

“WHO WERE THESE
MYSTERIOUS PEOPLE?”

*čəsna:m, the Marpole Midden, and the
Dispossession of Aboriginal Lands in
British Columbia**

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IN 1991, THE MUSQUEAM INDIAN BAND purchased the Fraser Arms Hotel, a property located in South Vancouver, close to the mouth of the Fraser River, where the community's main reserve is found. In itself, this real estate transaction was not a remarkable event. Often, frustrated with the slow progress of the resolution of their land claims in British Columbia, First Nations have purchased property both as a way to increase their land base and for commercial enterprises. For the Musqueam, the acquisition of fee-simple property was part of a strategy to reacquire territorial lands in the urbanized metropolis of Vancouver. What made this particular purchase out of the ordinary had to do with what could be found beneath the hotel and adjacent parking lot. Here lay the remnants of an important village site and burial ground that came to be known in archaeological circles as the Great Fraser Midden and, more recently, as the Marpole Midden. The Musqueam – the First Nation whose traditional territory encompasses the site and whose reserve is in closest proximity – know this place as the ancient village named čəsna:m. The late James Point, Musqueam historian, recounted that čəsna:m was “at one time a large village of people. The first people upriver from Musqueam.” These people were the “same kind as here at Musqueam” but had been “wiped out” by smallpox. As a young boy in the 1880s, Point recalled seeing at čəsna:

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m the remains of posts and “lots of bones.”¹ The Musqueam bought the hotel in 1991 to prevent renovations to the building that would most certainly have destroyed the site’s surviving physical remnants. Their long-term plan was to establish an interpretive centre – a scheme that would both support community educational and cultural programs and publicly reinforce their memory of *čəsna:m* and their lengthy territorial occupation. As Chief Wendy Grant explained in a letter alerting the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to the pending destruction, “The Musqueam Nation considers the Marpole Midden site to be one of the most meaningful storehouses of the history and culture of our people.”² Through purchase, the Musqueam regained control of sacred lands that had been lost to them through colonial dispossession.

By the 1990s, the association of the Marpole Midden with the Musqueam was automatic and unquestioned. Yet this was not always the case. In 1884, a construction crew upgrading a road that ran along the north arm of the Fraser River from New Westminster to the new farming settlement at Eburne (later known as Marpole) uncovered an extensive and artefact-rich shell midden, containing bone and stone tools, intricately carved objects, and human skeletal remains. Shell middens are layered deposits of discarded shells, fish, and animal bones; cultural objects such as bone and stone tools, jewellery, and art; and, in the case of Marpole, human burials.³ Today some archaeologists consider the Marpole Midden to be “the single most important site on the Northwest Coast” because of its tremendous size and extensive history of excavation and interpretation.⁴ The midden is used as a reference for analysis of

¹ James Point and J.E. Michael Kew, “Notes Including and Supplementing those Recorded in Field Note Book, April 24, 1968, from James Point,” Musqueam Indian Band Archives (hereafter MIBA); and fieldnotes by James Point and Wayne Suttles, “MS Placenames,” 28 September 1962, MIBA.

² Chief Wendy Grant to Janice Cochrane, Regional Director General, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Vancouver, 26 November 1990, file 205.2, MIBA.

³ From the 1860s to the 1880s, road building along the north arm of the Fraser River would have also severely affected the site. The earliest identified documentary reference to the Marpole Midden is in 1884, when Reverend H.H. Gowan and James Johnson inspected the site and retrieved a human skull and spear point. See Charles Hill-Tout, “Later Prehistoric Man in British Columbia,” in *The Salish People: The Local Contributions of Charles Hill-Tout*, vol. 3, *The Mainland Halkomelem* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), ed. Ralph Maud, 21–38; Harlan I. Smith, “Shell Heaps of the Lower Fraser River, British Columbia,” in *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History: Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, vol. 2, pt. 4 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1903), 135. For a detailed review of historical road and railway construction and its impact on the Marpole Midden, see Leonard C. Ham, *Archaeological Potential Model for the Marpole Midden* (Calgary: Canadian Heritage Parks, 2002).

⁴ R.G. Matson, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia, quoted in *Site to Sight: Imagining the Sacred* (exhibit at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 2004–05).

other archaeological sites on the Northwest Coast, especially in relation to identifying a developmental sequence of Coast Salish culture. R.G. Matson explains that the “Marpole Culture,” which has been identified as having existed between approximately 1,500 to 2,900 years ago and is named after the midden, had the same characteristics as those associated with Northwest Coast indigenous culture at the time of contact with European society – namely, “large winter villages, large multi-family households, stored salmon economy, ascribed statuses and abundant evidence of art.”⁵ Leonard C. Ham adds that the village of čəsna:m, just east of the Marpole Midden, was occupied from 1,500 until 200 years ago.⁶ From the point of “discovery” in 1884 until the 1950s, when recovery operations attempted to salvage the human remains and cultural objects before further urban expansion and construction of the Fraser Arms Hotel destroyed the site, the midden was the subject of intensive archaeological research, institutional and amateur excavation, national commemoration, public interest, and controversy. As Leonard Ham puts it, “It was the richness of the Marpole Midden which was its undoing.”⁷

In the late 1890s, Harlan I. Smith, of the American Museum of Natural History’s Jesup North Pacific Expedition, mined the site for human skeletal remains and cultural objects for the museum’s collections. These items were also to serve the museum’s investigations into the biological and cultural relationship between Northwest Coast indigenous peoples and those of northeastern Asia.⁸ In the 1920s and 1930s, local ethnographer Charles Hill-Tout and the Art, Historical, and Scientific Association of Vancouver (the forerunner to the Vancouver City Museum) also sponsored extensive excavations. The retrieved objects and skeletal remains became the basis of the association’s “pre-history” collection and the focus of its research into the racial origins of the Marpole residents. In 1938, Hill-Tout and his colleagues succeeded in having the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada dedicate

⁵ Matson, *Site to Sight*. See also Ham, *Archaeological Potential Model*; and David V. Burley, *Marpole: Anthropological Reconstructions of a Prehistoric Northwest Coast Culture Type* (Burnaby, BC: Arch Press, 1980), 8–10.

