilgard)."
27See HyperCard stack for full transcript.
capture the children, including Humpy. The children manage to outwit the giant who intends to eat them and they shove him into his own fire. "When he was burning, the giant said, 'I won't be killing or eating anybody else.' The children said, 'We'll not destroy you altogether. We'll have something to remember you by.' The leader of the bigger boys said to the sparks that were going up, 'You'll be mosquitos...’ He said to the bigger sparks, 'You'll be sandflies.' That's it." 28

More commonly there are stories of the lake bottom. Time is rarely specific in these stories, the speakers use terms like "long ago." But place certainly is specific. Place also appears to be consistent across many accounts of dramatic events like drought. The origin story of the drought was told by different storytellers to different interviewers in different places and at different times. Yet each storyteller linked the story to the area where the Sumas Lake used to be. In brief, the story begins with disaster, a famine, a drought in which all life dries up. Everyone dies except for one man and one woman. The woman lives at the south end of the prairie near a creek or a puddle and is able to survive through her ingenuity and the few remnants of living things. The man and woman eventually find each other and together they repopulate and bring back life and language.

The variations in the stories are instructive and, in part, are gendered. Mrs. Harry Uslick, born in Sardis, east of Sumas Lake, was interviewed by Norman Lerman in 1950.29 Her narration follows the activities of the woman who survives in south Sumas by a creek. This woman's amazing innovations are able to save the starving man who finds her by crawling over to the creek. Uslick relates that the woman, after noticing some trouts, "took her hairs, one at a time, and spliced them to make them longer. Then she took wild gooseberry thorn for her hook." Uslick's story is laden with "traditional"

28CA, Lerman, Lower Fraser Indian Folktales, Gus Commodore, "Mosquito I (Sumas Lake)." The "Mosquito Story" is now also in storybook form - told by Dolly Felix and edited by LaVerne Adams for Coqualeetza Education Training Centre: there is a lake in this version, but it is unnamed.
29Ibid, Mrs. Harry Uslick, "The Drought (Kilgard)."
information relevant to Sto:lo women including ways to make fire with "old time matches" and methods of drying and curing fish. Conversely, the male storytellers follow the male protagonist as he travels alone from territory to territory looking for people and finding nothing and no one. Joe Louie, interviewed by Imbert Orchard in 1967 in Everson, Washington, was a well-traveled man like the character in his story who hikes from Nooksack in Washington State to the Sumas Band's Kilgard Reserve before he finds the woman from Cultus Lake down on Sumas Flat living off little red pinfish in the remaining puddles of water.30

The variations on this story, by Dan Milo of Skowkale31 and Amy Cooper of Soowhalie32 are told in the 1960's. Each emphasizes the post-drainage landscape context — places you can still go to. After the drought, any lake has, of course, disappeared; all that is left is creeks and puddles. The listener is given familiar place names and a contemporary landscape context in which to situate the story: Kilgard, Yarrow, South Sumas. "They call it South Sumas now. There's a creek that runs from here over to South Sumas."33 But the link between contemporary landscape and story became dramatically apparent as I listened to Joe Louie. Slowly I began to realize that he tied the drought story explicitly to the dry lake bottom, helping Imbert Orchard to understand the story's geography. He says,

"You see, yeah...they brought life, you see, and all living to the Fraser River. ...It was at the lake that they first met,...you see they come down there to gather food and so forth, down to the lake. There was a big lake down there, you know, where they're drained out there, they use to come down there and gather up their sturgeon and steelheads in the spring of the year. Before they drained that....That's where they met...you see deep holes

30BCARS, Sound and Moving Image Division, Imbert Orchard, "Mr. Joe Louie," (4/1/67), cassettes 437-1&2.
31Wells, Chilliwacks, 40.
32Wells, Chilliwacks, 50.
33CA, Lerman, Lower Fraser Indian Folktales, Mrs. Harry Uslick, "The Drought (Kilgard)."
in there, you see, that left some water in the bottom, you see. And that's where she was found, you know, by this man there...

Here Louie seems to be using the origin story to discuss and contextualize the lake drainage. In turn, this drainage story of catastrophe, more familiar as history to Orchard, perhaps because he read about it somewhere, helps the listener to locate the actual place of the origin story. Using space to talk about events in time, Louie reflects on human innovation, the value of water and the "life and living" that comes with it.

Places and stories may interact in both written and oral traditions of storytelling. To encourage a continuation of the story about different stories, I wish to emphasize some connections.

First, places are significant symbolically and physically for the stories we tell. Stories are shaped by people living in a particular time and place with a particular heritage. The place of Sumas Lake, as "impediment," "beach," or "breadbasket" is implanted with meaning through story. Landscapes or waterscapes for an oral culture contain clues to the location of stories. The connection between place and story is neither direct nor linear, but places can act as memory devices which allow the transmission and maintenance of cultural knowledge.34 When written stories are taken out in memory to the place they refer to — whenever we drive over the lake bottom on the TransCanada Highway — they also rely on the memory device of place. We simply look or point for emphasis at the lake bottom, and the spatial anchor, the rhetorical landscape, reminds us of origins. We can say, "it happened here."

Understood this way, even the buildings of former residential schools can be seen as powerful memory devices. Coqualeetza, a cultural organization serving the Sto:lo, has retained the principal's house of the former Coqualeetza Residential School. As an artifact on the landscape, it reminds the community of the story of segregated education

34Brian Stock, "Reading, Community and a Sense of Place,"* Place, Culture and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 323.
and removals from homes. Now a Sto:lo craft store, it was recently used for the storage of their archive and library, acting as a place that also helps to assess that story.

Secondly, stories about dramatically changed places act as adaptive techniques to help people make dynamic environments coherent. When places with physical significance are gone, the rhetorical force of the stories to which they were connected is weakened; one can no longer point. In reference to altered landscapes from the TransCanada to the Transvaal, such a comment would seem to have relevance in any indigenous community experiencing "development." History is archived in the landscape. When place names no longer refer to anything tangible, the storytellers who have learned to use them will find fewer and fewer listeners who can appreciate the spatial anchors and thus the stories.

But storytellers belong to a dynamic and flexible tradition. Their stories help communities deal with change. Certainly the drought story of Uslick and Louie and the reclamation story of White and Hutchinson have many differences. One laments a terrible drought, the other celebrates drainage: in one, the water — without explanation — disappears: in the other, the lake is actively disappeared by people. The drought is framed by a very long time dimension and a small area of space: the reclamation is framed by a very short time dimension and the spatial expansion of a nation. But viewed at the site where it happens, the natural disaster and the technological marvel are aspects of the same "outside" force that continues to regulate the blood of the land.

Lakemount Marsh, a remaining part of Sumas Lake currently operated by a private hunting club. Photo L. Cameron, February 1994.
Perhaps surprisingly, both are stories of human progress. Beginning with imagery of an environment harsh to human life, both end with the affirmation of human ingenuity and expansion on or near the lake bottom land. There is survival. Such happy endings are always up for alteration when a space is contested, as the bite out of the environment begins to itch and the monster we are creating becomes visible. The local school district is currently writing histories for its K to 12 curriculum, creating "lake" tours and reassessing Sto:lo history in light of lake drainage. Legal histories are being written for Native land and water claims. As the Barrowtown station continues to pump the lakebed, experts lament soil erosion and admit the flood hazard can not be eliminated. Frequent handlers of soil are advised to wear gloves to prevent potential injury from toxins in the water and ground. Engaged storytellers have much to make coherent if the landscape is to continue supporting our stories of progress.

Thirdly and most importantly, stories about place can inspire our moral awareness. Our histories undoubtedly do many things. Yet, to ask what stories are good for us is, in some significant measure, to ask what places are good for us. A good story might make us care about the places where we spend our time and help us to realize that these places affect who we are and the stories — whose stories, which stories — we are able to tell. Historians might be persuaded to become time/space (environmental) activists; the idea that the job is simply to record it before it disappears might make more sense if the description included the proactive life of land and water stewardship. Stories about places may help bring back "the life and the living," reawakening a sense of wonder and respect for our homescapes. Combined with story, even the bite of a mosquito can reconnect us to a sense of place and the challenge of sharing it.
Old growth fir with M. Rogalsky beside lake bottom (above floodplain).
Photo L. Cameron, June 1994.
Chapter 4
ONE MORE BYTE

Ever since Laura began this work on Sumas Lake, I have been her muse. She seems to have no affection for mosquitos although she declares herself to be extremely desirable to us. On the coldest winter day, she has seen one hover slowly, as if in trance, across her computer screen towards her exposed typing fingers. The task was challenging, but after initial resistance, we pursued and persuaded her to see the wisdom of Marston Bates's lifelong attempt "to look at the world from the mosquito point of view." Bates was a scientist who did not shun anthropomorphism but identified the difficulties of avoiding it and even praised metaphoric language ascribing emotions to insects. "Angry bees" aided his understanding of necessarily mediated reality. In the 1940's, he extended his humanity to write an exceptional book — one of the few mosquito studies that was not simply a manual for the extermination of my kind. Bates and others have identified me as *Aedes Vexans* of the tribe *Culicini* from the order of *Diptera*. Although the mosquito's "pest" or "monster" persona through which I now speak has a universal dimension, please understand that my particular perspective on history is also just that — particular.

