COLLABORATION GEOGRAPHIES:

Native-White Partnerships During the Re-settlement of Ootsa Lake, British Columbia, 1900-52

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COLONIALISM WAS THE FIRST STAGE in the experience of Western modernity for most Aboriginal peoples of the world. Colonial discourses were part of an expanding capitalist and imperialist world system that generated profits for an elite group of Westerners who orchestrated the resettlement of alien territories through ever more complex systems of state administration and industrial production. Europeans brought their own imaginative geography to bear on distant lands as a means of legitimizing and, indeed, promoting the often brutal institution of colonial rule.[1] They viewed their European homeland as the fully modern pinnacle of civilization and most non-European regions as anachronistic, unclaimed, and often uninhabited stretches of territory awaiting settlement and cultivation. Such perceptions motivated settlers to travel thousands of miles in search of new wealth and opportunities.

The successes of colonialism hinged on the establishment of European power in non-Western regions of the globe. Colonialism was therefore attempted in many different places and through many different means.[2] These measures ranged from outright violence and conquest to treaty settlements and codified forms of discrimination. Conversely, colonialism varied according to the forms and intensity of resistance presented by both Aboriginal peoples and the physical environment. In fact, in some areas indigenous societies resisted colonization long enough to trigger alterations in its implementation and socio-cultural

[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[2] Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); see also Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

effects. Recent historical research on British Columbia has stressed precisely this sort of variation in the colonial experience.[3] In effect, the European struggle against distance diluted both cultural and physical colonial power, elevated the effectiveness of Aboriginal resistance, and diversified the social and cultural characteristics of the resultant settler communities.

This article explores the colonization of the region around Ootsa Lake[4] as a way of contributing to recent research on the diversity and complexity of the colonial encounter in British Columbia (Figure 1). Its central argument is that, although European residents and the Cheslatta T'en First Nation maintained a social and geographical distance, certain families established longstanding interethnic collaboration's that continue to play a significant role in regional politics today. On the simplest level, the region's limited resource base and market isolation meant that Whites and the Cheslatta benefited from collaborating with regard to work, information exchange, and trade. At the same time, the colonial administration in Victoria had great difficulty asserting its authority in the region. Consequently, settlers and Aboriginals struggled over the local allocation of power. During this process, some immigrant and indigenous residents found that they were able to enhance economic and social rewards within their own communities by forging collaborative relationships *across* ethnic lines. In turn, these family partnerships weakened – but did not eradicate – the colonial ideal and practice of segregation. The two factions thus created a complex society that simultaneously reproduced and challenged the social and cultural order of colonialism.

I begin by describing evidence that supports the argument that collaboration was significant within the colonial context. I then proceed with an overview of European colonialism in British Columbia, focusing especially on the appropriation of land and the cultural complex that underpinned it. I go on to explain how colonial power

[3] Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997); Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Bruce Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)colonial British Columbia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, 1 (1998): 3-31; Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

[4] The lake's name is pronounced "ewt-sa." The resettlement of the area began in 1900 and can be extended to 1952, when the Aluminum Company of Canada relocated both the Aboriginal and the White communities.

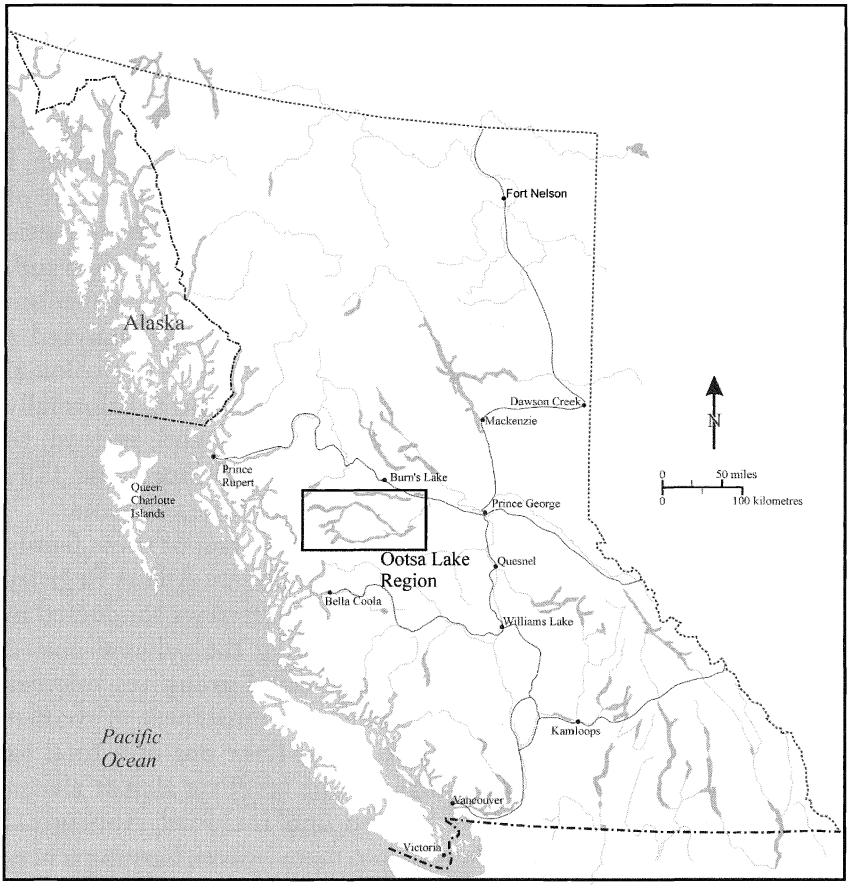

Figure 1: Study Area

was applied unevenly across this vast province, a circumstance that led to various forms of interethnic exchange and resistance among Aboriginal peoples. The next section explores the separate social realms of the indigenous and settler communities in the Ootsa Lake area. I conclude by describing how Cheslatta and White families collaborated to secure social rewards within their own communities and how those collaborations now factor into contemporary debates over land and resources.

METHODOLOGY: IS COLLABORATION SIGNIFICANT?

Interethnic collaborations were part of the colonial experience in British Columbia. Cole Harris has illustrated how the letters and actions of sympathetic missionaries, reserve commissioners, Indian

agents, and settlers constitute a discourse of Aboriginal advocacy.[5] However, he also points out that this discourse promoted a politics of Aboriginal assimilation and, consequently, did little to stem the process of land appropriation. Indeed, it is questionable whether collaboration significantly altered the implementation of colonialism. I argue that family collaborations at Ootsa Lake were a key feature of regional culture because they enabled Aboriginals and Whites – particularly Aboriginal and White men – to establish social prestige and, in some cases, to contest the spatial segregation upon which colonialism depended. Moreover, these colonial partnerships later catalyzed a series of interethnic alliances that now shape the region's postcolonial politics.[6] These alliances prompted the Cheslatta band to informally withdraw from the BC treaty settlement process and, instead, to pursue joint-venture projects (including the province's first fully integrated rural health care centre) with local White residents.

Evidence for the significance and special character of these family partnerships comes from a content analysis of Indian Affairs Registry Files (Stuart Lake Agency) and thirty-nine interviews conducted in the late 1990s with residents who lived during the colonial period (1900-52). The analysis of Indian affairs record group 10, volumes 1282 (1887–1911) and 7538 (1911–42), indicated 11 instances of conflict and eight counts of collaboration at Ootsa Lake out of a total 94 documents that mentioned the region. The conflicts almost always centred on the appropriation of land and included Aboriginal complaints that settlers were hunting too many beaver, burning fences that enclosed their hay meadows, and stealing logs to build houses. The collaborations invariably occurred between men who were engaged in trade, labour, and information exchange. Examples include two letters from settlers requesting that Aboriginal leaders be able to preempt land (both were denied) as well as reports indicating that Aboriginal and White men had established stable trading partnerships through which cash, food, veterinary assistance, and luxury items (such as gramophones) were exchanged. These findings are not unique to the Ootsa Lake region; indeed, Harris found many episodes of collaboration during the colonial period.