⁶ Ham, *Archaeological Potential Model*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ In relation to Harlan I. Smith’s work for the North Pacific Jesup Expedition, see Catherine C. Carlson, “Letters from the Field: Reflections on the Nineteenth-Century Archaeology of Harlan I. Smith in the Southern Interior of British Columbia, Canada,” in *Indigenous Archaeologies: Decolonizing Theory and Practice*, ed. Claire Smith and H. Martin Wobst (London: Routledge, 2006), 134–69; and Brian Thom, “Harlan I. Smith’s Jesup Fieldwork on the Northwest Coast,” in *Gateways: Exploring the Legacy of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, 1897–1900*, ed. Igor Krupnik and William W. Fitzhugh (Washington, DC: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 139–80.

the midden, an act that won the site a place in the national historical canon but that failed to preserve it. At mid-century, Charles E. Borden, a professor of German at the University of British Columbia (UBC), anticipating that further urban development would destroy the midden, conducted salvage operations to recover its skeletal remains and cultural objects. Aside from their various collecting agendas, these institutional researchers – Smith, Hill-Tout, and Borden – were all interested in the theoretical question of the identity (whether biological, racial, cultural, or ethnological) of the people who had lived there. Most often they theorized that the ancestors of the local hə́nqəmínə́m-speaking peoples residing in the Lower Fraser Delta had settled in the area in the remote past and had displaced an earlier, pre-Salishan people. The theories that migrating tribes had replaced the original Marpole residents in turn informed popular perceptions and disassociated contemporary indigenous peoples from ancient archaeological sites within their territories. Often the question of identity was framed as a mystery waiting to be solved. As a reporter with the *Ottawa Citizen* asked in 1948, “Who were these mysterious people who lived long ago at Sea Island at the mouth of the Fraser River? ... They were not Indians certainly.”⁹

In this article I examine shifting Western theories about the identities of the people who lived on the Lower Fraser River, concentrating on the transition from Charles Hill-Tout’s and the Vancouver’s Art, Historical, and Scientific Association’s emphasis on “race” in the 1920s and 1930s to the post-Second World War research of Charles E. Borden and his formulation of a regional chronology of “culture phases.” In other words, I do not determine who these people were but, rather, ask: Who claims the authority to assign meaning to the human skeletal remains and cultural objects taken from such places? What are the historical and political circumstances in which such assertions are made? What are the larger ramifications of these representations?¹⁰ Further, I present the Marpole Midden as an example of what happens to land that does not become an Indian reserve but that is clearly marked with Indianness. The historical, popular, and legal construction of the midden as an archaeological site, and not as a village or as a burial ground, distanced the Musqueam and other local Aboriginal communities from c̓əsna:m.

⁹ A.C. Cummings, “Dawn-Men of North America,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 October 1948, in Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file DIV, Vancouver Museum.

¹⁰ For a recent study that examines the identity politics surrounding contests over cultural property, see Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, *Claiming the Stones/Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002).

Significantly, this distancing contributed to the non-recognition of Aboriginal rights of ownership to ancestral places, including supposedly “abandoned” and unoccupied or seasonally occupied villages, which were not recognized by the reserve creation process. Distancing legitimized the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples.

Thus, I argue that a critical history of archaeology is an important component of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations on the Northwest Coast. Certainly, for the Musqueam, the history of excavation at Marpole and the removal of countless skulls, skeletal fragments, and ancient cultural objects over the years is a history of colonialism and dispossession. In the words of Musqueam’s treaty director, Leona M. Sparrow, this history constitutes a form of “cultural abuse.”¹¹ Scholars have long recognized the political implications of archaeological, anthropological, and historical research of indigenous histories and origins, linking such disciplinary projects to Western expansion and the colonial enterprise.¹² And as many observers have emphasized in relation to colonialist archaeology in other parts of the world, theories about identity and migrations (whether they are true or not) influenced broader, popular ideas about the legitimacy of European settlement and First Nations territorial assertions.¹³ In more recent years, however, many First Nations have established positive working relationships with archaeologists and place great faith in the strength of cultural

¹¹ Leona M. Sparrow, personal communication, October 2006.

¹² See, for example, the work of Bruce G. Trigger, “Writing the History of Archaeology: A Survey of Trends,” in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, vol. 3, *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 218–35; Bruce G. Trigger, *Artifacts and Ideas: Essays in Archaeology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003); Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (New York: Scribner, 1995); David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Claire Smith and H. Martin Wobst, eds. *Indigenous Archaeologies: Decolonizing Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Joe Watkins, “Through Wary Eyes: Indigenous Perspectives on Archaeology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 429–49; and Ian J. McNiven and Lynette Russel, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Lanham: Altamira, 2005).

¹³ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 87. For a detailed case study on how archaeology legitimized white settler society in late nineteenth-century Rhodesia by presenting black Africans as recent migrants, see Henrika Kuklick, “Contested Monuments: The Politics of Archaeology in Southern Africa,” in *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 135–69. In relation to how British interpretations of Benin (Sudanese) material culture supported imperial discourses of degeneracy and theories regarding the length of the Benin history in Africa, see Annie Coombes, “Material Culture at the Crossroads of Knowledge: The Case of the Benin ‘Bronzes,’” in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 7–28.

objects as evidence of their Aboriginal rights and title to their territories. Certainly, the second half of the twentieth century has witnessed increased indigenous control over the interpretation of the past, including the interpretation of archaeological findings.¹⁴ In my experience, many First Nations individuals express a profoundly emotional connection to ancient cultural objects and passionately draw upon archaeological sites, features, and artefacts as indisputable material evidence of territorial ownership. At the same time, these individuals are keenly aware of the argument that cultural objects and human remains cannot disclose ancestry. Knut Fladmark, in *British Columbia Prehistory*, describes the disciplinary difficulties of linking ancient and historical peoples through artefactual evidence alone:

An important example is the problem of correlating archaeological and historical cultures. A prehistoric archaeological culture is really just a collection of artifacts at about the same time by people sharing some kind of socio-cultural relationship. Differences in content between such collections through time are taken to signify changes in the way of life of the people involved and perhaps even the occasional wholesale replacement of original groups by newcomers. While most such interpretations are probably valid, the relationship between archaeological collections of survival material fragments and former whole societies is far from clear, and it is seldom possible to state confidently that a specific archaeological culture is the predecessor of any particular tribe of the historic period.¹⁵

This may be so, but when understood within the context of oral traditions that describe an uninterrupted occupation of the land and community memory of places such as *čəsna:m*, “archaeological” objects, for many First Nations individuals today, become a tangible representation of long-standing connections among people, their ancestors, and place. In many Northwest Coast cultures, the physical separation between life and death is not as easily demarcated as it tends to be in Western belief systems.¹⁶ Many Coast Salish peoples, of whom the Musqueam are a part, experience death as inextricably linked to the lives of the living, to

¹⁴ See, for example, Smith and Wobst, *Indigenous Archaeologies*. The 1997 exhibit, *Under the Delta* (Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia), which displayed cordage and basketry retrieved from wet-sites at Musqueam and other sites of the Fraser Delta, was produced collaboratively with the Musqueam Indian Band.

¹⁵ Knut R. Fladmark, *British Columbia Prehistory: Archaeological Survey of Canada* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1986), 5.

¹⁶ Mary Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia 1900–50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

the world of spirits, ghosts, and souls. There is no clear-cut distinction between the living and the ancestors or between the more recently deceased and those who passed away long ago.¹⁷ Yet there remains a fundamental dilemma of First Nations history and archaeology, as recently explored by David Hurst Thomas: How do we reconcile the claims of archaeology as “science” with Aboriginal historical traditions that place indigenous people in their territories since “time immemorial” or that have other origin and migration accounts?¹⁸

CHARLES HILL-TOUT AND THE ART,
HISTORICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION
OF VANCOUVER: VISUALIZING RACE

This memorial marks the site of one of the largest prehistoric middens on the Pacific Coast of Canada. It originally covered an area of about 4 ½ acres, with an average depth of 5 feet and a maximum depth of 15 feet. Its lowest layers were formed many centuries ago when the islands opposite were tidal flats. The bone and stone implements and utensils found in it have thrown much light upon the culture status of prehistoric man in this vicinity.¹⁹

In May 1938, local ethnographer Charles Hill-Tout, who has been credited with “discovering” the Great Fraser Midden, addressed a large crowd gathered for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada dedication of a cairn commemorating the midden. Hill-Tout emphasized the tremendous size of the site, aligned it in importance to world treasures such as King Tutankhamun’s tomb, and theorized about its great antiquity. The site offered “valuable and interesting evidence of the culture and prehistoric conditions of the aborigines of this section of the country, and of the antiquity of man in this region,” he explained, placing the midden within the larger context of anthropological inquiry and propelling Vancouver into the scientific spotlight.²⁰ For the audience of civic boosters, the midden spoke to the basic, essentialist question of the origin of humankind in North America. The cairn did not celebrate a monumental or dramatic history, nor did it celebrate a history of events,

¹⁷ Howard E. Grant, personal communication, February 2006.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Skull Wars*.

¹⁹ National Historic Sites and Monuments Board, “The Great Fraser Midden,” brass plaque, 1937, formally on loan from Parks Canada to the Musqueam Indian Band.

²⁰ “Presentation of Cairn commemorating the Great Fraser Midden,” 7 May 1938, and “Cairn Marks Historic Midden Where Ancient Mankind Lived,” 9 May 1938, unidentified newspaper clippings, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file DV, Vancouver Museum.

heroic people, or social memory. Instead, it commemorated a history of measurements, geological sequence, a shifting river, and ancient stone artefacts. “This is a scientific memorial,” the public historian Judge F.W. Howay further clarified, “and not in the line that I follow (history).”²¹ What was downplayed during the celebrations was that the cairn had been placed not on the actual site of the Marpole Midden but, rather, nearby in a small city park, a location deemed more appropriate for tourists.²² Also downplayed during these proceedings was the fact that, since the late 1800s, the midden had been a major source of skulls and skeletal remains for local relic hunters, the American Museum of Natural History, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Vancouver City Museum as well as other museums in the province and beyond. This commemoration was not about making connections between contemporary Aboriginal people and Vancouver’s history; rather, the organizers sought to reaffirm the legitimacy of settler society by commemorating a lengthy human occupation.

The very degradation that prompted the appeal to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board had previously led the Art, Historical, and Scientific Association of Vancouver to undertake extensive excavation of the Marpole Midden in the late 1920s.²³ Established in 1894, the association’s mandate was to build a fine arts gallery and a museum of antiquities and natural history, highlighting “the remains of Indian life in British Columbia and America.”²⁴ Thus, the excavations were largely mining operations aimed at obtaining artefacts and human remains for the museum’s displays on Vancouver’s “prehistory.” Between 1927 and 1933, the association engaged the self-taught “archaeologist” Herman Leisk to retrieve, regardless of technique, skeletal remains

²¹ F.W. Howay to T.P.O. Menzies, 1 November 1937, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file DV, Vancouver Museum.

²² Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, testimony given on 25 October 1949 at the Hotel Vancouver, RG23, vol. 5, item 53: 237-40, National Archives of Canada. Dr. Sage of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board explained to the commission: “We do not definitely put markers at the site ... In the same way we did not ask people to go to the Flats at Musqueam to find where Simon Fraser had his brief and fleeting adventure with the Musqueam Indians. We put it right on Marine Drive where all tourists can see it.”

²³ For these excavations, the City of Vancouver donated lots whose owners were in arrears on their taxes.

²⁴ Ronald W. Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 37. The Vancouver City Museum was forerunner to today’s Vancouver Museum. In line with the practices of larger cultural institutions of the time, the Art, Historical, and Scientific Association of Vancouver made the theoretical and spatial distinction between art (defined as European cultural production) and artefact (indigenous cultural production). This separation of “art” and “artefact” further contributed to distancing Aboriginal people from modernity.