In order for you to hear a history about Sumas Lake, someone must represent it. I depict the place in word, but I also represent the lake in a slightly different sense. Elected by the popular demand of local storytellers, I frequently represent (in the sense of a political agent) the interests of Sumas Lake and its right to have existed. As people keep saying, "it was probably the finest breeding-ground in the whole...." You know how it goes. Perhaps it is time for a new election. I feel pretty close to death so let me begin. By all means wave your arms about, increase the blood circulation, but save your

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questions. Interaction is a special interest of mine and I always make time for my audience.

Water is a particularly good subject for reflection. James Joyce praised, amongst many other qualities, its "universality, its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level: its metamorphoses as vapour, mist, cloud, rain, sleet, snow, hail...its ubiquity as constituting 90% of the human body: the noxiousness of its effluvia in lacustrine marshes, pestilential fens, faded flowerwater, stagnant pools in the waning moon."5 You may have heard my story before: indeed, I hope you have. It is hardly a departure from everything that has come before. That is a task for modernizers and I leave it to them.6 I am no limnologist, that is to say, no lake expert, but with Aedes Vexans being one of the species most attracted to light, to firesides and desk lamps where storytellers gather, I am a great observer of historical documents. Aedes Vexans has one of the widest ranges of all mosquitoes and have been found in the Palearctic, Nearctic, Oriental Regions; Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia.7 One was trapped by an airplane in Louisiana airspace at 5000 feet.8 As Bates seemed to suggest, with all these studies going on, all this data being created, how can the scientist say the mosquito is of no use to humans?

But let us stop talking about utility. People have become weary and wary of claims of redemption through the technological fix, of DDT to fight us, and now, after the flooding in the Midwest of the United States, of dams to counter flood. Many are aware of trouble in the environment due to technological intervention, but one of the biggest sleeper issues, one of the greatest problems of environmental degradation is people's real human capacity to forget a disappeared environment. With few physical reminders, heritage trees, lakes and buildings connected to stories that keep them in consciousness,

6Latour, Never Been Modern, 130.
7Bates, Natural History, 282
8Ibid., 41.
people forget things that once were so important to their lives. Perhaps a purpose of history is to make people miss what they haven't experienced and help them to understand where they are.

Interaction is quite the buzz word amongst users of electronic media. But action on each other is not something that the interface between computer and human necessarily exemplifies best. That medium is a little too predictable, not necessarily thrusting life into history, but possibly reducing the little that is there while consuming so much energy in the debugging process. Alternatively, oral history — an interactive method of learning stories from people in the flesh — is full of surprises. One does not begin an oral history project with the idea that one's assumptions will remain unchanged. The power dynamic is not controlled completely by the interviewer. "What sort of insects do you rejoice in where you come from?" the Gnat inquired. "I don't rejoice in insects at all," Alice explained, "because I'm rather afraid of them — at least the large kinds. But I can tell you the names of some of them." Good questions shape answers, but Alice need not satisfy the Gnat's agenda.

The archive, that place containing amongst other important documents, a naturalist's journal acting as a mausoleum for my squashed relations, is also a lively and creative arena of debate. Here, in bits and pieces, lie stories in their seasons: the eggs, pupas, wrigglers and final flight of an event, ideas emerging in the interface between past and present, document and rhetoric. But outside, out on the water and the land, touching the ancient and sacred, is where the wonderful interactive history occurs. And that is where the mosquito poses its greatest challenge to history. How far are historians willing to go to honor time through the honoring of place? Where will they break the divide between the human and the non-human? What discomfort are they willing to accept, where are their flood limits? Electronics may connect us to an overflowing reservoir of

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information but I suggest that a mosquito's bite is, amongst other things, a big reminder that you are part of a greater network of relationships beyond those of your people-centered communities. And so I ask: how many bites of memory does the historian require?

Dear Ida,

When arrow-camping
And with mosquitoes are stamping
That is the time to think of me.

Your affectionate Clytie
May 27th, 1889

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Sources are listed, when possible, by the name of the archive from which they were gathered. Many thanks to the living "links," the women and men who helped to connect me to the following materials. The private photograph and manuscript collections of Neil Smith, a farmer and historian in Sumas, provided many afternoons of absorbing study. Oral interviews conducted during this project may be archived in the near future, depending on the wishes of the participants, as stipulated by the terms of my agreement with the University of British Columbia's "Ethical Review of Activities Involving Human Subjects in Questionnaires, Interviews, Observations, Testing, Video & Audio Tapes."

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DISAPPEARING A LAKE
A Meditation on Method and Mosquitos

A HyperCard Stack by Laura Cameron
University of British Columbia
April 1993
DISAPPEARING A LAKE
A Meditation on Method and Mosquitoes

LEGEND

A HyperCard Stack by Laura Cameron
University of British Columbia
April 1993
FLOODING THE LAKE

Deep Lake
Land Development
Recreational Area
Real Estate
Crown Land
Mosquito Problem
New West District
Indian Territory
Stó:lo Territory
Blank
Not Blank

Origin Story
Flood Story
Mosquito Story
Marshy Lands
Ecosystem
Beautiful Sight
Common Lands
Source of Sturgeon
Site of Massacre
Bird Sanctuary

Controversy: George Ferguson
Scenery: Myrtle Ferguson
Common Lands: Charlie Power
Place of Two Cultures: Charlie Power
Great Expanse of Sand: Edith Lamson
God's Country: George Ferguson
Common Land: Ed Kelly
Superabundance: David Mathers
Humour: David Mathers
Sunday Outing: Ed Kelly
Source of Sweet Potatoes: Ed Kelly
Source of Pleasure: Ed Kelly
Impediment: Stanley Webb
Political Decision: George Ferguson

Return to Beginning
Continue
DISAPPEARING A LAKE
A Meditation on Method and Mosquitos

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April 1993

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Vancouver Public Library

The flow of human life in any given place - the patterns of social interaction in any given unit of settlement, the continual unfolding of reproduction and transformation within any given territory, or what takes place in any given area - is riddled with complexities, is marked by simultaneous diversity and successive variation, is an admixture of the more widely general and the locally specific, owing to the side-by-side existence of practices whose associated power relations, whose associated structuring processes, are of different spatial and temporal dimensions.

Allan Pred, Making Histories and
Constructing Human Geographies
The idea that history is both a science and an art is old and intimate knowledge for many practicing historians. However, an understanding that the art of history is not just the way we "write up" the facts, but is embedded in the research process itself, is rarely acknowledged, let alone articulated as an integral part of the resulting thesis or book. To deepen an appreciation for the historical process, the intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra urges historians to consider history a dialogue between past and present, an interplay of the "documentary" and "rhetorical" aspects of historiography in relation to the object of inquiry. In his sense, a documentary model of history privileges the discovery of new information through empirical research in the archives. Conversely, appropriate rhetorical usage insists that historian's objective analysis is limited self-consciously by a process of creative mediation and active transformation of her sources which, in turn, transforms her thought. By embracing the rhetorical arm of history, we may explore an interactive understanding of knowledge through a re-reading and replaying of materials currently in circulation.

My study concerns the representation of Sumas Lake, a lake that once filled part of the Lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Sumas Lake was drained in the early 1930's when a government led by farmer-politicians invested time, rhetoric and considerable amounts of money to create new areas for agriculture in the Fraser Valley, settle returning soldiers and eradicate the mosquito. Today, a traveler driving east towards Abbotsford, past the 30,000 acres of nearly parcelled fields north of Vedder Mountain, has no sense that her car skims the edge of what was once an expansive body of water. Since the "event" of its drainage, the experience of this aqueous space has been mediated by photography and cartography, through the usual maps of both written narrative and indigenous oral traditions as well as through oral testimonies exchanged in the process of making oral history. A mediation on these methods of representation may not unmask the "real" place, but it may provide some insight into the way people, including myself, shape the historical space of Sumas Lake.