The interviews provide a clearer picture of how these family collaborations challenged the binary oppositions upon which

[5] Harris, *Making Native Space*.

[6] Soren Larsen, "Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality through Interethnic Alliances: The Case of the Cheslatta T'en in Northern British Columbia," *Human Organization* 62, 1 (2003): 74–84.

colonialism depended. I conducted structured interviews with 22 settlers and 17 of the Cheslatta band's 19 elders. Although a high percentage of settlers and Aboriginals described conflicts with the *category* of "other," relatively few identified conflicts with specific families or individuals. Thirteen Cheslatta interviewees (76 per cent) complained of conflicts with "White people" or the "White man," whereas only four (24 per cent) identified specific individuals with whom they fought. Twelve settlers (55 per cent) indicated conflicts with "Indians" or the Cheslatta people, while eight (36 per cent) made reference to problems with individual families. One might question these data on the grounds that memory erodes details (i.e., the names of individuals or families) while promoting generalizations (i.e., categories of people). However, an extremely high percentage of interviewees mentioned collaborations with *specific* families. Fourteen Cheslatta (82 per cent) recalled particular partnerships with White individuals by name, whereas eighteen settlers (82 per cent) remembered collaborations with specific Cheslatta people. Although Aboriginal and White women did identify such partnerships, all interviewees indicated that the collaborations occurred between men involved in the pursuit of trade, information exchange, and labour.[7] Interviewees also revealed that most of these collaborations (88 per cent) were stable and exclusive associations between two male heads of family.

In part, the interviewees were able to recall the names of their collaborators because those partnerships have endured and now form the basis of interethnic political alliances.[8] As I discuss later in this article, that persistence alone is one indication of the significance of such collaboration. At the same time, these interview data show that, during the colonial period, Ootsa Lake residents recognized partners as a distinct category of social relationship that challenged the colonial construction of otherness. This situation created a complex regional culture. An Aboriginal man would often recognize the boundaries of his White partner's trapline while dismissing those of "White people" in general. While incoming settlers asked the provincial government to relocate Aboriginal "trespassers" to reserves, collaborating families often lived in close proximity to one another and refused to relocate even under provincial orders. Consequently, the data show

[7] Seven of the seventeen Aboriginal interviewees were women; ten of the twenty-two White interviewees were women.

[8] Larsen, "Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality."

that collaborations between the male heads of family were significant during the colonial period because, in specific cases, they contested the practice of segregation. In order to understand this situation, it is first necessary to examine European colonialism in British Columbia and, in particular, the resettlement and appropriation of Aboriginal land at Ootsa Lake.

COLONIALISM AND THE CONTROL OF LAND

The seizure of indigenous territory was the central concern of colonialism in British Columbia.[9] Unlike colonized peoples in Africa, South America, and Asia, most Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia were not used as free labour but, rather, were dispatched to small, isolated reserves.[10] Immigrants came to control land and resources through a variety of intentional and unintentional means. These included violence, legally codified forms of discrimination, and depopulation by smallpox. I would like to concentrate on the two aspects of colonial intervention most essential for the establishment of European authority and the appropriation of Aboriginal land: (1) a form of colonial consciousness known as the frontier myth and (2) state legislation regarding settlement and Indian reserves.

Developed and codified long before the colonization of British Columbia, the frontier myth underpinned the imposition of a settler society at the expense of the region's Aboriginal residents. As Edward Said has argued, European administrators and settlers in colonial lands operated under an imaginative geography in which peripheral regions such as British Columbia were seen as wild and unclaimed territories awaiting the civilizing effects of settlement and cultivation.[11] Confident in the moral superiority of their task, immigrants were motivated by their own utopian visions of the future rewards to be gained from civilizing a rough and unruly land. In these new settings,

[9] Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990); Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); Harris, *Resettlement*; Harris, *Making Native Space*.

[10] In *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1848–1930*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, New Star Books, 1996), Rolf Knight shows that many Aboriginal people did in fact participate in the workforce as wage laborers. Nevertheless, the central focus of the settler society in British Columbia was the appropriation of land, not the creation of an indigenous labour pool.

[11] Said, *Orientalism*.

history was rendered invisible, with Aboriginal peoples consigned to a timeless, premodern past.[12]

In a case study of Williams Lake, a logging town in the province's central interior, Elizabeth Furniss has identified the general themes and practices of the frontier myth. Central to the myth is the concept and practice of segregation, which eventually created what David Sibley has called "geographies of exclusion."[13] In other words, the frontier myth constructed social and physical distance between pioneer-protagonists and the Aboriginal "other." Furniss's case study of Williams Lake illustrates precisely how the myth subordinated Aboriginal people through the institutional forms of the built environment (museums, reserve housing, and public spaces), racial stereotypes, the metaphors and jokes of everyday conversation, and outright discrimination. In this way, it constituted the symbolic force behind the exploration, conquest, and resettlement of indigenous lands in British Columbia.[14]

Building on the implicit assumptions of the frontier myth, colonial land legislation – the second major component of colonial discourse in British Columbia – consistently ignored the existence of Aboriginal title,[15] confined Aboriginal peoples to reserves, and opened their traditional territories to European ownership. The Land Ordinance Act, 1861, for example, enabled settlers to stake 160-acre parcels, build homesteads, harvest resources, and bring the land into capitalist markets. In exchange, the settler had only to swear allegiance to the British Crown, pay a nominal filing fee, and "improve" the land with buildings and fences. Backed by legislation, settlers actively deterritorialized indigenous landscapes and then transformed them physically, legally, and economically into parcels of private property whose resources were made available to global markets. Predictably, setters and Aboriginals came into conflict during this process. When they did, the government tried to enforce its will through a network of Indian agents, locally appointed justices of the peace, and British common law courts and commissions that Aboriginals neither appreciated nor understood.

[12] Harris, *Resettlement*, 225-6.

[13] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[14] See also Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992).

[15] The phrase "Aboriginal title" refers to the indigenous ownership and occupancy of territory prior to European colonization. See also Harris, *Making Native Space*; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*.

After British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871, representatives from the provincial and federal governments squabbled bitterly over Aboriginal land policy.[16] The eventual result, finalized in the 1920s, was a patchwork of small, marginal reserves that effectively removed Aboriginal peoples from the settlers' world. Amendments to the 1876 Indian Act, for instance, outlawed potlatches, forced Aboriginal children to attend residential schools, and forbade indigenous peoples to pursue Aboriginal title in court. Despite promises to the contrary, the British Columbia Indian Lands Settlement Act, 1920, allowed for substantial reductions, or "cut-offs," of existing reserves without the consent of Aboriginal occupants. Such legislation actually created conditions of segregation and dependency, thereby *transforming* Aboriginal societies in accordance with colonial stereotypes.[17]

THE LIMITS TO COLONIAL AUTHORITY

In practice, however, colonialism was inherently partial. On the legislative side, the region was simply too vast and the apparatus of government too far-flung for effective enforcement and surveillance. As historian Bruce Stadfeld has noted: "Rather then being an omnipresent force of Native oppression, the long arm of the government was actually quite short in most places, leaving settlers frustrated with the paucity of government response."[18] Stadfeld gives examples of how Aboriginal peoples were able to resist colonization precisely because state enforcement was often weak, particularly in more remote regions. The limited capacity of the state to enforce its will was especially evident in the area of Ootsa Lake. A single Indian agent was responsible for administering the entire Stuart Lake Agency, which covered thousands of square kilometres. In addition, the longstanding dispute between the federal and provincial levels of government over reserve allocation weakened the institution and validity of state authority. Indian agents complained that a lack of administrative consistency allowed tensions between indigenous people and European immigrants to fester for years, and settlers and

[16] Harris, *Making Native* Space; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*. Although colonial officials such as James Douglas had allocated reserves as early as the 1860s, the issue of reserve allocation intensified following the province's admission into the Dominion in 1871.