Figure 1: Alderman H.L. Corey unveils the National Historic Sites and Monuments of Canada's cairn commemorating the Great Fraser Midden, May 1938. This cairn was not located on the midden site but, rather, in a nearby city park so that it would be more accessible to tourists. Vancouver City Archives photograph No. Mon P13.

and other artefacts from the midden. One method appears to have been to scrape away the sides of a trench with a kitchen knife and metal rod and to “watch the stream of dirt” for falling objects.²⁵ Leisk worked tirelessly, rain or shine, uncovering bits of carved bones, stone implements, beads, ceremonial copper, skeletal fragments, and fragile skulls from the muddy entanglements of dirt, stone, and tree roots. Skulls were fragile and often disintegrated in Leisk’s hands.²⁶ Leisk was not only retrieving objects for the sake of public display, however. He considered himself deeply involved in scientific work, and, although not requested to do so by the museum, he described his daily activities

²⁵ H. Leisk, “Hints on Excavations at Marpole,” undated notes, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file D-IV, Vancouver Museum; and Sharon Johnson, ed. “Herman Leisk’s Journal Notes, 1927-1933 of Excavations at the Marpole Site, DhRs 1, and other Coastal Sites,” September 1986, Vancouver Museum, copy in possession of the Musqueam Indian Band, 1-2.

²⁶ Leisk, “Hints on Excavations at Marpole.”

in journals and provided progress reports.²⁷ To Leisk's mind, careful record keeping, coupled with his institutional connections, marked his work as archaeology and distinguished it from the non-scientific and casual activities of "pothunters" or tourists looking for ancient prizes to add to their private collections. "I think I have learned the excavation trade pretty thoroughly," he confided to Harlan I. Smith, who, at this time, was the head archaeologist at the National Museum of Canada.²⁸ For Smith, however, the dig failed to meet the emerging profession's expectations regarding historic chronology: "It looks to me like mostly a treasure hunt; could learn nothing of any stratigraphy."²⁹ Leisk took a phenomenal amount of material from the midden, over one thousand human skeletons, according to one report, many of which were subsequently discarded due to insufficient museum storage space.³⁰ Two hundred or so human skulls became the basis of the Vancouver Museum's collections on prehistory and the focus of craniological investigations to determine the race of Vancouver's "mysterious" first inhabitants.

With their substantial collection of skulls, Charles Hill-Tout and Dr. George Kidd, former professor of anatomy at Queen's University, began the serious business of cataloguing and measuring the series. In the late nineteenth century, anthropologists and archaeologists viewed variations in skeletal remains, especially skulls, as evidence of racial distinctiveness. And even though Franz Boas's ground-breaking research on New York City's immigrant communities in the early 1900s revealed greater biological differences within the supposed racial groups than between them, "race" as a hierarchical category continued to permeate scientific, legal, and popular thinking well into the twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Vancouver City Museum's study of skeletal remains was influenced by the phrenological methods of the National Museum of Washington's physical anthropologist, Aleš Hrdlička.³¹ For Hill-Tout

²⁷ Herman V. Leisk to Thomas H. Ainsworth, Curator, Vancouver City Museum, 16 October 1955, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file D-IV, Vancouver Museum.

²⁸ Harlan I. Smith, "British Columbia – Marpole," transcribed letter, received 1935, Harlan I. Smith Collection, box 9, file 4, Archives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (hereafter CMCA).

²⁹ Harlan I. Smith, "Archaeological Records: Archaeological Sites, Vancouver Area, Part II, Fraser River District to New Westminster (includes Marpole Midden), 1936," Harlan I. Smith Collection, box 9, file 7, CMCA.

³⁰ Herman Leisk, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Sun*, 4 February 1937, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file D-VII, Vancouver Museum. Leisk also disposed of damaged skulls by throwing them, a few at a time, into his trash. See "Skull Mystery Explained," *Vancouver Sun*, 4 January 1932; and "Origin of Skulls Traced by Police," *Province*, 4 January 1932.

³¹ Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 102-10. See also Constance Backhouse, "Race Definition Run Amuck," in *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

and the museum, skull research provided important evidence as to who first lived in British Columbia. “Who?” in this case, was synonymous with “what race?”

In 1933, Kidd conducted detailed anthropomorphic research on eighty-one of the human skulls that had been removed from the Marpole Midden and other sites in the area. Using comparative measurements of skull cubic capacity and other cranial indices, Kidd posited two distinct types (and therefore races): the older “long-headed” (dolichocephalic) and the historic “broad-headed” (brachycephalic). Kidd concluded that the two types roughly corresponded to distinct chronological periods of time because long-headed skulls were most often found in deeper ground and broad-headed skulls were of more recent burial.³² In Kidd’s report, Charles Hill-Tout found further confirmation of his theory, first proposed in an 1895 publication of the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, that a “hostile people” had displaced an early race of people.³³ The osteological research revealed a keel-like ridge running from front to back along the long-headed cranium, a characteristic believed exclusive to Inuit skulls.³⁴ Consequently, Hill-Tout speculated that the first Marpole residents were “members of the Eskimo stock,” who were “driven out or exterminated by a later broad-headed people such as the present tribes of this region.” He believed that some two or three thousand years ago on the Lower Mainland, an aggressive people migrated to the area and displaced the previous residents, who were ancestors of the Inuit.³⁵ Hill-Tout’s erroneous two-race model (Franz Boas and others have attributed skull differentiation to cultural deformation), together with his lack of formal training, kept him on the margins of the developing field of North American anthropology and archaeology. However, it is important not to minimize his influence in popular circles on the local scene, where the theory that the Aboriginal

³² George E. Kidd, “Report on Collection of BC Indian Skulls in the Vancouver City Museum, 1933,” copy in Harlan I. Smith Collection, box 9, file 4, CMCA.

³³ Hill-Tout, “Later Prehistoric Man,” 25. Hill-Tout based his 1895 conclusions that there were two distinct groups of people on his perception that there were two distinct skull types in middens of the Lower Fraser River.

³⁴ See also Backhouse, “Race Definition Run Amuck,” for a study of the 1939 Supreme Court of Canada’s *Re Eskimo* decision, which ruled that “Eskimos” belonged to the same race as “Indians” and so fell under Canada’s Indian Act.