The significance of LaCapra's "history as dialogue" model becomes obvious when document-based scholars step off the paper trail to adopt the methods of oral history or cultural anthropology. Active engagement with the information of memory culture may cause the researcher to re-examine his own role as mediator and his assumptions about what source materials are to act as the standard by which to judge the "authenticity" of an account. Historians thus enter a process of inquiry that engages both head and heart. A dialogue with my materials is not strictly oppositional nor is it a one-sided question and answer session. As I attempt to open my research framework to alternative histories and geographies that dissect and reconstruct Sumas Lake, my understanding of the lake becomes heterogeneous and may appear intellectually "messy." But to restrict the conversation to dominant and specialized perspectives on the lake, to the viewpoint which militates against the mosquito "messy," for instance, would be to repeat the intellectual process of fragmentation that facilitated the lake's physical disappearance seventy years ago.
Sumas Lake was a multiple-use, multiple-meaning habitat for the Stó:lo who continue to live near the drained lake and the non-Native settlers who came to the valley after the 1870s. Both cultures were dynamic and thus a stable description of the lake is misleading to assert; furthermore, the meanings we derive from Sumas Lake geographies and histories are tied to the methodologies which help create and shape them. Harold Adams Innis wrote in his *Empire and Communication* that civilization was a precarious balance of visual and oral cultures: visual culture which privileges the written word is related to territorial expansion and the command of space whereas oral culture is associated with individuality and stability of tradition over time. Innis's thesis intrigues me because he did not view visual and oral traditions as unrelated entities; like the interplay of document and rhetoric, these two aspects of knowledge production may illuminate each other. As we explore the rhetorical strategies of the visual and aural materials that inform my current study and decode particular metaphors that are employed to define the lake, my hope is that this research will gain a depth not permitted by a less reflective attitude towards the archive. Your decisions will affect its possibilities and you may choose, at any time, to add your own thoughts by "clicking" the notebook in the upper left corner, or peruse the selected metaphors that flood Sumas Lake by "clicking" the upper right corner.

Tony Hiss writes that "whatever we experience in a place is both a serious environmental issue and a deeply personal one." My proximity to my materials has been influenced considerably by the fact that this history is directly connected to my own history, that the territory that is defamiliarized by the documents of the past is viewed in the context of a familiar, though rapidly changing, present environment. A rereading of currently available materials in a new, flexible way expands my admittedly local awareness and provides a basis for future work. In one translation, *Sumas* from *sum-ah* means "big opening" in recognition of its historic openings to the Fraser River when in flood. Although metaphor has the dangerous ability to drain individuality even when it allows us to perceive the world in new ways, Sumas Lake may provide a "big opening" to an increasingly sensitive and productive methodological framework.
The visual materials of the photograph and the map are powerful and persuasive representations of reality. Decades before the invention and widespread use of the "miniature camera," several photographers chose to take pictures of Sumas Lake. Many images are family portraits of picnics on the beach expressing a harmonious relationship with sand and water.

But of the photos existing in archives throughout the Fraser Valley, the vast majority document the changes that technological change wrought. Roland Barthes wrote that "The photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents...no writing can give me this certainty." Leonard Frank's panorama of Sumas Lake, photographed during low water season on March 22, 1922, is indeed a powerful ratification of Sumas Lake. However, by excluding people from the image, he depicts the Sumas Lake to be eliminated, not abolished.

The importance of Sumas Lake as an aqueous entity often is linked with the issue of its depth. How much of a lake was it? Harry Quadling's appearance in the Valley Magazine with the hand-forged object that he found on the drained lake bed suggests, quite persuasively, that Sumas Lake was not always shallow.

The photograph does not reproduce reality and as Henri Lefebvre writes, "where there is error or illusion, the image is more likely to secure it and reinforce it than to reveal it." A critical examination of the photographer's point of view is not unfamiliar to people who regularly document their experience with their own cameras. Such analysis is less common when viewing the visual information provided by cartography. Indeed, cartographer's themselves have only recently questioned their own objective methodology and dispassionate motivation. Modern cartographers have aimed to produce a correct verifiable analogue of the terrain with increasingly precise instruments. Many yet adhere to the idea of linear progress: by the application of scientific methods, their production of maps can only get better. Nevertheless, some simple observations are worth repeating: a dynamic, three-dimensional universe will never translate perfectly onto a sheet of paper or computer screen. This criticism is hardly new, but requires constant repetition as we are bombarded with increasingly attractive, clean and bold graphics which empower the map with authority.
The lake between the depth of the lake and theeniable seashore is not established but the prevailing course of the water is a steady body of water. Its depth rising and falling to the season, the changeable weather of the area has made it a tidal lake. According to Native tradition, the Chilliwack River once flowed into Somen Lake before a log jam diverted it towards the Fraser. The Senom bedrockers had purchased their land before the floods of 1873 and 1894 caused the Chilliwack River to realign its course from its northerly journey through the Lougheed, and away from the land of the Saka clan, to flow increasingly westward into Somen Lake. The Chilliwack brought till along with its waters and the lake became shallower. Sufficient to say, no bedrocker wanted the river and the river region was prepared to sue dynamic and gave to define their title, a situation little considered when federal government claimed Somen Lake the natural destination of the Chilliwack River.


One school of geography asserts that the Fraser River used to flow south but through Somen Lake in its ancient courses that emptied into Sultings Bay, supporting a similar claim by the Nuxalk Indians of Washington State. Valerie Cameron's 1979 geography thesis accepts this hypothesis that the Fraser River once flowed through the Somen Valley (during the Holocene), causing her conclusion on the absence of Fraser sediments and the existence of an escarpment to the Fraser, a lobe of Nuxalk gravel in the north of Somen Valley.

Bruce Dixon, Derby Commission, to William Duff, March 13, 1951: Copy of Correspondence.

Valerie Cameron, "The Last Generation: Geographic History of the Somen Valley," Fraser Valley University, 1999.
The following examples of cartography are altered slightly to clarify my own reading of the map as well as those lines which have been distorted by the low resolution of this computer screen. But whether the author intends misrepresentation or not, all maps are distortions. All maps challenge the boundary between the imaginary and the real. The poststructuralist critiques of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have infiltrated geography departments and many adherents read the map not as a "mirror of nature" but as a rhetorical construction regulated by the outmoded roles of positivistic epistemology and produced in specific social contexts. Maps become maps and the task of deconstruction is to decode them and reveal their deceptive naturalness. We depend on the road map but rarely hold up the map and see what the poststructuralist geographer J.B. Harley sees, an "instrument of state policy," an "affirmation of domination over territory," a "mythic geography full of 'points of interest,'" and an affirmation of our love affair with the automobile. The Provincial government's post-drainage map of the lake bottom is all of these: it is also an advertisement selling newly created private real estate.

I. O'YING DISTRICT
LANDS FOR SALE

Citation Continue Deassert

SUMAS DYKING DISTRICT
LANDS FOR SALE

The Provincial government had sold to the inebriated, which was in the railway belt but sold it to the Provincial government for a dollar per acre. The drainage of the lake, "Honest Abe" B.C. Bennett, the popular minister of Agriculture from Chilliwack, who considered the drainage project to be his finest public achievement, sponsored the ad campaign which was extended to the United Kingdom, Holland and Scandinavia. Bennett was isolated in the post-war campaign and results were not welcome to purchase the expensive, $5000 per acre bottom land which only sold briskly when the government dropped the price to $125.00 in 1929.

Read as metaphors, maps can help us perceive past environments in new ways; they not only orient, maps reorient. The British Maps of the 49th Parallel of Latitude (1858-1862) provide an early glimpse at the straight lines claiming British authority on their western possessions. The map employs the approximate toponyms of local usage but does not mark Native settlements in the territory, thus inaugurating the myth of an empty land owned, without question, by the Crown.

Cartographic lines led to more lines which sought and reflected the aspirations of government to control people and property. In reference to the increasing surveillance of aboriginal people, Cole Harris writes, "survey lines and fences were pervasive forms of disciplinary power backed by a property owner, backed by the law and requiring little official supervision."14

New Westminster District
The surveyor Charles Wilson and the enterprising and transport officer, Stanley East Lord, both left journals that describe life and wildlife at Camp Semass which should be understood in the context of this map and their search and control mission. Stanley East Lord recorded that native people did not traverse the area of Semass Lake during the mosquito season, but, on the contrary, sought comfort there.

We knew these mostuncorrovisors to be expected, from Indian experience. I must confess I had a vague suspicion that the panels were to be inserted; yet the query described had stages erected, or rather flanked to inset panels driven like piles into the mud at the bottom of the lake. The panels were made of the heads of animals, and the first appearance of mosquitoes, moths, and other insects, this fact the wily savage has taken advantage of. During their "reign of terror," the Indians never come on shore if they can help it, and if they do, they take good care to sing away interludes out of the canoes before reaching the stage. These stages each with a family of Indians living on them, have a most picturesque appearance. The little fleet of Canoes are moored to the poles and the platforms are reached by a ladder made of twisted cedar bark. Often have I slept on these stages during the savages, to avoid being devoured. If you are restless and roll about in your sleep, you stand a very good chance of finding yourself scoured in the lake.


In 1867, Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, stated to reduce the size of these reserves for the Indians, to the extent of land they could maintain for cultivation and greatly desired for immediate settlement. Remarks in an unpublished document to the public interest.


The original reserve acted off by McCall were reduced from 40,000 acres in the Chilliwack, Semass, and Chinook zones to about 6,000 acres.