[17] Refer to the overarching arguments in Furniss, *Burden of History*; Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*; and Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

[18] Bruce Stadfeld, "Manifestations of Power: Native Resistance to the Resettlement of British Columbia," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History on British Columbia, ed. Ruth Sandwell* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 34.

Aboriginals were equally frustrated. Many conflicts were resolved locally, and Aboriginal people were able to resist settlers' demands.[19]

As Stadfeld's research indicates, in remote regions of British Columbia, European immigrants reached the limits of state power and support quite rapidly. Aboriginals, by contrast, possessed valuable information and goods. Cole Harris has noted that, in many immigrant societies, the lines drawn in colonial culture between self and other – that is, between European and Aboriginal – were blurred through intermarriage, information exchange, and shared work arrangements.[20] He argues that such interethnic collaborations and interpenetrations were most pronounced in regions that possessed little monetary wealth and only the poorest connections to outside markets and institutions of state authority. In these situations, settlers found that the exchange of goods and information with local indigenous people was essential for their survival.

Examples of this sort of socio-cultural interpenetration are not difficult to find. The Chinook language, which blended English, French, and indigenous words and phrases into a lexicon of some 700 words, is indicative of this sort of cultural interaction on a broad scale. Local and oral histories and government reports by Indian agents provide many specific examples of trading partnerships, intermarriages, and shared work arrangements on traplines, wood lots, and ranches. In sum, developing social connections between Aboriginal peoples and an immigrant society led to regional diversity in the colonial experience. A unique blend of subordination (promoted by colonial practice) and collaboration (achieved through social relationships) emerged at the edges of administrative authority and market integration.

COLONIAL RESETTLEMENT IN THE OOTSA LAKE REGION

A complex dynamic of subordination and socio-cultural exchange characterized colonial life in the Ootsa Lake region. On the one hand, land appropriation and the frontier cultural complex promoted the

[19] Letters and documents from the Indian Affairs Central Registry Files (RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1) provide many instances of complaints by the Stuart Lake Indian agents and the frustrations and conflicts experienced by settlers and Aboriginals in the Ootsa Lake region. In *Making Native Space*, Harris also notes similar circumstances in more remote areas of the province.

[20] Harris, *Resettlement*, 271-2.

development of a distinct and privileged society for European settlers. In farming and ranching regions such as Ootsa Lake, this social reality was most often expressed in the form of an agrarian discourse that stressed moral values, family-centred independence, social order, and an enduring vision of progress through cultivation.[21] Like the broader frontier myth of which it was a part, agrarian thought legitimized the segregation and subordination of Aboriginal peoples, whom Europeans viewed as antithetical to agricultural progress and community order. Settler cultures in farming regions were therefore characterized by utopian visions of the taming of an unused wilderness.

At the same time, Ootsa Lake settlers found themselves depending on the Cheslatta people for food, trade goods, and geographical information about the new environment. This dependence allowed the Cheslatta to maintain a measure of control as they both resisted and accommodated colonial resettlement.[22] In short, the shared predicament of living in an isolated and often harsh environment generated opportunities for social collaboration. In particular, Aboriginal and White men cultivated interethnic relationships in order to augment economic productivity and to enhance social prestige within their own communities. In so doing, they weakened both the conception and reality of a segregated colonial existence. In order to fully understand this situation, however, it is necessary first to describe the two distinct social realms that emerged in this region.

The original immigrants to Ootsa Lake were the ancestors of the modern-day Cheslatta T'en. The Cheslatta are a small group of Carrier, or *Dakelh*-speaking people, who pursued a hunter-gathering economy that anchored an extensive trading system with groups on the Pacific coast. The *Dakelh* consisted of approximately fourteen "regional bands," which were collections of interdependent families that, together, possessed a common territory and dialect.[23] Social identity before contact was based largely on the collective exploitation of a band territory and an intimate association with place.[24] Typically, one to three extended families lived together in a village and cooperated economically in what ethnohistorians call a "coresidential group."[25] Each regional band incorporated anywhere from two to nine of these

[21] Ibid., 225-6.

[22] See also Stadfeld, "Manifestations of Power."

[23] Margaret Tobey, "Carrier," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Subarctic, ed. Julian Steward* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1979), 413.

[24] Tobey, "Carrier," 414.

[25] Eleanor Leacock, "A Reappraisal of Aboriginal Athapaskan Social Organization," *Arctic Anthropology* 17 (1980): 60-3.

coresidential groups, which harvested resources from a collective territory open to the entire band.[26]

The Cheslatta settled a large area east of Ootsa Lake in the last decades of the eighteenth century after having emigrated from the Carrier villages of Ulkatcho and Kluskus, some 150 kilometres to the south (Figure 2).[27] This new area, however, was not as ecologically rich as was their former homeland. A seven-kilometre canyon in the Nechako River prevented salmon – the staple food supply for larger Carrier villages elsewhere – from entering the region. Early accounts suggest that the Cheslatta periodically suffered from starvation when wolves and other predators eliminated much of the wild game.[28] The people therefore developed a flexible nomadic economy based on the seasonal exploitation of a variety of wild foods such as freshwater fish, berries, mountain caribou, bear, and mule deer. The group spent most of the year in three small villages along Cheslatta Lake in the northern portion of their territory; however, in the fall it embarked on extended hunting expeditions to the Quanchus Mountains.

The nineteenth-century fur trade transformed the group's communal territorial system. With the construction of Fort Fraser in 1806, some sixty kilometres northeast of the Cheslatta villages, Simon Fraser, of the North West Company, established the land-based fur trade. After the Hudson's Bay Company acquired control in 1821, post records indicate that Cheslatta leaders were very interested in trading pelts for weapons and food, particularly during periods of game scarcity.[29] Ethnohistorians have shown that the fur trade prompted foraging groups such as the Cheslatta to evolve from holding a purely communal conception of territory to participating in a system of separate family hunting areas.[30] It is believed that this transition occurred, in part, because British traders preferred to

[26] Ethnographer Irving Goldman indicated that the Cheslatta adopted crest prerogatives from the Nuxalk by the mid-nineteenth century and that this altered their communal system. However, the group's involvement in the fur trade (which began during the same period) was responsible for completely transforming this communal arrangement into discrete family hunting units. See Goldman, "The Alkatcho Carrier: Historical Background of Crest Prerogatives," *American Anthropologist* 43 (1941): 399-400.

[27] Tobey, "Carrier," 413-414, 431.

[28] Hudson's Bay Company Archives, post journals from Fort Fraser, 1822-44, B.74/a/1; and Hudson's Bay Company Archives, post journals from Fort Fraser, 1887-1907, B.74/a/2-5. Both of these journals provide a chronological record of periodic episodes of starvation among the Cheslatta people.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Charles Bishop, "The Emergence of Hunting Territories among the Northern Ojibwa," *Ethnology* 9 (1970): 1-15; Toby Morantz, "Economic and Social Accommodations of the James Bay Inlanders to the Fur Trade," in *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations, ed. Shepard Krech* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1984).