³⁵ Charles Hill-Tout, “An Address given at Marpole on the formal presentation of the Midden Cairn to the City by His Honour Judge Howay,” in *The Art, Historical, and Scientific Association, The Great Fraser Midden* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art, Historical and Scientific Association, 1938); and “Ancestors of Eskimo Roamed this District before Indians, Hill-Tout Informs Local Club,” *Wenatchee Daily World*, 8 June 1934, in Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file A-XXV, part c, Vancouver Museum.

people of the Lower Fraser had displaced an earlier people became the metanarrative for Marpole.³⁶

The Vancouver City Museum's enduring preoccupation with skull research did not stop at taking measurements. In the 1930s, European natural history museums developed the techniques of facial reconstruction, claiming they created accurate resemblances of people who lived in the past. By deriving probable facial features from the contours of the bone and building up clay directly over the surface of well-preserved skulls or their reproductions, artists-anthropologists moulded sculptural busts so lifelike it was said they "would instantly be recognized if met face to face, giving a far more vivid impression to laymen than an unadorned collection of skulls."³⁷ By this method, the Marpole skulls were transformed into visual representations of race, which, in turn, reified racial categories.

In 1933, the sculptor Carl Robinson produced a number of Marpole reconstructions for the Vancouver City Museum. Museum curator T.P.O. Menzies reported that Robinson's renderings became "a popular feature of the Museum" and "attracted a very large number of visitors."³⁸ Recognizing that reconstructions straddled scientific and artistic practice, and in view of critiques suggesting the risk of artistic licence at the expense of scientific truth, Robinson stressed material exactitude in his work, explaining that "no attempt has been made to give expression or individual characteristics to the face, the idea being merely to show, as nearly as possible, the appearance of the subject in life." He confirmed, "The general principle followed has been to follow the bones where

³⁶ Hill-Tout also received substantial press coverage in the *London Illustrated News*. See Robert Gerard West, "Saving and Naming the Garbage: Charles E. Borden and the Making of B.C. Prehistory, 1945-1960" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1995), 9-10. Dismissing Hill-Tout's speculations, Franz Boas argued that the long-headed skull was an example of cultural modification. For a review of the enduring influence on subsequent analysis of Hill-Tout's theory that a hostile people migrated into the Fraser Delta and displaced the original habitants, see Owen B. Beattie, "A Note on Early Cranial Studies from the Gulf of Georgia Region: Long-Heads, Broad-Heads, and the Myth of Migration," *BC Studies* 66 (1985): 28-35; Ellen W. Robinson, "Harlan I. Smith, Boas, and the Salish: Unweaving Archaeological Hypothesis," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 10 (1976): 185-96; and Thom, "Harlan I. Smith's Jesup Fieldwork on the Northwest Coast." In relation to the theory of migration more generally, see Wayne Suttles, "The Recent Emergence of the Coast Salish - the Function of an Anthropological Myth," in *Coast Salish Essays*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 256-64.

³⁷ "Sculptors Restore Face of Early Man," undated news clipping, Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file E-XIII, pt. c, Vancouver Museum.

³⁸ Vancouver City Museum and Art Gallery, Curator's Report for October; and November 1933, Harlan I. Smith Collection, box 9, file 4, cmca.

possible and to arrange the other features in harmonic relation to the whole.”³⁹

The reconstructions became visual evidence of the theory that Vancouver was occupied by an earlier “race” of people. Robinson compared the reconstruction of a Marpole skull with work done on a 150-year-old skull from another indigenous cultural group of British Columbia, the Kwakwaka’wakw, a skull considered “modern enough to be Indian, yet old enough to preclude the possibility of European blood.” Both sculptures produced a “har-



Figure 2: Carl Robinson’s reconstruction of a “longheaded” and a “broad-headed” skull. Robinson noted that both reproductions were “decidedly un-Indian” and suggested “primitive Asiatic characters.”⁴⁰ Reconstructions in the collection of the Vancouver Museum. Photographs by Alastair Maxwell.

monic balance” of facial features, which, according to race theories of the day, signalled race purity. As association director R. Munro St. John explained, “In mixed races ... [symmetry] is not so dependable, as the intermingling of widely divergent types always produced disharmonious features in the first few generations.”⁴¹ Robinson’s comparative experiment surpassed his own expectations when reconstruction performed on the 150-year-old skull not only revealed a recognizable Indian type but also one to which “experts [could] assign a tribe and habitat.”⁴²

Additionally, the reconstructions offered renewed evidence supporting the thesis that North America was peopled through an Asiatic migration across the Bering Strait land bridge. St. John claimed in the *Illustrated London News* that “both long-heads and short-heads portrayed North Asiatic faces, high cheeks, prominent eyes, shovel-like protruding mouths, and squat dished-in noses. No Indian race now existing has

³⁹ [Carl Robinson], “Reconstruction of Skulls from Eburne and Point Roberts,” Charles Hill-Tout Papers, file E-IV, Vancouver Museum.

⁴⁰ Carl Robinson, “The Reconstruction of the Prehistoric Skulls of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia,” in Vancouver Art, Historical and Scientific Association, *The Great Fraser Midden*, 27.

⁴¹ R. Munro St. John, “Whence Came the North American Indian?” *The Illustrated London News*, 29 December 1934.