The Act of 1860 granted 100 acres of surveyed Crown land to those who would take possession, pay no more than 10 shillings per acre and register title. In 1864, William McCall surveyed Indian Reserves between New Westminster and Harrison River.

According to McCall's correspondence, the oral instructions of James Douglas told him to include all lands claimed by the Indians and, in no case was a reserve to be under 100 acres.


In 1867, Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, stated to reduce the size of these reserves for the Indians, to the extent of land they could maintain for cultivation and greatly desired for immediate settlement. Remarks in an unpublished document to the public interest.
As a body of water subject to overflow in freshet season, Sumas Lake did not encourage intensive settlement around its edges: the metaphor describing Sumas Lake as an impediment thus had a certain resonance even in the early days of immigrant settlement. Efforts to drain the lake intensified after World War I as the Provincial and Dominion governments sought settlement areas for returning soldiers. The propaganda campaign to convince the taxpayers that the drainage project was absolutely and immediately necessary employed the powerful rhetoric of the Dominion's entomological experts. A seal of approval on the decision to eliminate Sumas Lake is a map of the floodlands that intermittently surrounded it on the east and west prairies, revealing just how significant Sumas Lake can look once the lake area becomes identified as a problem. The 1921 map of the Fraser Valley "mosquito problem" was prepared after aerial mosquito surveys, the first in Canada, were conducted by entomologist, Eric Hearle.

Mosquito Problem

Unmentioned in Hearle's map, but revealed in his text (p. 13 see citation), is his finding that the anticipated decline of adult mosquitoes did not ensue as in 1921 despite the record river level. Inching from the size of the Sumas Poolite breeding areas, we might expect the mosquitoes to be overwhelming here. But the most severe problem was in Mission, where Hearle's base of operations was established. Hearle's 1926 report for the Department of Agriculture became gist for his Master of Science degree as well as the basis for the eradication of the mosquitoes, through the drizzling of their breeding places, throughout the Fraser Valley.

Of his educational campaign, Hearle notes that "Until recently, very few people in the affected area had any idea that mosquitoes were troublesome, and the past was suffered as a necessary evil. Like the tide and the weather, it was considered to be unaffected by human intervention...Unfortunately, owing to the intermittent nature of the past, public opinion, which may be very excited during a bad season, fades away before it is brought to a point where definite action results... It was found that a great number of people in the Lower Fraser Valley were ready to evacuate mosquito hives and looked upon their eradication as one of the habits and life histories of mosquitoes. In order to eliminate such an educational campaign was undertaken by the Dominion Entomological Branch in 1919 and 1920. By means of newspaper and magazine articles, lectures, demonstrations, and exhibits at the largest exhibitions and district fairs, popular delusions regarding mosquitoes and their habits were, to some extent, dispelled." (p. 17 see citation)
Historical geographers produce new maps of old places. Nevertheless, the geographic present, the up-to-date accurate base map, is a most persuasive map. Volume Three of the illustrious Historical Atlas of Canada is introduced with a cartographic quote from 19th Century, "Words following words in long succession...can never convey so distinct an idea of the visible forms of the earth as the first glance at a good map." And in the same volume, Robert Galbraith's 1891 and 1912 maps of the Lower Fraser Valley radically reduce the size of Sumas Lake and include the Vedder Canal which was not created until the lake was drained in the 1920's.
Patricia Roy's map of the Lower Fraser Valley railway system in 1914 dissolves the lake altogether, a decade before its actual disappearance.

A reliance on the base map is not a sufficient explanation for this authorial or editorial omission as other maps in the same collection of essays, Alfred Siemen's Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape, do include Sumas Lake.

The maps of Roy and Galois simply are flawed and need not be implicated in an anti-Sumas Lake conspiracy: in fact, they provide an illuminating metaphor which addresses any tendency on my part to navel-gaze. Sumas Lake is a blank even in the minds of many, if not most, Fraser Valley inhabitants. My own mental map of Sumas Lake formed only when I first learned of its existence a few months ago, after living most of my life near the lake bottom.
The Australian historian Lyn Riddett recently asserted that "all communities if left unchallenged, will construct a history based on a social memory which ignores uncomfortable and negative facts." Transient and rapidly growing communities like Abbotsford and Chilliwack in the Fraser Valley often depend on key individuals with long-term roots in the area to maintain these memories. For Oliver Wells, whose grandfather was one of the first White settlers in the area, Sumas Lake is Indian Territory in 1858. The celebrated local writer-farmer imaginatively mapped the region in 1966 as it might have looked in 1858, employing ethnographic fieldnotes and oral history. Credited with the reawakening of Stó:lo weaving in the Fraser Valley, and documentation of what appeared to him to be a disappearing Stó:lo culture, Wells is intent to reinforce the image of a working, named resource base before the inundation of settlers into a mythically empty land. Non-professional efforts at Sumas Lake cartography may disrupt official historical images, reflecting an awareness that the power of the map-maker must not be wielded by experts and servants of state policy alone.
As part of a Canada-wide First Nations movement, the Stó:lo are becoming ever-stronger as an assertive, culturally defined community. The Coqualeetzetza Center, a cultural education training center for the Stó:lo Nation, produced a map of present-day reserves in 1982 as part of their curriculum development. The map employs the persuasive aesthetic of clear, colorful graphics and is mass-produced for distribution. I was particularly moved by this representation of the region because despite its depiction of present landscape, the area appeared far less familiar to me when Indian lands were emphasized. The map excludes Sumas Lake, which is now of considerable current interest to the Sumas Band and the Stó:lo Tribal Council who continue to gather and share historical materials for possible land claim actions as well as for the reinforcement of their cultural identity and long-term ties to the land, water and air of the Fraser Valley.
Narratives that describe the environment provide an alternative type of map, what Margaret Atwood calls "a geography of mind." Different cultures may produce different mental geographies. Historians recently awarded anthropologist Julie Cruikshank the Macdonald Prize in History for the contribution of her recent collaboration, Life Lived Like A Story. Scholars were challenged to accept oral tradition of Yukon women as an indigenous, intact narrative framework whose stories must not be plundered for buried facts, but understood in the context of their use by storytellers to integrate past meanings into the present and navigate in the world. Robin Ridington's work with the Dunne-za of Northern British Columbia also sorts a similar argument and a growing body of scholarship from Africa and Australia that explores oral tradition together with documentary history makes memory culture an increasingly compelling source for Native history.

To benefit from these rich sources, historians must not only reassess an exclusive use of written, document-based narrative, but must view their own stories as part of a process in which they too employ plot and imagination in order to confront temporal chaos in the present. This challenge need not be viewed as a demand for a total relativization of the historian's craft, but as an opportunity to reveal its rhetorical aspects which, indeed, can only make the work more honest. Taking my cue from Sumas Lake, my hope is that an "opening" between the written and oral tradition perhaps may be created by examining metaphor and its use by writers and speakers to make the past coherent.

In recent general histories focusing on the development of a region, on the teleological "evolution of cultural landscapes" or "the growth of a province," Sumas Lake is described implicitly or even explicitly as an impediment or barrier to progress. Such metaphoric language serves many functions: Hayden White, indebted to the tropic categories of Northrop Frye, suggests that dead metaphors give the impression of reality through objective, non-vivid language whereas living metaphor changes the way we look at things. A metaphor like "barrier" may function as a dead metaphor when employed to describe Sumas Lake, whereas "big opening" may appear more vital and thus, more suspect to those who link rhetoric with deception and dead language with reality.
By situating the language of Sumas Lake, or rather, the Sumas Reclamation Project, within their discourse of progress, many historians have played a major role in the subjective disappearance of the lake. The words of older general histories weave into the most recent histories. Margaret Omanson weaves a historical alchemy in her highly influential British Columbia: A History wherein she transforms the Sumas area into "marshy lands." 23 Without mention of a lake. In her recent West Beyond the West, Joanne Barman invokes the same image when she writes, "the Sumas reclamation project drained thirty thousand marshy acres of the fertile Lower Fraser Valley for mixed and dairy farming." 24 Despite the historiographic and moral ease of draining a low, wet, muddy tract of marsh rather than an inland, equally "fertile" body of water, a "marsh" is potentially a very inappropriate metaphor until its negligible depth has been confirmed. 25

Sumas Lake was just outside the geographical area targeted by the 1991 Vancouver and its Region, the recent offering of the UBC Geography department. Yet it does refer to Sumas Lake by name in a paragraph inside Graeme Wynn's essay "The Rise of Vancouver," describing John Oliver's attempts to move B.C.'s economy away from "its heavy dependence upon extractive industries." 26 Along with his description of the improvement of communications, the relocation of UBC to Point Grey, Wynn writes that "To encourage farming, Sumas Lake and the great marshes that surrounded it in the Fraser Valley near Chilliwack were drained..." The positive context of this statement is somewhat jarring given Wynn's passionate prose in his introduction. "As the 'grand line' of development moves ever outward across the Fraser lowlands, and the speculative frenzy of a society that inclines to value land (and place) in purely economic terms spirals onward, under roots of familiarity and attachment to particular landmarks and landscapes are severed by the accelerating cycle of change." 27 But in his chosen spatial and temporal framework in which the growth of the city is central, a place like Sumas Lake is understandably marginal to his regional geography.