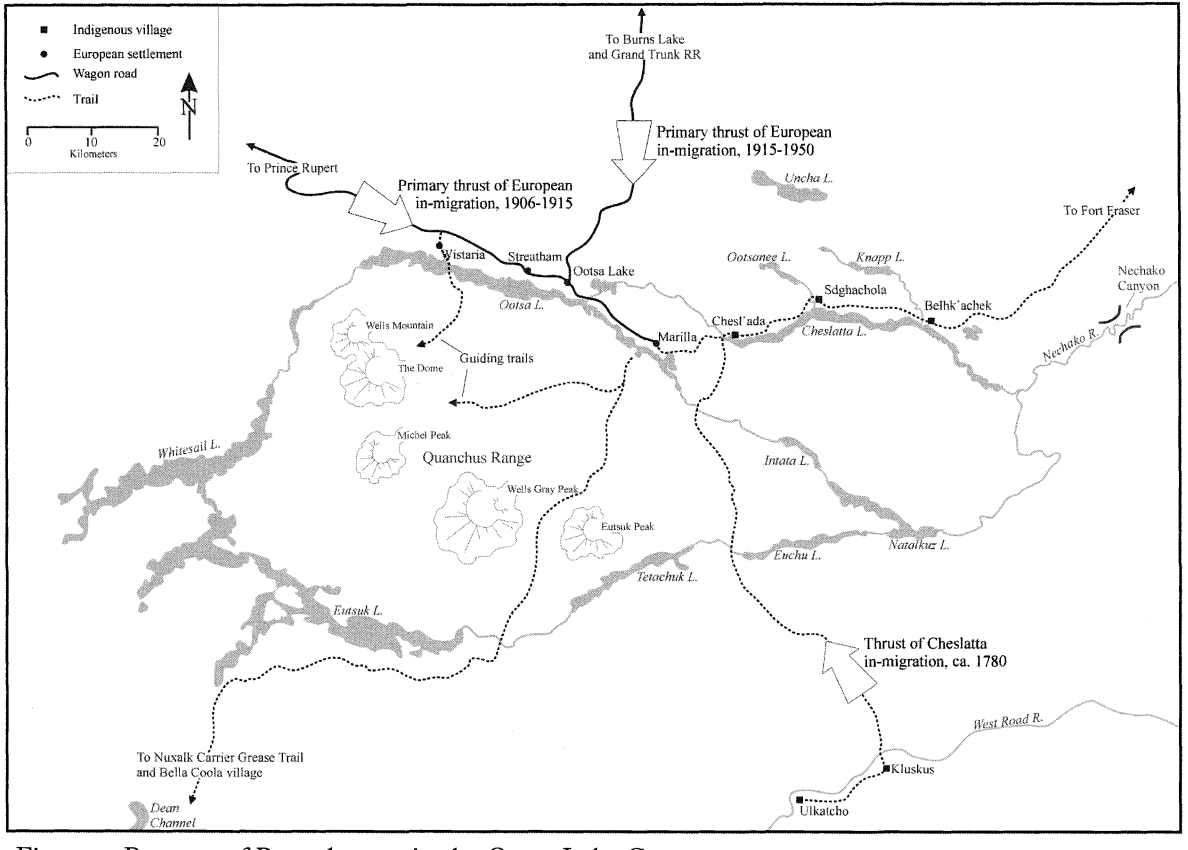

Figure 2: Patterns of Resettlement in the Ootsa Lake Country.

negotiate not with the entire group but, rather, with what they called "principal Indians"; that is, the male heads of each family.[31] Coupled with the constant demand for small game, this preference meant that individual families – not the band or even the coresidential groups – became responsible for economic production and territorial management.

The family hunting system took several decades to develop among the Cheslatta. By the mid-nineteenth century, though, each extended family (called a *sadeku*) had its own hunting territory, or *keyah*, managed by a family head known as the *deneza*.[32] Inheritance of territorial rights was bilateral, often with a preference for primogeniture (possibly encouraged by British traders). Symbolic and habitual forms of walking were central to the *keyah* system. Literally, *keyah* means "within the feet" and translates roughly into "the area in which one walks."[33] In actual practice, this meant that the *deneza* (family heads) used walking as a means of making and maintaining claims on their *keyah*.[34] In other words, the family's area was claimed as long as it was used (i.e., as long as someone was walking around in it). It is interesting to note the close connections between this form of Cheslatta territoriality and the group's involvement in the fur trade. The habitual act of walking the trapline to maintain trails and traps is clearly related to producing furs for exchange. Claiming an area by walking also provided an excellent means of establishing new trapping territories in vacant or underutilized areas.

Each family developed powerful symbolic attachments to its hunting area. The *deneza*, for instance, affixed "crest titles" to their respective territories. These titles were symbols that represented a system of honorary patrilocal group affiliation borrowed indirectly from the *Nuxalk* (Bella Coola) people of the Northwest Coast via the *Lh'kacho* Carrier during the mid-nineteenth century.[35] Placenames likewise expressed symbolic connections to the hunting area by linking ancestral stories to physical features such as lakes, mountains, and caves. Out in the territory itself, the *deneza* and other

[31] Morantz, "Accommodations," 64.

[32] Soren Larsen, "The Cheslatta Redevelopment Project: Economic Development and the Cultural Landscape of the Cheslatta T'en," *Research in Economic Anthropology* 20 (1999): 60-1.

[33] William Poser (Athapaskan linguist), interview by author, tape-recorded, Southbank, BC, 7 July 1998. Although most Carrier groups use the spelling "keyoh," Poser indicated that the spelling "keyah" more accurately reflects the Cheslatta dialect. Other common translations for the word include "my home," "my trapline," and "place where I live."

[34] Larsen, "Cheslatta Redevelopment," 61.

[35] Goldman, "Alkatcho Carrier," 399–400.

relatives carved long marks into the bark of spruce and pine trees, creating what archaeologists call culturally modified trees (CMTs). When the Roman Catholic missionary Father Adrian Morice introduced a system of syllabics to the Cheslatta in the 1890s, the *deneza* were able to personalize such markings by inscribing their names, crest titles, or other messages into the trees.[36]

As the central concept of land tenure in Cheslatta society, the *keyah* included, by way of its etymology, the idea that effective territorial ownership and occupation was achieved and expressed through the act of walking. As a political system, the *keyah* produced a decentralized arrangement of power in which the *deneza* directed resource harvesting in their family hunting territories and so wielded a certain amount of influence over Cheslatta affairs as a whole. As practised on a daily basis, the *keyah* system used crest titles, place-names, and physical alteration of the environment to delineate, claim, and express territorial attachments. In these ways, *keyah* traditionally helped to structure the political and economic aspects of Cheslatta life and, in particular, formed the basis for achieving and maintaining social prestige.

SETTLER SOCIETY

The first Europeans in the Ootsa Lake area arrived in 1904 along the Nuxalk-Carrier grease trail from the Nuxalk village of Bella Coola on the Pacific coast (Figure 2). In later years, they arrived by boarding a stern-wheeler on the Skeena River at Prince Rupert, disembarking at the settlement of Hazelton, and heading overland from there on wagon roads, most of which had been old Aboriginal trails. Reports suggesting that the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) Railroad's Ootsa Lake line would be built along the south shore of Ootsa Lake drew many of the earliest European visitors to the area. But it never happened.[37] Discouraged, most of the speculators departed, leaving only a handful of settlers to clear homesteads and to start cattle ranches and traplines in the foothills of the Quanchus Mountains. The completion in 1914 of the GTP some seventy kilometres to the north near the town of Burns Lake did, however, bring additional families to the region and allow them to import furniture and agricultural machines. Settlement coalesced around four communities – Wistaria, Streatham, Ootsa

[36] Larsen, "Cheslatta Redevelopment," 57.