⁴² *Ibid.*

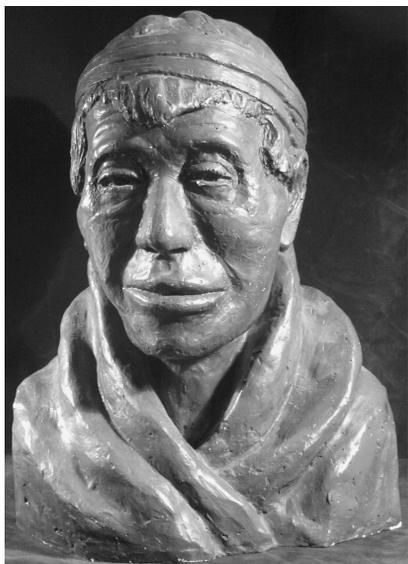


Figure 3: Carl Robinson's reconstruction of a "historic" Kwakwaka'wakw man. Note that this individual is draped with a blanket, whereas the Marpole residents are not clothed. Reconstruction in the collection of the Vancouver Museum. Photograph by Alastair Maxwell.

such protruding mouths or flat noses.⁴³ Such theories reinforced the idea that the people buried in the Marpole Midden were not affiliated with the Musqueam and, at the same time, associated indigenous peoples with Vancouver's Chinese community. As one newspaper put it, the midden was, in its beginnings, "a species of China Town."⁴⁴ In contrast, a 1957 report by archaeologist Robert Heglar on the museum reconstructions claimed that the series of busts of the Marpole Indians would give the museum visitor "a rather confused impression as to the appearance of this particular Indian group." He observed that one of the busts "appears as a generally Mongoloid head but with Negroid nose and lips"; a second "presents a combination of Mongoloid eye form accompanied by a Caucasian nose and lips." Furthermore, a third reconstruction "appears as a full-face and profile of the typical Plains Indian of North America," and another could be characterized as an "elderly Chinese male."⁴⁵

Reconstructions for museum display were meant to offer, according to Carl Ledoux, writing in 1941 for the *Vancouver Sun*, a "more faithful portrayal of prehistoric man," allowing museum visitors a greater connection to the past, beyond the "screen of scientific seclusion" and without reference to academic writing that was "dry as the sands of the Sahara."⁴⁶ Reconstructions turned skulls into portraits – individuals who were visible, in some cases personable, and always accessible to the average museum visitor. In this public-display context, skulls were transformed into living people, not races or cultures.⁴⁷ While the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Canada's Past in a Dump Heap," *Star Weekly*, undated news clipping in Charles Hill-Tout Papers, Section A-XXV, file B, Vancouver Museum.

⁴⁵ Roger Heglar, "General Remarks Concerning the Reconstructions of Facial Features of the Marpole Midden Indian Population Displayed in the Vancouver City Museum," February 1957, Laboratory of Archaeology, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia.

⁴⁶ Carl Ledoux, "Looking at Yesterday," *Vancouver Sun*, 27 September 1941.

⁴⁷ Ironically, the museum staff named one skull "Horace," which supposedly had the same cranial measurements as that of curator T.P.O. Menzies. See, "'Horace' Feared no Dentist's Drill," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 October 1933.

museum's curators wanted to provide a broader context and greater humanity to the unadorned skulls, the reading of museum visitors was quite different from that put forth by museum professionals (such as Hill-Tout) bent on articulating distinctive racial types. And because reconstructions fabricated potentially real people and were placed on public display, they were left open to narrating and storytelling that diverged from the pseudo-scientific discourses of skull measuring.

Assigning individual identities to the skulls made it easier for the museum-going public to link the human remains on display to living Aboriginal people living on nearby Indian reserves. Nevertheless, such connections were mediated by dominant, racist ideas about the indigenous, as reflected in Ledoux's newspaper stories. Ledoux presents dual portraits, corresponding to the romanticized stereotypes of the noble savage and degraded warrior, respectively:

One, in our opinion, seems to indicate a tired old chief, gazing with anguished eyes and sorrow in his heart at the remnants of his tribe, ravaged possibly by pillaging Haida warriors, who from the North have swept down on his village. The artist captured the weariness and hopelessness, together with majestic calm, portrayed in the expressive line of his face.

The second figure, on the other hand, depicts a shrewd war-like mien; the piercing eyes look into far spaces as if spying out the land for a foray. The mouth and chin show determination of unusual strength and it seems quite evident that this was a ruthless and dominant leader of men. Who knows? The stern warrior may have been the one responsible for the grief so graphically portrayed in the countenance of the old chieftain.⁴⁸

Despite museum labels highlighting scientific relevance, the skulls and their reconstructions reproduced local popular meanings that emphasized a violent indigenous history prior to contact with European society. The reporter conflated the white narrative of the vanishing Indian with a thrilling, regional drama of intertribal warfare. This history, which described aggressive Haida raids on Lower Fraser River villages, offered a familiar narrative context for the reconstructions.⁴⁹ Ledoux went on to romanticize an Aboriginal man's response to the exhibit:

⁴⁸ Ledoux, "Looking at Yesterday."

⁴⁹ The Lekwiltok, or "Yucletaw" (a division of the Kwakwaka-speaking people living at Queen Charlotte Strait and, by the 1840s, at Cape Mudge and Campbell River), are known to have raided along the lower Fraser in the early nineteenth century and before. See Wayne Suttles, "The Ethnographic Significance of the Fort Langley Journals," in *The Fort Langley Journals: 1827-30*, ed. Morag MacLachlan (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 174-5.

We observe an old Indian in one of our museums, stooped with the weight of years, eyes glazed with age, coming in to look at a few relics as a reminder of his youth. Suddenly he sees one of the reproductions and asks what it is. Upon being told that the skull from which the reproduction was made originated but a short distance from his native village, the old man said, "Maybe him my long time grandfather."⁵⁰

As we have seen, in representing the early inhabitants as a different race of people, the museum's research distanced local Aboriginal people's association with Marpole and challenged their long residency in the province. However, in this case, Ledoux suggested direct ancestral connections and, musing on the presence of an "old Indian" museum visitor, linked the reconstructions to a local indigenous community. If we (very briefly) set aside the reporter's racist portrayal of this visitor, we will see that the genealogical history Ledoux imagines runs counter to the museum's theorizing about racial typologies and is, perhaps, more in line with Coast Salish historiography and its emphasis on a continuous genealogical past and uninterrupted residency within the territory. Yet both discourses – the scientific and the popular – worked in the end to distance and dispossess contemporary Aboriginal people from a lengthy history of occupation. The museum's research assigned a more recent (and, therefore, presumably less legitimate) occupation of land. The newspapers' romantic individualizing suggested an affinity between the (reconstructed) skeletal remains found at Marpole and contemporary people but limited the latter to the trope of the vanishing Indian. Consequently, the reconstructed identities only reinstated an imagined alignment with an untainted and inaccessible past, free of the supposedly corrupting influences of modernity and civilization. Because the facial reconstructions were produced by an authority – the museum – and under the auspices of science, such romantic stereotypes were reaffirmed.