In the Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of Cultural Landscapes, edited by Alfred Siemens of UBC's geography department and published in 1998, Siemens writes, "Official action was taken as early as 1878 to drain Sumas Lake, the great impediment to east-west transportation through the Lower mainland, and thus to expose new and valuable land for agriculture as well as to assure agriculture on a year-round basis on the annually flooded lands around the periphery of the lake." 28 But remembering Ronald Huyer's and Patricia Roy's maps within the same book, the "great impediment" metaphor becomes less coherent. Indeed, roads and rails went through the valley prior to the draining of the lake at a time when riverine transportation was also important.
These scholarly histories intended for a general reading audience reflect the intentions of the government to "reclaim" intractable land for agriculture and also set in powerfully entrenched those views. Sumas Lake is drained and drained in policy cause and effect, within the linear logic of print and the spatial expression of a young province. These academics, working from institutions like the University of British Columbia, are in the provocative words of Noam Chomsky, "closely associated with power...they are the ones who are in universities and throughout the whole system constructing, shaping and presenting to us the past as they want it to be seen." 29 Certainly the conscious intention of these writers was not to compete against other ways of knowing, but the result of their work is to empty Sumas Lake in the fast stream of societal development, a compelling, comforting choice for a place described, not in the larger sense of inhabited territory, but within a short temporal and a broad spatial framework.

Two unpublished M.A. theses produced inside the university and reproduced for the Chilliwack Archives, discuss the lake in a more intensive local framework. Of particular note is Donna Cook's 1977 M.A. thesis "Early Settlement in the Chilliwack Valley," written for the UBC's Department of Geography. In it she details the early attempts of settlers to manage rationally the "extremely disorganized drainage pattern" 30 of the valley. Her interest in settlement is focused on White homesteading: although she briefly confirms the existence of several hundred resident Stikine and says someone must study them, she opens her paper with the unfortunate statement that in 1863 there were only a handful of people in the valley. Terrence Arnott's expansive 1976 curiously "The Chilliwack Valley Continuum" mentions the "inordinately friendly" natives who offered environmental advice and were "wisely granted equitable land settlements," and is peppered with comments stressing the "otherness" of the indigenous people like "Who knows why the Sto:lo were such pushovers?" and "What do you expect from people who talk to trees?" 31

Treatments of Sumas Lake in local histories stress the intractability of the land in order to reconstitute the image of what George White in 1848 termed the "engaged pioneers who laid the foundations of new settlements." 32 White's perspective remains alive and well in recent local works such as Lorett Rigg's 1991 Heart of the Fraser Valley, Kris Foulks 1992 "Land Beneath the Lake," and lawyer and author, John Cherrington's 1992 The Fraser Valley: A History. Terms like "biggest," "best," and "worst" are prevalent. Cherrington writes that the Sumas accomplishment was considerable and he justifies the Reclamation Project in terms of the "loamy soil beneath." 33 The pumps that drained the lake were the largest in Canada emptying 300,000 cubic feet per minute enabling the creation of what Cherrington calls the "richest, most efficient dairy, berry and hop growing region of the province." The hundreds of "dead and floating fish" including large sturgeon on the lake bottom becomes nothing more than a "unique sight." And the rhetorical topper is, as per usual, the mosquitoes. "Even the mosquitoes which had so tormented the Royal engineer survey parties in earlier days all but vanished from the dry prairie."
But written narratives are not devoid of positive metaphors for the lake, and may
arise particularly when the spatial framework contracts to an individual perspective or
expands to a more global environmental awareness. A published memoir of "Sumas
Prairie - A Mosaic of Memories," by Barbara Beldam reflects nostalgically on her
personal experience of life near Sumas Lake. Her Grandfather Bowman came to B.C. as a
geological surveyor and remained on the Sumas Prairies to farm. Barbara was born in
this area in 1904 and remembers her childhood as deeply satisfying and "a time of real
security" until the arrival of the B.C. Electric Railway in 1911, and its passengers who
came to hunt at Sumas Lake, brought the first major change. 24 Settlers lived on the
numerous ridges that surrounded the lake, protected from flood on land no one could
take from them. Barbara and her sister roamed freely by horseback "sitting backwards
or forwards or standing up," picked wild strawberries, collected buckets of wild
hazelnuts and hunted for ducks and pheasants for the family table. If the mosquito
season was bad, "my sister and I wore long black stockings lined with paper." But then
"the dragon flies came and that meant the beginning of the end for the mosquitoes. How
I loved them and how beautiful I thought they were. I still think so."

By focusing on the seasons and the totality of experience, the mosquito
becomes an integral part of the lake environment. Ecologists who view Sumas
Lake as an ecosystem underscores a similar awareness: mosquitoes attract and
sustain other forms of life. An interdisciplinary narrative written from a
conscious environmentalist stance provides a critical and persuasive perspective
on the man/lake relationship. Barry Leach, a retired college professor of
Environmental Science and key figure in the establishment of the Reifel
Migratory Bird Sanctuary, offers a passionate and well-researched natural history
of the Fraser Delta in Waterfowl On A Pacific Estuary, produced by the Provincial
Museum. Leach, a British-born naturalist himself, follows in the footsteps and
studies in the notebooks of the naturalists Stanley Keast Lord 25 and the
world-renowned Allan Brooks, 26 both of whom spent considerable time studying
and shooting the waterfowl around Sumas Lake. Although the waterfowl was on
the decline with little aid from British Columbia's lax conservation laws, 27 Leach
asserts that the grazing geese of the Fraser Valley lost their last remaining
unharmed habitat after the lake was drained.

Our written historical narratives undoubtedly do many things. In
one important respect, our stories give meaning and context to place and
that continuum may sustain us though we desensitize the sensory realm,
fill our ears with traffic noise and reduce time to money. The equation of
economic and industrial development with progress is no longer so simple
to formulate and the telological tendencies of the historian must be open
to moral and spiritual growth as well as economic development. To open
our ears and eyes to the narratives of oral tradition is to understand
"where is here" with the mental maps of the people who first gave the
Fraser Valley human shape.
A significant generalization is asserted by scholars who study oral culture in North America and Australia. While written narrative tends to rely on time to talk about events in space, oral traditions tend to employ the toponyms of space to talk about events in time.38

Flood and local topography figure prominently in the traditional stories of the Sumas and Chilliwack Indians, an oral culture that did not disappear despite devastating epidemics. The stories also survived in the minds of Native people selected for indoctrination by the Methodist missionaries such as the Reverend C. M. Tate who founded the Coqualeetza ('place of cleansing') school for Native education in 1886. Dan Milo, born Siik-kwih-LAH-Ikah in 1857 was one of the first students of Coqualeetza. A well-traveled historian of his people, Milo recounted stories of origin and of the flood in Halkomelem and English to the writer-farmer Oliver Wells in 1964, each an archetypal story that may be told in different ways by different narrators. Both stories employ the toponyms of local places, imbuing the Sumas area with meaning beyond its geography. Although the chronology is not specific, Milo uses space and spatial metaphor to talk about events in time. Stories give the landscape meaning and the toponyms themselves act as big metaphors, allowing a simple place name to contain events of the past and cultural knowledge.

ORIGIN STORY

Well there was a boy from Kilgard. In those days they used to call that place Semath. That means Sumsa. Well, that one boy was left by himself. All his people died. So he went home. And the next morning he made up his mind to come over there and see who was living at Yarrow, where he saw that smoke coming out of a big house where there was a lot of Indians living. When he come there, he went right into the house there. There was just that one girl left, after she had all the bodies put away. So that is the first time he ever saw this girl. So he got acquainted with her. So he got real acquainted, and they married right there. So they stayed together. And that's where the language that the Indians are using started from. They went over to Nicomen, where there was a lot of Indians there. That was the only people that used the language that the Indians are using now, today.

THE FLOOD

Well, when that time come, the flood started. They began to follow that Sums Mountains. The ladies called that mountain A'mfik'ahats. That was the name of the mountains that didn't go out of sight during that flood. Well, they got up to the top of the mountains, and they had a long rope that the Indians used, instead of some kind of a stick and tree, they tie up themselves there. The story said that there's three caves went last from there, that broken off and nobody knows where they went to.