[37] Pat Turkki, *Burns Lake and District* (Burns Lake, BC: Burns Lake Historical Society, 1973), 267.

Lake, and Marilla – along the north shore of Ootsa Lake. Much of it occurred some distance from the Cheslatta villages, but immigrants did preempt land within the family hunting territories.[38]

Settlers brought with them a much different perspective on the land and its proper use than that expounded by the Cheslatta. For the settlers, an agrarian discourse that emphasized domestication and law, not walking, was the primary means of claiming and transforming the landscape. Travel literature from government printers stressed that this new "wilderness" was mostly empty and available for cheap.[39] Once the "wilderness" had been civilized, the land, wrested from nature yet free from government control and urban blight, would become a source of income and pride. This victory was physically represented on the landscape by a house, a barn, and fenced pasture or timber land. Cyril Shelford, who was the son of English immigrants and who later served for six years as British Columbia's minister of agriculture, captured this agrarian ideal when he described the early twentieth-century visions of his father, Jack:

> [Jack Shelford] decided that [England] was too small and opportunity too limited for a young man wanting to make a new life, free of the restrictions which inevitably come with a densely populated country. Although he knew very little about [North America], he knew that you could still acquire land for next to nothing ... it was a land of promise and with lots of work [a portion of it] could be built into a little empire where one could be free from all government regulations.[40]

For early settlers like Jack Shelford, the lack of extensive agricultural fields and a substantial built environment confirmed their belief that Aboriginal peoples were not using the land. The frontier myth had no room for hunting territories, trails, CMTs, crest titles, place-names, and *keyah*. Like the "wilderness" itself, Aboriginal peoples needed to be assimilated or removed so that the "little empire" could be made.

This colonial cultural perspective often led to conflict. Consider a 1922 incident near Uncha Lake, some forty kilometres north of Ootsa Lake. In October of that year a group of settlers wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs that "bands of Indians" were trespassing

[38] Larsen, "Cheslatta Redevelopment," 62-3.

[39] Province of British Columbia, Department of Lands, "The Francois-Ootsa Lake District," Bulletin 28 (Victoria, BC: Government Printer, 1925).

[40] Cyril Shelford, *From Snowshoes to Politics: A British Columbia Adventure!* (Victoria: Shelford Publishing, 1987), 6.

routinely on their land, trapping out the beaver and hunting too many game animals. The group at Uncha reasoned that trapping was no longer economical for the Cheslatta because the beaver population was dwindling and fur prices were unstable. In the context of the agrarian ideal, these circumstances made the Cheslatta "squatters with no legal right to the land in question." Because they were not able to provide for themselves, the settlers insisted that their "privations and wants ... [brought about] a feeling of enmity between them and the settlers of the community." The solution to the disruptions, they concluded, was to "eject" the Cheslatta from the area and place them in a reserve located in some "less populated portion of the province."[41]

Every time they are told, stories such as the Uncha Lake conflict reproduce the agrarian ideal and its overarching frontier myth. For instance, Pat Turkki's *Burns Lake and District* relates a story about Jacob Henkel, a one-time prospector from the Yukon who had "forded rivers and braved the dangers of the Algatcho Indian trail ... [which] was so narrow in places that one misstep would have sent him and his horses over the precipice."[42] One afternoon in 1904, shortly after his arrival at Ootsa Lake, Henkel had his first encounter with a Carrier man named Skin Tyee:

> Skin Tyee told Mr. Henkel that the area was Indian Country and that he must leave. "Jake" (as he was known) was a powerful man. Without replying, he placed his hands on the other man's shoulders and forced him to the ground. After this incident, the two men achieved an amiable relationship and Skin Tyee often brought Jake meat after a successful hunt. Jake then staked out a half-section of land near Ootsa Lake and built a cabin in which to spend the winter.[43]

In the narratives of contact, such examples of subordination are elevated to the level of myth, helping to pave the way for European civilization of the "wilderness." Skin Tyee and the "Indian Country" are wild, threatening, and profane, but Jake, confident in his strength, remains composed as he subdues them both with an understated violence. As the pioneer Jacob Henkel transformed the Ootsa Lake country into a civilized homestead, he implicitly transformed Skin Tyee into an unwitting supporter of colonialism.

[41] Correspondence from H.C. Shinn to the Department of Indian Affairs, 2 October 1922. Indian Affairs RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1.
[42] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 196.
[43] Ibid.

The settlers' built environment impressed the agrarian ideal on the landscape. For example, the story of Jake Henkel, cited above, posits the homestead as the icon of the pioneer victory over the wilderness. Other landscape symbols central to the settler's sense of place were more public and included the post office, church, school, and general store. By serving as places of exchange for goods and information in both informal and ritualized ways, these locales helped to congeal social life. In this way, the built environment promoted community attachment among settlers, enabling them to downplay their ethnic, political, and religious differences in favour of shared participation in agrarian society.

Life in an immigrant community levelled most Old World distinctions of wealth and class, facilitating among the settlers a common identity.[44] However, the case remains that, as in Cheslatta society, not all individuals possessed an equal amount of social prestige and influence. The families in charge of the post offices, for instance, typically controlled and monitored the exchange of information. Settlers holding government positions, such as justice of the peace or game warden, garnered extra respect. A review of Ootsa Lake's local histories, though, shows that many settlers established prestige through entrepreneurship.[45] The owners of rudimentary hotels, restaurants, guiding operations, and general stores not only provided valuable services to other settlers but also enjoyed greater access to the region's limited supply of cash. These leading families used their wealth to stage dances, rodeos, and festivals, which made them among the most active and visible of all the community's members. Consequently, entrepreneurs often became powerful and respected figures in regional life. This elevated standing did not confer absolute or permanent social advantage but, rather, served to enhance one's reputation. Nonetheless, the issue of prestige is important because many male entrepreneurs depended on interethnic collaborations with Cheslatta leaders to create and maintain their relative affluence and social status.

[44] See Harris, *Resettlement*, 260.

[45] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 195-275; Jean Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost: A People's History of the Ootsa Lake Region, 1905-1955* (Likely, BC: Quesnel Lake Publishing, 1994), 13-33.

COLONIAL COLLABORATIONS

Actual social life in the Ootsa Lake area cannot be reduced to the separate existences described thus far. Ongoing collaboration between the Cheslatta and the immigrants introduced new levels of complexity for both cultures. The content analysis described earlier reveals that twenty male heads of family formed relatively stable and exclusive partnerships in work, trade, and information exchange. The shift in Cheslatta society from a communal to a family-based hunting system during the fur trade was a foundation – although not a cause – of this interethnic collaboration; instead, family affiliations emerged between males in response to resource scarcity and isolation and, consequently, enabled these individuals to achieve and to maintain status in their respective communities. These partnerships remain significant in the postcolonial era because they form the basis of a grassroots interethnic alliance against non-local firms.[46]

At base, collaboration emerged during the colonial period because it was mutually beneficial, particularly for males involved in trade, labour, and entrepreneurial activities. The benefits of collaboration were especially evident from the settlers' perspective. Until the transportation improvements of the late 1920s, the region's closest market was Prince Rupert, about 500 kilometres away. With road construction, residents found markets in Houston, Burns Lake, and Prince George, although distances were still formidable and most goods had to be shipped across Francois Lake on a small government ferry. Local subsistence depended on wild game, cattle, berries, and small vegetable gardens. For the average settler, monetary wealth was in short supply and was acquired by trading furs or selling cattle or railroad ties.[47] Furthermore, immigrants typically knew very little about their new environment. Given these circumstances, settlers began to interact with Cheslatta people in order to obtain goods such as meat, clothing, and berries; to gather information about local game populations and environmental conditions; and to secure assistance for hunting and trapping expeditions.[48]

Specifically, interethnic relationships functioned in three ways: (1) information exchange, (2) trade, and (3) shared labour arrangements. Routine exchange of information translated into lasting social

[46] Larsen, "Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality."