Although he conducted detailed ethnographic research with Fraser River Coast Salish communities, Charles Hill-Tout did not consider involving contemporary Aboriginal people in the formulation of knowledge about ancient archaeological sites. He held that contemporary Aboriginal residents were relatively recent newcomers to the area. The racialization of skeletal remains through facial reconstructions would have only reinforced this theory. The transformation of the skulls into recognizable faces, coupled with his erroneous perception of linguistic

⁵⁰ Ledoux, "Looking at Yesterday."

conformity among the Lower Fraser and Vancouver Island Coast Salish, convinced Hill-Tout that “it is impossible to believe that these tribes have occupied the delta for any very considerable period.”⁵¹ His commitment to disconnectedness was also born of the notion that Aboriginal cultures did not change. Because “primitive peoples such as our Indians are deeply conservative and cling to the customs of their forefathers with great tenacity,” argued Hill-Tout, present-day indigenous people could not be the descendants of people with different cultural practices.⁵² With cultural transformation rendered impossible for the ancient inhabitants of the Marpole Midden, the evident differences between these people and the contemporary population at Musqueam and other villages in the Fraser Delta were resolved by positing the presence of another race of people altogether. Science reinforced the idea that Aboriginal people were not only situated in the past but were stuck somewhere in between the ancient and the modern.

THE MUSQUEAM, CHARLES E. BORDEN,
AND THE CATEGORIZATION OF CULTURE

In 1943, Californian anthropologist Philip Drucker, in his *Archaeological Survey on the Northern Northwest Coast*, pushed for systematic, scientific archaeological work on the origins of precontact coastal peoples and the development of a regional chronology of culture for the Northwest Coast culture area.⁵³ The publication inspired UBC professor Charles E. Borden, who, being deeply passionate about the archaeological potential of the Vancouver area, initiated a series of salvage projects

⁵¹ Hill-Tout theorized that if a population were resident in a location for a millennium, it should display a greater degree of linguistic diversity than did mainland speakers. See Charles Hill-Tout, “Ethnological Studies of the Mainland Halkomelem, a Division of the Salish of British Columbia,” in *The Salish People: The Local Contribution of Charles Hill-Tout*, vol. 3, *The Mainland Halkomelem*, ed. Ralph Maud (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), 86. In relation to the complexity and the diversity of the languages of the *hulq̓amiñm̓-hən̓q̓amiñm̓-halkomelem*-dialect continuum, spoken by people living on the east coast of Vancouver Island from Victoria to Comox, in Burrard Inlet, along the Fraser River to Yale, and in parts of northern Washington State, see Patricia A. Shaw, “Language and Identity: Language and the Land,” *BC Studies* 131 (2001): 39-55; and Wayne Suttles, *Musqueam Reference Grammar* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

⁵² Charles Hill-Tout, “Buried Treasures of British Columbia,” Hill-Tout Papers, Vancouver Museum.

⁵³ Philip Drucker, “Archaeological Survey on the Northern Northwest Coast,” *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 133; Anthropological Papers*, No. 20 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1943).

at rapidly vanishing sites within the city's limits.⁵⁴ In the late 1940s, when renewed urban development in Vancouver threatened one of the last remaining portions of the Marpole Midden to contain intact archaeological deposits, Borden organized UBC students and volunteers to conduct excavations on the site.⁵⁵ Following Drucker, Borden trusted that archaeology would provide scientific answers about the dating, cultural sequence, and migrations of the Indians who, he believed, had settled in the region in the remote past.⁵⁶

Charles E. Borden's methods differed from those utilized in the earlier collecting work of the Vancouver City Museum, with its emphasis on procuring artefacts for museum display. Borden, in the new manner of the day, systematically collected *all* data related to a site, including cultural objects, human remains, and soil and plant samples; and he recorded in his voluminous notebooks detailed descriptions, diagrams, and photographs. He also described the process of carrying out the dig, noted relational data for each artefact, and even included a list of daily visitors. Because of his enthusiasm for systematizing the work of excavation, Borden was much more interested in how burials were situated within the larger context of the site than he was in the human skeletal remains per se. Even though the very act of conducting a dig meant the site's inevitable destruction, meticulous note taking and sample collecting permitted, in effect, the transposition of archaeological sites to the laboratory. As Borden explained to his students, the reward for such attentiveness in the field came later in the laboratory, where the finds began "to tell the story of the interesting chapters in the prehistory of

⁵⁴ In 1948, Borden, who at the time was a professor of German, conducted a field class at the Marpole site with UBC anthropology students, which led to a permanent course on the archaeology of British Columbia. See Anne Williams, "Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden, late Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at the University of British Columbia, recorded [in 1978], transcribed, and edited by Anne Williams, Department of Anthropology, UBC," November 1979, Museum of Anthropology Archives, University of British Columbia. In relation to Borden's career and his influence on archaeology in British Columbia and Canada, see Roy L. Carlson, "C.E. Borden's Archaeological Legacy," *BC Studies* 42 (Summer 79): 3-12.

⁵⁵ They began an initial exploratory trench, but the Aluminum Company of Canada's plans to construct the Kenney Dam and flood the Nechako gorge in British Columbia's interior directed Borden's attention away from his Vancouver-based work to more urgent salvaging elsewhere in the province. In the summer of 1952, Borden and anthropologist Wilson Duff received a small grant from the provincial government to conduct an archaeological survey at the Nechako gorge, during which they located over 130 sites of importance to Cheslatta history. The following season, the province and the aluminum company provided additional funds to enable them to continue with more intensive investigations prior to the flooding of the area. See Williams, "Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden," 50-7.

⁵⁶ Charles E. Borden, "The Middens of British Columbia," talk presented on CBR radio, 8 March 1948, Charles Borden Papers, box 49, file 21, University of British Columbia Archives (hereafter UBCA).

this area.”⁵⁷ In this paradigm, archaeological evidence could be read like a book – the assumption being that one could turn the pages backwards to the “prehistoric” period for which there existed no written records.