For so many days they went up there; then the water began to come down. They got down, about halfway down, to the lower half. They stopped in a place, and there's a cave inside the mountains. So they stay there, right there, to be dry. And they had that long rope coiled up inside the cave. And they stayed there; those people, stayed right there. They could see the lower land was dry; the grass begins to get green. Then they began to come down, and that long rope and other stuffs that they had there, that's left there. Anybody can see that end of rope inside the cave. Whenever will see it, it will be either good land or bad land, whoever will see the end of rope and the stuff that's left in there. And then they began to come down. They got down there, and the place was all dry.

Well, the story is that's why our language changes. The old Halkomelem language, what the White man calls Chilliwack, that all died out, and they began the language that we see today. Halkomelem. That's the end of that story.
Local animals, fish, and even the mosquito are given meaningful through story. Norman Lerman collected stories in 1950-51 and presented them in his unpublishe\" Lower Fraser Indian Folktales.\" Gus Comromoda, an elder of the Sumas Band, narrated this Mosquito story for Lerman, another variation on a plot similar to mosquito stories told by the Alaskan Tlingits, the Kwakiutl, and Tsimshian.39

Mosquito Story

MOSQUITO I (SUMAS LAKE)

A bunch of young people, including a couple of Humpback Salmon, went to the beach and sat at Sumas Lame to go swimming. They took a bunch of a couple of fish. When they ate, they took the dried fish, out them up and divided it between them. When they divided the fish, they set the tail part of the fish to Humpy. The tail is the hardest part of the salmon. Humpy started hollering for the giant - sakti. Humpy didn't mean any harm. The giant wasn't very far away that day and he heard the hollering. Sakti ran to his home and got his big basket. His basket was supposed to have been made of snakes and frogs woven together. When the giant got there, he put Humpy in the basket first. (He was sure to have him, anyways.) When the giant put someone else in, Humpy kept climbing up and getting to the top again. When the giant was on his way home, he happened to pass a limb that was a little low, and Humpy got a hold of it. The giant just stopped and didn't think the basket would catch the tree, but little Humpy got out. When the giant got to the camp, he told his children, "Oh! I've got something extra special for you today." He started taking the children out one by one. He was looking for Humpy, but Humpy was gone. When he got to thinking about it, he remembered bumping that limb and thought that that must have been when Humpy got out. When the giant got back to the beach again, Humpy was quite a way out in the water. The giant picked up rocks, threw them at Humpy, and broke his paddle. Everyday the giant would break Humpy's paddle, he'd get another one. Humpy's last paddle was one with a lot of knot holes in it. The giant couldn't break that one because the rocks just went through the knot holes. The giant gave it up and went home.

When the giant got home, he built a fire in a great big pit and a rock in the fire got hot. (That's the way they used to do their cooking.) Before he had gone to chase Humpy, he instructed his children to put pitch on the other children's eyes and behind the knees of the young people so they couldn't run away, or see. When the giant's children were putting on the pitch, the other children closed their eyes tightly so the pitch couldn't affect their eyes and they could open them again. When the rock was ready, they were all sitting around and the giant started doing the Feast Dance. They let him dance until he got worked up and wasn't expecting anything. When he got close to his fire, the bigger boys and girls shoved him into it. They showed him in there, put in more dried wood and burned him. When he was burning, the giant said, "I won't be hitting or scaring anybody else. The children said, "We'll not destroy you altogether. We'll have something to remember you by." The leader of the bigger boys said to the sparks that were going up, "You'll be mosquitoes." He said to the bigger sparks, "You'll be sandflies." That's it.

Continue

more →

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A version of the Mosquito story is told by Sophie Joe (better known as Dolly Felix), an Elder who works with the Coqualeetza Elders Group, and is edited for publication by La Verne Adams in a booklet produced by the Coqualeetza Education Training Centre for use in elementary classes. Felix makes the giant female and describes the transgression of the children as not failing to share but staying out late without permission, similarly reinforcing and contextualizing cultural expectations and values. Although few of the Sumas elders speak Halkomelem and language education is an ongoing concern, such stories continue to be narrated orally in English at community gatherings.

For the Sto:lo that lived with Sumas Lake, the mosquitoes were one part of a whole in which story imparted meaning to even the smallest, most troublesome member. The mosquito also was revered as a clever warrior; mosquito in Halkomelem is Kwesel, a title that was carried by the earliest known Sumas chief renowned for his quick “in and out” style of attack on enemy villages. The name now is held by the current chief of the Sumas Band. Places and animals contain story and these words imbue the external world with meaning. As tangible reference points, mosquitoes, mountains, and lakes may act as rhetorical devices that persuade members of a community to accept its values and standards. To examine oral tradition is to open up an awareness that the destruction of the lake is linked to a destruction of sacred texts and cultural knowledge. Words and place matter; the library is all around us if we know how to see and to listen. My own limited temporal framework of research may prevent more than a superficial study of Sumas area oral tradition because an understanding of living tradition requires, amongst other commitments, the development of personal relationships with narrators. Nevertheless, I need not neglect the existing stories documented by other researchers.
III

METAHORS OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral history is a collaborative endeavor but it is not oral tradition. Certainly in the sphere of academic history, the use of oral history has more persuasive power because this methodology is comparatively established. Unlike oral tradition which, by the definition of Jan Vansina, is not contemporary because it is "passed mouth to mouth for a period beyond the lifetime of the informants," oral history consists of the "reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants." 43 Since the 1960's, oral history has garnered support from social historians like Paul Thompson who call for the democratization of history and proclaim the ability of oral history to give expression to the unprivileged and defeated members of society. 44 Ethnic historians claim that ethnic oral history can emancipate minorities from colonized history. The appeal of oral testimony to feminist historians, such as Joy Parr, lies partly in the possibility that it can validate the voices of women, previously silent in traditional historical accounts. 45 Following these trends of the wider world, several oral history projects were undertaken throughout the Fraser Valley in the past thirty years.

People who remember Sumas Lake are still alive, but before I began my own intensive oral history project, I thought I could benefit by listening to previous collaborations. Memories of Sumas Lake exist on tape in archives in the Fraser Valley and in Victoria. Some tapes have never been transcribed and others are retained partly as an attempt to make oral history more accurate so that meticulous reviewers may verify the findings of published materials. Researchers rarely do the concept of listening to hours of often rambling conversations daunting. But if the tape archive is viewed as a realm of possibility where we listen not merely as objective puzzle-solvers but as moral beings with a potential role to play in making the past coherent for present community, the experience is transformed. I slowly began to realize that although few facts were confirmed as I listened, my questions were altered profoundly. The metaphors for Sumas Lake multiplied: images flooded dry paper documents and the voices stayed with me long after I stopped the tape.

Edith Lassen (born 1910), interviewed by Janide Viessmann, Sept. 10, 1987

In the process, oral history often leads one back to paper documents.

George Ferguson (current mayor of Abbotsford) interviewed by Janide Viessmann, Aug. 24, 1987

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No oral history project has focused exclusively on Sumas Lake, but the question, "What do you remember about Sumas Lake?" anchors the interviews of many interviews with Sumas community elders. The Matsqui Sumas Abbotsford Museum Society and the Chilliwack Museum Society have sponsored several of these collaborations with the help of government monies, the cooperation of White homesteaders and to a much lesser degree, the Native elders of the area. Other typical questions are "how did people help each other out in times of trouble?" and "what do you remember about the ice-storms and the floods?" The tone of the interviewer is typically empathetic, rarely challenging and often leading. The interviews attempt a reconstruction of the hardships and joys of past community life while validating and celebrating the efforts of the early pioneers who forged the new world.

As the spatial framework shrinks to local concerns, oral history provides insights that are not available in written records. In particular, the use and experience of the commons of Sumas Lake did not come to my attention until I heard Ed Kelly and Charlie Power talk about it on tape. Sumas Lake when it was not in freshet, served as common grazing lands for the livestock of both Natives and non-Natives and as a place to harvest natural fodder. These cattle farmers helped to form a vocal minority of Sumas residents that opposed any Sumas reclamation because they correctly anticipated that once the lake was gone and the lands sold, their cattle would be forbidden on the natural grasslands that traditionally were open to them in the low water season. Ed Kelly, born in 1900 on the Sumas Indian Reserve, was interviewed by Janette Vienneau of the M.S.A. Society in 1983 at his home and barbershop near the Tzockan Reserve near Sardis. Charlie Power, also born in 1900, was interviewed by Neil Granger of the Chilliwack Museum Society in 1983.

Few interviews with Native elders have been produced by the local Museum societies, and Edward Kelly's account here is privileged as a glimpse at community life from a Súcile perspective. Janette Vienneau, the interviewer, was unable to transcribe local place names like "Coombette" or "Häkonson" words, so her interpretive powers were limited to some extent. Thoughts about the Súcile are not high on the priority list of questions or answers in many interviews with the White settlers and similarly, questions concerning problematic Native-White relations are rarely posed to Native people in any of the available oral sources.