[47] Chris Beach, "Beneath the Waters: A Microhistory of Ootsa Lake, a Northern Eurocanadian Community" (MA thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, 1998), 44-55.

[48] Beach, "Beneath the Waters," 31-5.

connections between families – connections that could challenge the territorial outcome of colonialism.[49] For instance, six Cheslatta elders recalled the name of a settler who had filed the documents registering their family's *keyah* as a trapline. By the 1930s, portions of all the Cheslatta hunting territories had been recorded within the trapline system. Immigrant families registered eleven traplines at this time, and this generated inevitable conflicts since most of them infringed on Aboriginal territory.[50] However, five Cheslatta elders recognized and even sanctioned the trapline of the immigrant who had provided registration assistance.[51] When, in an interview, elder Pat Edmund mapped the boundaries of his family's hunting territory, he clearly identified the lakes that marked the rough boundaries of neighbouring Cheslatta areas but not those located on adjacent immigrant traplines. He then came to a lake named after Frank Hanson, a settler who had helped Edmund's father register the line. Hanson Lake clearly lay within the boundaries of both Edmund's family territory (though not his trapline) and the settler's trapline. When I asked Edmund about this lake, he replied: "This [lake] is in Frank Hanson territory and we [didn't] go into someone else's territory at that time. It's a rule we had."[52] Edmund had identified two distinct and divergent social categories: the first encompassed the land appropriated by the White "other," which he refused to recognize, and the second denoted the valid trapline of his father's collaborator.

Immigrants, in turn, received valuable information from the Cheslatta regarding the new environment. Take, for example, the story of Bill and Frank Bickle, two brothers who arrived in the region in the early winter months of 1907. Ootsa Lake had frozen over, so the pair simply planned to trek across the ice. They were stopped short by a Cheslatta man named Matthew Sam. As Bill Bickle stated in a 1971 interview with Pat Turrki, Sam told the brothers that "the White man had no knowledge of the lake ice. The Natives had an almost psychic knowledge of the ice and knew where and when it was safe to cross."[53] Sam guided them across the frozen lake, telling

[49] Intermarriage was an uncommon occurrence between 1900 and 1952, which further underscores the complexity of the colonial situation: social distance existed amid close partnerships between males.

[50] See Mike Robertson, *Cheslatta Traplines* (Southbank, BC: Cheslatta-Carrier Nation Printer, 1985).

[51] Whereas five Cheslatta individuals recognized the traplines of their parents' White collaborators, only one sanctioned the traplines of Whites in general.

[52] Pat Edmund, interview by author, tape recorded, Takysie Lake, BC, 1 June 1998.

[53] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 250–1.

them that the ice near the point bars was extremely treacherous. After settling in the area, the Bickle brothers developed a longstanding relationship with Sam. They bought cattle, hay, and furs from him and, in exchange, helped him to break ground for his own fields.

Trade was another avenue through which interethnic relationships developed. The only two published local histories of the area record barter and exchange relations, and some setters established general stores specifically to trade with the Cheslatta people.[54] In interviews, sixteen Cheslatta and White respondents indicated that their families had forged exclusive trading partnerships, which proved to be especially valuable during the periodic episodes of resource scarcity.[55] For example, Jim Van Tine, now an elderly trapper, who was born at Ootsa Lake in 1922, recalled that his father had a close relationship with a neighbouring Cheslatta man, Michelle Jack.[56] Jack provided meat, berries, and moccasins in exchange for the use of the Van Tine's meat shop and hay swather. As a child, Van Tine frequently played with Michelle's son, Donald, who was of approximately the same age. As he put it: "I used to play with Donnie and the other Jack boys. We didn't think anything of being different colors, different races. We all grew up together." When Donald Jack was accused of murder decades later in 1992, Van Tine and his brother, Doug, circulated a petition to exonerate him of the crime. Such an event is indicative of the way a longstanding personal relationship can undercut the colonial ideal of social distance.

Interethnic collaborations also developed through labour. As early as 1906, settler Harry Morgan hired the Cheslatta *deneza* Michelle Charlie to help him pack in supplies from the coastal port of Bella Coola.[57] Jim Clark, a prominent settler who owned a horse farm, went on routine hunting expeditions with Baptiste Louie. The trips so bonded the two that Louie gave Clark the nickname "brother."[58] Former minister of agriculture Cyril Shelford recollected fond memories of hunting and trapping expeditions with Jimmy Andrews, an Aboriginal "friend of the family" who lived at the head of Ootsa

[54] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 197-292; Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 55-8.

[55] The owners and operators of general stores were the only White respondents who indicated having partnerships with multiple families. Only two Native people held trading affiliations with multiple families (Marvin Charlie, interview by author, tape recorded, Southbank, BC, 29 May 1998; Anne Troy, interview by author, tape recorded, Grassy Plains, BC, 27 May 1998).

[56] Jim Van Tine, interview by author, recorded in fieldnotes, Ootsa Lake, BC, 29 May 1999.

[57] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 57.

[58] Ibid.

Lake. In his autobiography, he recounted that Andrews stopped by their place one morning, complaining that he no longer had any shotgun shells and could not provide for his family. Shelford's father gave Andrews several shells, and Cyril watched as the Aboriginal man shot eight geese while crawling quietly on his belly in the rain. Andrews then gave the Shelfords two of the birds to reciprocate for their gift. As Shelford wrote: "Jimmy ... showed me how a real hunter moved, which would later help me in the guiding business."[59]

Guiding itself was a major interethnic undertaking in the region. The business developed during the 1920s and provided much-needed cash income for Aboriginal and settler families. Twelve residents of Ootsa Lake acquired guiding licences and advertised in various outdoor publications, attracting sport hunters from Nevada, California, the Dakotas, and Michigan.[60] Most of these entrepreneurs worked directly with Cheslatta men to help plan the trips, pack the horses, track game, and entertain the hunters.[61] These relationships were not ephemeral but, rather, were genuine partnerships that typically lasted lifetimes. Alan Blackwell, for instance, worked only with Michelle Charlie, while Jimmy Andrews worked with Billy McNeil. Baptiste Louie, of course, worked with his "brother," Jim Clark.[62]

Based on the preceding description, it might appear as though interethnic collaborations functioned only as survival mechanisms for Aboriginal and White males living in a remote and harsh environment. These relationships, however, performed an additional and vital role: they enabled men from both factions to advance their social prestige. In other words, economic productivity was one of several ways of establishing and maintaining prominence. The Cheslatta *deneza* were obliged to provide for their extended families and honorary crest group affiliations, whereas entrepreneurs in the immigrant community established status by amassing, displaying, and distributing personal wealth. In either case, the region's isolation and periodic resource shortages made these tasks extremely difficult. Interethnic collaborations in trade, work, and information exchange therefore became a convenient way of increasing economic output and, by extension, elevating one's social standing. Guiding partnerships allowed both Cheslatta family heads and immigrants to accumulate

[59] Shelford, *From Snowshoes*, 21.
[60] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 84.
[61] Shelford, *From Snowshoes*, 151.
[62] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 84.

an unusual amount of cash.[63] Associations in trade were equally profitable and enabled leaders from both factions to provide necessities and luxury items for their dependents. Although not all individuals established status in this way, many did rely on interethnic collaborations to create and to maintain prestige in their own communities.

This interaction at once reproduced, yet moved beyond, the colonial ideal of segregation. On the one hand, separate worlds definitely existed. Like other Aboriginal societies, the Cheslatta faced the colonial phalanx of land appropriation, government neglect, and institutionalized discrimination. Still, interethnic relationships allowed settlers and Aboriginal to cross the boundaries of otherness by facilitating joint economic production and creating the conditions for social prestige. A complex regional society emerged in which Aboriginals and settlers often *depended* on each another for their own status.

Ultimately, this intertwined social reality diminished – but did not eradicate – the ethnic segregation promoted by colonialism. Leaders from both groups tried to avert territorial conflict in order to preserve the mutual benefits they derived from collaboration. This relationship meant that Cheslatta leaders were often able to continue to occupy desirable or strategic sites otherwise located in the midst of an immigrant community, sometimes against provincial directives. It is within this context that I explore a specific episode of conflict and collaboration – one that involved prominent males from both the immigrant and Aboriginal communities.

Baptiste Louie was a Cheslatta *deneza* who managed a relatively small *keyah* in the vicinity of Cheslatta Lake (Figure 3). Some twenty years before the first settlers arrived in 1904, he began using a large bay in Ootsa Lake as a loading area for water-borne trading expeditions and the surrounding uplands for horse pasture.[64] This piece of land was an isolated site that, nonetheless, he had claimed as part of his *keyah*, undoubtedly because of its excellent lake access.[65] Louie actually resided in the village of Sdghachola on Cheslatta Lake. He maintained a cabin and corral at the Ootsa Lake location and, in addition, maintained familial connections to the site (it was his father's birthplace and the location of a small burial ground).[66]

[63] Larsen, "Cheslatta Redevelopment," 63.

[64] Correspondence from R. Loring (Indian agent, Stuart Lake Agency) to Indian reserve commissioner, 9 February 1906. Indian Affairs, RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1.

[65] Elizabeth Louie, interview by author, tape recorded, Southbank. BC, 20 June 1998.

[66] Correspondence from W. McAllan (Indian agent, Stuart Lake Agency) to government agent, Hazelton, 26 July 1912. Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 7538, File 27, 163-1.

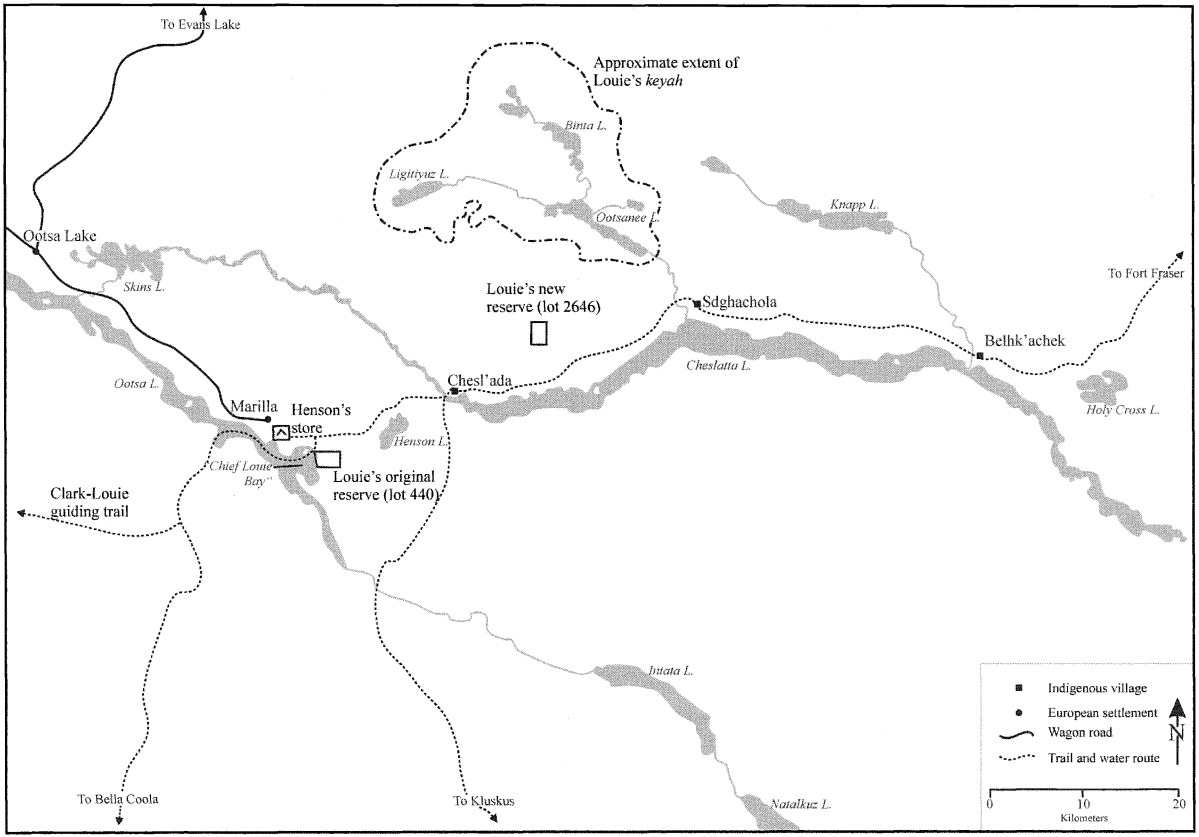

Figure 3: Lot 440 and Associated Features.

Shortly after the advent of resettlement, Louie forged collaborations with two local settlers as a means of enhancing his own wealth and prestige. In 1916 he established a trading relationship with George Henson, an English immigrant who raised Percheron horses and operated a general store near the settlement of Marilla. The Cheslatta *deneza* provided most of the goods sold in Henson's store, including locally harvested meat, furs, and berries from his *keyah* as well as clothing, eulachon grease, and dried salmon that he imported from the Nuxalk village of Bella Coola.[67] Louie also worked with another settler, Jim Clark, in a profitable guiding business that attracted affluent hunters from the United States.[68] From these partnerships, the *deneza* received cash, weapons, and other European goods, all of which elevated his status in Cheslatta society.[69] In fact, over the years he acquired such prestige from these relationships that, when Indian agents selected a single chief for the Cheslatta band in 1951, a council of elders elected him to the position.

At the same time, the settlers also used the partnership to establish status in their own community. Henson depended on his trading association with Louie to acquire the cash and materials needed to stage a series of impressive rodeos in the 1930s – rodeos that attracted riders from across western North America.[70] Clark similarly profited from his guiding partnership with the *deneza*; within years he possessed enough money and social influence to co-host Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir during their famed visit of 1937.[71] In both cases, Baptiste Louie was an integral part of the settlers' economic success and social status.