The Sumas Band is currently documenting its own oral histories regarding the lake. Doing oral history is a process of redefining self as well as reconstructing past experience; it is perhaps instructive as an indication of the complexity of community memory to note that the contemporary baseline of self-awareness must incorporate the Sumas Band's controversial recent proposal to build a toxic waste incinerator on their Klgard Reserve where they have owned and operated a brick factory since 1979. There is no simple recourse to the most recent "noble savage" stereotype, the "Indian as environmentalist," in which to frame a native versus newcomer scenario.
Edward George Kelly was born at Kilgord in 1906 and speaks of his family's experiences and use of the land to handle Viscountess of the Mission/Folin/Ashford Museum in 1987 at his home and barbershop near Vedder Crossing by the Trans-Canada Reserve.

1. Did you have a garden on your property?
   K. Yes, at Kilgord sh ah my dad used to have that before the Great Northern came through Kilgord sh ah my dad had sh ah an orchard and garden just about where the mill the mill.
   1. Railroads used to pass through?
   K. sh, sh, yes
   1. Oh were they the seed do you know?
   K. The seed.
   1. The seed for their, to plant their garden?
   K. Oh, I don't remember that... no, no.
   1. Did he sell any of the products?
   K. No.
   1. So it was for the family?
   K. Yes.
   1. Your sh what kind of an orchard did he have?
   K. He had apples, cherries... that's about what I can remember.
   1. Did your mom do any canning?
   K. Yes, mother did a lot of canning, sh ah my dad was hunting ducks, mother canned ducks, mother canned preserves, mother canned all kinds of fruits canned...
   1. So what other things did she can?
   K. My dad, sh ah my mother, sh ah canned deer meat, my dad did a lot of hunting and sh ah a lot of fishing and mother canned the fish for the family and the fish were caught in the Sumas Lake.
   1. What kind of fish?
   K. Oh there in the Sumas Lake you have sturgeon and various types of salmon, and trout... trout... trout.
   1. So these would be the three kinds your mom would can?

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K. And in those days there was no such thing as a sh ah sh seasons for hunting, just open seasons all yourround that's in the early days.

1. For whenever you needed.
   K. Just for the need. That's another thing too sh ah speaking of whatever used it... ah the people in those days there was no such thing as sports... hunting, so such thing as sports hunting game sh ah we were taught whenever we're out mother would say "now kids we need a salmon for supper" and sh ah sh ah go out to the pinelands and sh ah sh ah plant the most looking salmon and this is the part and sheet sh 300 led... and we'd go back to the pinelands and we'd ah heat the nice fresh looking one again 'til wherever we caught it we'd bring that home and the old folks needed to tell us "now don't play with the salmon fish, that's our source of food our livelihood, don't waste, just take out what you absolutely need."

1. So your dad did a lot of deer hunting.
   K. Yes, a lot of deer hunting, duck hunting.
   1. Tell me the story about the Vancouver hunter.
   K. This is when the B.C. Electric Railway was opening from Vancouver to Chilliwack sh... the Vancouver hunter used to come up to Sumas Lake and ah then they would ah were returning home back to Vancouver they would have the ducks hugging over their shoulders riding the B.C. Electric train back home to Vancouver.
   1. How many let's say, each person, would they bring... how many ducks?
   K. They would have at least a dozen ducks because the ducks were plentiful yah, ducks are plentiful.

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1. Did you do any canoe-hunting?
   K. Oh in these days the lessons are very mild out a lot of rowers and the the Sumas Lake was to Summary near to the port where houses could ah ah traveling where the tramates and the hoteliers over Sumas Lake and sh also the sh... fisher River used to bound over the water and sh ah ah a group of no boys one sid... smarted up by the name of Gus Comander he was very good to the kids he was always with us and we'd start from Kilgord in the evening and the small group then to the big slough and the big slough emptied into Sumas Lake sh... it's called Penticton here where the sloughs are ah there ah and so the way back ah Gus Comander would yell 'It's time to go home!' So we'd start for home and each word blew so hard it it very easy getting home because we'd just put out our staves for sails, sail back home again on the sea.

1. That must've been fun.
   K. Yes, really fun.
   1. What else did this Mr. Gus Commander do?
   K. He worked on the trestle staff at Kilgord.
   1. And you had mentioned something about after his wife died.
   K. Oh, after his wife died and sh and Gus Commander sh ah gave us his the as our Citizens we went there a lot of times there playing games and the drones the drones were held there and sh and then the the Thursday night we would meet around 'til about ah 11 o'clock or something like that and no one would be around so we'd all go home and probably one o'clock in the morning the the security would be mu... and they always came to our home first cause I furnished the music I used to play the violin for the drones and if I was home they would have a drone so whenever they when they when we're up then it woke one of the other boys up and then all the rest of kids up and then we would down all night my 'til 10 o'clock in the morning and then ah when 'til evening and if some of the people stay on the beach and if I don't remember on my dad, no... and then about 4 o'clock they'd all come to the cottage and the drones would start again in so... ah 11 o'clock ah 'til until sometime his after morning then everyone goes home.

1. So you were the main entertainers.
   K. I was at the time and then whenever I had to sh ah have the moon sh ah my mother used to make over she played the mouth organ and sh'd have a guitar on her lap strumming the guitar while she was playing vocals organ this is by herself you see 'til I come built then to resume the playing again.
A relationship to the Sumas Lake may be affected not only by sex, but by gender or age. Oral history provides a window to these differences that diaries and memoirs may not document. Myrtle Ferguson's mother spent a considerable amount of time on chores inside the Bellevue house by the lake, all year round. Myrtle would visit in the summer and reflect, seventy years later, on the loss of an interior "home and a 'view'" when the lake was drained. This experience is stark contrast to the experience of Barbara Bowman Homestay, whose hunting and horseback riding enabled close and constant contact with the outdoors. Ferguson was interviewed by Neil Granger of the Chilliwack Museum Society in 1983.

Sumsa: Myrtle Ferguson

Sumas Lake as an area of limitless abundance is one of the more prevalent of the descriptions that surface in the interviews with the men. David Mathers (born 1896 and arrived at Sumas in 1912) was interviewed by past curator of the M.S.A. Museum Society, Diane Kelly, in 1971. His granddaughter, Lynne Wright, currently works at the museum and informed me one Friday afternoon in March that her Grandfather Mathers, "was full of blarney and liked to make things more interesting."

| Revenir: David Mathers | Transcript
|------------------------|-------------

Diane Kelly: Well, let's go back a little bit, Sumas Lake was drained in 1922. Do you remember this?

Mathers: Oh, I remember that all right.

D.K.: Can you tell us something about how they drained it? The men who worked on it?

Mathers: Yes, because I had a job delivering some of them pure alcohol to drink. The men that was running the machines.

D.K.: Pure alcohol?

Mathers: Yeah, it was nothing else that was strong enough for them. (laughter)

D.K.: I see. Do you remember hunting on the lake, did you hunt birds on the lake? Ducks?

Mathers: There was a lot of fish, then.

D.K.: You fished on the lake?

Mathers: Yeah. Fishing was not fishing, it was just going down and loading the boat.

D.K.: You just tied your boat up and threw your line in and you couldn't pull them out fast enough.

D.K.: I see. You remember the large flocks of ducks that came in?

Mathers: Oh yes, oh yes. You couldn't go without ducks. It wasn't really sport either you just went down and killed them.

Continue
But despite our ability to hear and analyze these memories, oral history has not made the transmission of oral information any less subjective or ethnically problematic. Both interviewer and interviewee create the spatial and temporal boundaries as well as the content of the oral record. Nevertheless, oral history, in published form, generally is read not heard and the authors of transcribed texts must shape this material. They do not, indeed, can not reveal completely their active role in eliciting, mediating and editing the oral document. Thus some historians, such as Patrick Hagopian, contend that the technique of oral history may be tamed by the abuse of rhetoric. The writer, without revealing her role in the creation of the record, may freely reinforce her own arguments with the rhetorical force of the participant's 'raw' and compelling testimony, seemingly innocent of this person's ideological agenda.

One popular and potentially abusive editorial strategy, familiar to those who probe documents, is to delete the questions from the final text. Sound Heritage, a project of the Sound and Moving Image Division of the Provincial Archives has published several books of oral history including Imbert Orchard's 1982 Floodland and Forest: Memories of the Chilliwack Valley, in which Orchard weaves testimonies, gathered in 1963 for a CBC Radio series, with documentary research and photographs to reconstruct the valley as it was known in earlier times. Oral information is central rather than supplemental for Orchard and he creates a collage of memory by arranging tape excerpts by theme. His materials are archived in Victoria and it will be interesting to check the quality of his tape after thirty years as well as his questions.