Louie took advantage of his site on Ootsa Lake to maintain his partnerships with the settlers. He used the bay as a break-of-bulk point, a place to unpack the goods imported from the coast and from which to transport them overland to Henson's store at Marilla.[72] It was also the site from which he and Clark transported hunters across Ootsa Lake to visit the Quanchus Mountains.[73] Despite encroaching settlement, Louie maintained his cabin there and kept horses on the upland pasture in the

[67] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 284; Marvin Charlie, interview by author, tape recorded, Southbank, BC, 29 May 1998.
[68] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 56-7.
[69] Marvin Charlie, interview by author, tape recorded, Southbank, BC, 29 May 1998.
[70] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 71.
[71] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 46.
[72] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 284.
[73] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 57.

summer for these hunting and trading trips.[74] In 1923 the Ditchburn-Clark commission scheduled the site as one of the Cheslatta band's sixteen reserves, although it was not until 1938 that British Columbia officially conveyed such lands to the federal government.[75]

In an October 1925 letter to the attorney general of British Columbia, George Henson alleged that a group of Cheslatta men from Louie's reserve had slaughtered four of his prized Percheron horses. The reason for the slaughter remains unclear. However, the settler did ask the provincial government to compel the Cheslatta to fence in their personal pasture land so as to "restore peaceful and amicable relations between the Indians and settlers of this district." He concluded that the fences would maintain the security of the open range and "would also be of benefit to the Indians, as they too have some cattle grazing on the commons."[76]

Without a clear explanation from Henson, provincial officials reasoned that the conflict had materialized simply because Louie's reserve, unlike the other Cheslatta parcels, was located in the midst of the immigrant community. Their judgment accorded with the expectations ingrained in colonial consciousness. In a letter to the Indian reserve commissioner, W.E. Ditchburn, the attorney-general wrote: "The parcel is surrounded on three sides by Crown granted lands and is in the center of a large farming area ... which is highly desirable for White settlement."[77] Days later, Ditchburn replied: "I am perfectly in accord with your view that it might not be desirable to have an Indian reserve in the midst of White settlement, and would like to do anything which would obviate such a state of affairs." He concluded that "the Indians would be satisfied if another area of land further afield could be secured for them."[78] On 16 July 1927 the superintendent of lands transferred Louie's reserve to lot 2646, some thirty kilometres distant, and sent a copy of the reassignment to Henson.[79]

[74] Correspondence from W. McAllan to J. McLean, 24 June 1912. Indian Affairs RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1.

[75] "New Reserves, Stuart Lake Agency," 1923. Indian Affairs RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1.

[76] Correspondence from G. Henson to L. Memendes, 3 October 1925. Indian Affairs, RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1.

[77] Correspondence from L. Memendes to W. Ditchburn, 17 October 1925. Indian Reserve Commissioner's Office, file L-131-1.

[78] Correspondence from W. Ditchburn to L. Memendes, 20 October 1925. Indian Reserve Commissioner's Office, file L-131-1.

[79] Correspondence from H. Cathcart to W. Ditchburn, 16 July 1927. Indian Affairs RG 10, vol. 7538, file 27, 163-1. The formal transfer of this reserve did not occur until conveyance in 1938.

The provincial government's decision to relocate Louie's reserve reproduced the colonial model of ethnic segregation as a means of preventing conflicts and promoting agrarian progress. Yet the relocation never occurred. First of all, the region was too distant for the government to enforce its mandate, a situation that characterized other more remote areas of the province.[80] More important, though, Henson and Clark had no desire to remove the *deneza* and his people from the reserve. To force the relocation would mean eliminating a valuable trading partner who provided a substantial portion of their own personal wealth and, by extension, social status. It is perhaps for this reason that Henson never asked the government to remove the Aboriginal men, only to compel them to construct fences. Consequently, Henson ignored the provincial order of segregation. Despite the fact that it was no longer a reserve, Baptiste Louie continued to use the site for guiding and trading endeavors until 1952, at which time the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) created a hydroelectric reservoir out of Ootsa Lake and flooded the entire area.[81] In fact, the bay now carries the name "Chief Louie," a toponym that indicates widespread immigrant acknowledgment of the *deneza's* occupation of the site.[82]

The preceding account is but one episode in an ongoing dynamic of conflict and collaboration in which a local mechanism for establishing social status took precedence over the colonial administration's directives of segregation. This is not to say that the mechanism *transcended* the reality of colonialism. It is telling, for example, that Henson reported the slaughter of his horses to the provincial government instead of soliciting his Cheslatta trading partner for a resolution. The fact that a single letter effected the removal of Louie's reserve likewise speaks to the systematic discrimination that underpinned the colonial administration. Yet, it is equally significant that Henson disregarded his own government's orders and that the Cheslatta leader remained on a desirable piece of non-reserve land situated in the midst of the immigrant community.

In short, Louie came to occupy a position in the settlers' society because he was a source of wealth and prestige. Other Aboriginals occupied a comparable station. Jimmy Andrews actually lived in the settlement of Wistaria so as to be near his guiding partner, Bill

[80] Stadfeld, "Manifestations of Power."
[81] Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 285; Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 58.
[82] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 56.

McNeil.[83] Conversely, settlers such as Henson, Clark, and McNeil served a similar role in Cheslatta society. All of these individuals recognized their partners as a distinct social category that challenged the stark binary oppositions of colonialism on both conceptual and territorial grounds. Within this context, Aboriginals and Whites created personalized designations for their partners (such as "brother" or "friend of the family") at the same time as they accepted and reproduced the invidious opposition of "White man" and "Indian." Ultimately, colonialism's ideals and procedures were both defended and challenged at Ootsa Lake, an ambivalence that can be found even within the mind and actions of a single individual such as George Henson.

Social life in the Ootsa Lake region reproduced and reworked colonialism's geographies of exclusion. The overarching force of colonial resettlement, of course, created and constantly reinforced the social, cultural, and physical boundaries of otherness. Yet setters and Aboriginals had to collaborate, negotiate, and communicate with one another because their region was so detached from the reach of colonial administration and the integrative effects of modern economic markets. Ultimately, the region's isolation gave rise to a system of establishing status through interethnic collaboration that, at times, challenged the practice of segregation. In their harsh and remote geographical setting, immigrants and Aboriginals negotiated local allocations of power through ongoing cycles of conflict and collaboration that, in the final analysis, came to define social life in their region.

The complex society formed at Ootsa Lake during the colonial period remains a significant factor in contemporary regional politics.[84] After 1952 a series of non-local timber and mineral companies imposed their own design on the region through various development projects. Aboriginal and White residents found themselves powerless to oppose outside firms and politicians. Alcan relocated most of the Cheslatta and settlers from the area of Ootsa Lake in 1952. Although the future MLA Cyril Shelford attempted to form a joint Aboriginal-White protest group, the Department of Indian Affairs thwarted his plans, claiming fiduciary responsibility for the Aboriginals. In fact, the interview data cited throughout this article indicate that most Aboriginals and Whites had more intense conflicts with "outsiders"

[83] Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 58.

[84] For a complete account of this situation, see Larsen, "Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality."

(Alcan, timber firms, politicians) than they did with any single local group.[85]

In the 1990s, interethnic partnerships between families became the basis for political action. A grassroots coalition based on family affiliations helped to defeat Alcan's plans for a second hydroelectric dam in 1995. Eventually, they produced a joint-venture sawmill (in operation since 2000) and the province's first fully integrated health care centre (opened in 2001). Indeed, the Cheslatta band's leadership has found these coalition politics so helpful in advancing their social and economic interests that it has informally withdrawn from the provincial land claims process. In closing, Aboriginal-White family partnerships were significant during the colonial era insofar as they challenged the social and territorial outcomes of resettlement; now, however, they have become, in the face of outside pressure, a source for a postcolonial regional politics.

[85] Fourteen Cheslatta (82 per cent) and twenty White (91 per cent) interviewees identified ongoing conflicts with a non-local entity.