Bird Sanctuary: Win Fadden

Beautiful Right: Joy Starr

Common Lands: Fred Zink

There was between ten and twelve thousand acres of lake, and there was no depth to it. When it wasn't in freshet I don't think there would be an average depth of three feet, hardly---maybe four. There was always fish in it. There was some quite large sturgeon taken out of Sumas Lake when they drained it. In the fall it was a sanctuary for ducks; there'd be ducks on there by the million, and they would come in to feed in the marshes around the edge of the lake at night; and for an hour at dusk, why, a good shot would get anywhere from 20 to 40 ducks in an evening, just shooting them in fligh. That has all been more or less forgotten about.

Win Fadden was born in the early 1890's, son of William Fadden, brother of Joy Starr, interviewed in 1963 by Imbert Orchard.
I would say that there was five or six thousand acres that was marginal land that didn't belong to anybody. It was still government land; and that was still an attraction when we moved here. We used the marginal lands of the lake to cut hay or run a bunch of young cattle for pasturing. They had a kind of gentleman's agreement. If a man went out and cut a swath around a certain tract of land, why, that was his hay. And nobody would infringe on his rights to that hay. Of course, it wasn't only the people that lived right close to the lake bed that used the marginal land, especially for pasture. There were people even as far away as the other side of Chilliwack that used to drive cattle down in the early spring and pasture them there. The water, as it came up, drove the cattle back, and they would take them home when they got up close to the farms. When the water went down, they would bring them back down again to pasture until their feeding time in the winter. So that benefitted a lot of people.

Fred Zink (1896-1979) whose father, Jacob Zink, came from Germany and eventually bought a farm in the Lower Sumas area. Interviewed in 1963 by Imbert Orchard.

The high water was very pleasant to play around and swim in, and it was a beautiful sight. Wild roses used to bloom just at the top of the water. And these were the very lovely perfume that came from them as the water came up to them - a sight that was pretty, even though it was disastrous. We made many rafts in those days, as well as using the wooden tubs to sail in. Children had a good time playing in the high water till the mosquitoes came; then you didn't play very much.

Mrs. Joy Starr, born in the 1890's, daughter of William Fadden of Upper Sumas, interviewed in 1963 by Imbert Orchard.
Professional ethnographers and anthropologists have collected a substantial body of information about Sto:lo use of Sumas Lake. Unquestionably their records are extremely valuable; nevertheless, historians need to be able to contextualize interactions with "informants," who often are credited only by their initials in the main texts of older ethnographies, such as those by Wilson Duff. Fieldnotes provide context for the exchange and if they are available, they enrich the knowledge offered considerably.

On a July afternoon in 1950, informant Robert Joe told anthropologist Wilson Duff about the past existence of a large sturgeon weir that crossed the Sumas River at the point where the river left the lake at a width of 100 yards and a depth of up to 20 feet. The weir was owned by the Sumas but they allowed outsiders to use it: after catching what sturgeon they wanted, they opened the weir.

According to Sumas Band members, the remaining Sumas Reserve was renamed Kilgard, derived from Kw'delw'qame, meaning "fish heads sticking up," in recognition of the trapped sturgeon that were left exposed on the lake bottom. In an interview with Gordon Mobs in 1985, elder Edna Douglas stated that live sturgeon were being ploughed up by the farmers as late as the late 1950's, knowledge that still troubles her.

From Gordon Mobs,
"Sumas Lake Review of Fisherman & Native Use," for Roy Mobs,
Sto:lo Tribal Council, 1987
Oral history may highlight the creative, interactive and empathetic components of oral scholarship, but only if the historian self-consciously attempts to reveal the process by which the oral record was made. Post-structural ethnography has produced a great deal of self-critical literature on the inherent, but rarely acknowledged, power structures that underlie all interactions between informant and interviewer. Steven Tyler bespeaks those anthropologists who exchange the pen for a tape recorder and steal the last possession of the informant, her voice.46 Alternatively, the pen of literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak condemns the patronizing attitude held towards the informant who is considered incapable of strategizing towards the interviewer.47 Yet few ethnographers or oral historians are ready to submit, as Tyler does, that no representation is better than continued attempts to make more sensitive representations. Some scholars experiment with dialogical models of oral history that dispute monophonic authority and emphasize that culture is relational, existing between subjects in relations of power.48 The dialogue self-reflexively creates and reflects the separation of subjects and forces the oral historian to accept responsibility for the text.

Whether or not these theoretical and moral considerations affect the editorial decisions concerning Oliver Wells' posthumous work, The Chilliwacks and their Neighbors, the book is a fine example of self-conscious rhetorical usage of oral history. The editors, Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway and Wells' daughter, Marjorie Weldon, retain the questions of Oliver Wells as well as the answers and attempt to contextualize the interview in terms of place and time. The interviews gain depth and value as we learn about the Sto:lo interviewees as well as Wells' strategies to reinforce "friendly" relationships between Natives and Newcomers. Wells was a self-taught linguist and researchers from the Sto:lo Tribal Council and scholars like Cole Harris remark on their frustration upon reading the transcripts. Interviews are cut short and pertinent remarks are left unexplored. Nevertheless, the editorial detail and honesty of the book makes it a rich source of knowledge about Sumas Lake. Before it was drained, the lake was a favored location for those Natives who wanted to escape a bad mosquito season. Mr. and Mrs. Kelleher, both elders from Matsqui with Native mothers, described the exodus in an interview with Oliver Wells in 1966.

An Extract From the Monograph

Oliver Wells: The draining of Sumas Lake made a difference in the country, didn't it?

Mrs. Kelleher: Oh, my, yeah. My, we used to have a good time up on that lake, when we had the gas boat, and we'd get a crowd and go way up there to get out of the mosquitoes.

Wells: Do you have any remembrance of the Indian village on Sumas Lake on top of the water? The Boundary Line Survey people, they described this village; and the people would take their canoes, and go out to the village; and they would get rid of all the mosquitoes before they left the land.

Kelleher: No, we never seen one of them. It's a funny thing: we used to come from Matsqui here and go up there and have a good time in them sandbars there. No mosquitoes; and they'd be thick down here.
Certainly oral history may contain factual information. Nevertheless, if oral history is valued as an interactive community process and not strictly as a document to be mined for factual content, these oral “artifacts” have historical value beyond their individual existence on cassette tapes or in published records. The dialogues themselves are historical events as historians and interviewees address the past people can live with. Those oral historians who rely on technology and archival procedures for accurate results may view an emphasis on the rhetorical, aesthetic dimension of the oral record with some anxiety. Nevertheless, as LaCapra notes, the defense of a transparent medium is also a quest for a certain rhetoric “unclouded by emotion, unclouded by images and universalistic in its conceptual or mathematical scope.”

If oral history is understood as a vital component of the rhetorical dimension of history, expanding an historical culture of argument and transforming our own perspectives in the process of our research, we have located it in a position of strength.

Sumas Lake begins to disappear as an objective entity when we meditate on the layers of mediation between past and present consciousness, and threaten to evaporate altogether when we attempt to define it through a metaphorical link with other things. Like the people and the environment it depicts, history is fragile. Nevertheless, as we self-consciously and creatively attempt a critical and empathetic dialogue with our materials, we also begin to give the lake depth. By meditating on the power of rhetoric, our own as well as the rhetoric of our sources, we reveal the creative aspect of the historical process. We also assert that metaphors matter. Metaphors persuade us to accept their way of knowing the lake and we must choose them carefully, Justice McEachern’s recent lamentation in which he described a “vast emptiness” of the Okanagan and Wet’suwet’en territories is a powerful reminder that there is no neutral objective space anymore, mental or physical, past, present or future. Emptiness for whom? Sumas Lake no longer physically exists but as various individuals and community groups seek to make the landscape of the past coherent, the memory of Sumas Lake becomes active both as an instrument and as a goal.

Viewed as an action of representation, cartography is an assertion of spatial power and control, whether created by the state or by individuals and interest groups. The privileged metaphors of written narratives that describe Sumas Lake are often tied to the overall plot of the text in which they reside. When the narrative employs the rhetoric of societal development in the economic sense, the lake is generally a barrier to progress. If, however, we imbue oral tradition with interpretative power, Sumas Lake itself becomes the big metaphor, opening us to an awareness that even the pain of a mosquito bite may have meaning. Thus when Sumas Lake is drained, there is a hole in Sfölo culture as well as the ground. Power resides on both sides of the oral history dialogue and the alternative metaphors for the lake must be portrayed as a joint effort between interviewer and interviewee. But the research process of the historian, even in the archive of official documents, is never a solitary enterprise. History is an ongoing dialogue whereas I transform my materials as they transform me.
Methodology need not be viewed as a closed system of rules, but as a flexible point of departure which expands the possibilities for further research. An examination of the rhetorical aspects of metaphor floods the lake and when the waters recede, we may find enriched soil, relational and irreducible differences and a heightened awareness of the shaping force of language. Although maps, narrative traditions and oral history do not mirror reality, a conscious use of these materials as mediated historical sources may provide an "opening" for my chosen metaphors, allowing them to give meaning to place and the creatures that lived there.