The chief task Borden set for himself at Marpole and other sites in the area was to reconstruct a spatial-temporal culture history and an “area synthesis” of the Lower Fraser Delta region. Through systematic excavation, recording, and artefact classification, Borden sought to establish vertically temporal and horizontally spatial “maps or lattice works of Aboriginal cultures.”⁵⁸ Artefact assemblages (i.e., compilations of objects according to affinities in material type, modes of manufacture, and original function) revealed to Borden a series of distinctive “cultures” that were potentially associated with geographic and temporal phases. Thus, investigating the possible links between archaeological objects and specific groups of people who lived in the past was not a priority. Borden’s series of cultural phases for the Lower Fraser River reached back two thousand years, but this observation, he warned in 1968, “does not necessarily imply that ancestors of the Stalo have occupied the entire or even part of the lower mainland region for the past two millennium. Population shifts may have occurred within this period, which perhaps will become evident when the archaeological record is more complete.”⁵⁹

Whereas Charles Hill-Tout used skulls to define “races” of people, Borden organized artefacts around the category of “culture.” And just as, earlier in the century, Berkeley anthropologist Alfred Kroeber famously popularized the culture-area classification scheme, whereby Aboriginal cultures were categorized spatially based on linguistic evidence and a series of “elements” (e.g., fishing and hunting technologies), Borden used artefact assemblages to distinguish distinctive chronological and geographical cultural phases. However, as Bruce Trigger has noted in relation to the period more generally, because archaeologists focused on the surviving stone or bone objects – objects that represented perhaps the least dynamic aspect of precontact society – their methods contributed to the widespread notion that, before Europeans arrived, Aboriginal cultures changed very slowly.⁶⁰ In other words, Borden’s archaeology at Marpole focused on a culture without people and without politics.

⁵⁷ Charles E. Borden, “Notes on the Prehistory,” unpublished manuscript, Charles Borden Papers, UBCA.

⁵⁸ West, “Saving and Naming the Garbage,” 13.

⁵⁹ Charles E. Borden, “Prehistory of the Lower Mainland,” in *Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape*, BC Geographical Series No. 9, ed. Alfred H. Siemens (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1968), 24.

⁶⁰ Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Borden's cultural phases for the region were complicated by his own work on the Musqueam Indian Reserve, a village site of continuous occupation for some three thousand years.⁶¹ Borden, in his 1940s to 1970s excavations of a number of village and burial sites at Musqueam, established the most recent precontact phase for the Fraser Delta region – the Stselax Phase – as AD 1250 to 1808, the latter being the year Simon Fraser visited the Lower Fraser. Borden hoped to find a relationship between the more recent precontact culture and its predecessor: “It will be interesting to see whether other elements of the old culture also occur in the lower Stelax levels. The important question: Did the recent Mu[squeam] culture evolve from the old culture or are the Mu[squeam] Indians an intrusive people?”⁶² Borden's culture history was further complicated when archaeological history was linked to a specific family. In the late 1940s, Musqueam elder Frank Charlie gave Borden permission to excavate the floor of his longhouse, one of the last remaining traditional cedar-plank houses on the reserve: “It was a dirt floor and over the centuries the occupational debris accumulated, and you had a long history of the occupation of that house,” Borden later explained in an interview on the subject.⁶³

In September 1947, Charles E. Borden received written authorization from Indian Agent H.E. Taylor to carry out archaeological investigations on the Musqueam reserve. As it turned out, Borden later recalled, this was “a task which was not so readily done because in those days the Indians were rather suspicious of strangers and hostile to people coming onto their reserve.”⁶⁴ When he took the permission letter to the reserve, band secretary Willard Sparrow “almost hit the roof.” Borden's plans to excavate were postponed until Chief James Point and other influential members of the community, including Edward Sparrow Sr., granted permission.⁶⁵ Borden's affiliation with the Musqueam began on a shaky foundation, but, over time, he was able to secure permission for his excavations:

⁶¹ Musqueam Indian Band, “Musqueam Comprehensive Land Claim: Preliminary Report on Musqueam Land Use and Occupancy,” presented to the Office of Native Claims by the Musqueam Indian Band Council, June 1984, Musqueam Indian Band Archives.

⁶² Charles E. Borden, “Musqueam East, Field Notes Oct. 1951 – April 1955,” Laboratory of Archaeology, University of British Columbia.

⁶³ Williams, “Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden,” 40. On the excavation of the Frank Charlie house, see Michelle Diane Poulsen, “Making Choices: Examining Musqueam Agency at Stselax Village during the Post-Contact Period” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005).

⁶⁴ Williams, “Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden,” 37–8; H.E. Taylor to Doctor Charles E. Borden, 4 September 1947, Charles E. Borden Papers, box 12, file 8, UBCA.

⁶⁵ [Charles E. Borden], “Musqueam, 1950,” unpublished field book, Charles E. Borden Papers, box 50, file 13, UBCA.

I did manage to convince James Point, who was the chief of the band at that time, that it was desirable to rescue these remains before they were destroyed. In order to pacify Mr. Sparrow⁶⁶, I invited him to come to our lab and to view what we had excavated already in sites such as the Point Grey site and the Locarno Beach site. So one day I packed them all into my car and drove them out to the lab. Mr. Sparrow came, and his wife, his children, and grandchildren. We all landed in the lab, and I explained in detail the various items that we had. They obviously did not know what they were and how they functioned, and they were very, very much interested, in particular Mr. Sparrow. And after a while when one of the children tried to handle some of these rather fragile objects, he told him, "Don't touch, don't touch, be careful." And so this established a good basis for further co-operation. Mr. Sparrow himself permitted me to conduct excavations on land which belonged to his family on the reserve.⁶⁷

Borden often reported that, prior to his work on Indian reserves, Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia were not interested in their "pre-history." Borden's daytrip with the Musqueam families to the university's new archaeology lab appears to have reflected the common assumption among many archaeologists and academic researchers that, if Aboriginal people could only see how institutional researchers treat and preserve cultural objects (or collect information), they would support their research. Borden believed that awareness of the custodial and public-education concerns closer to home would engender community endorsement. From the time of the university visit on, "we have had nothing but good relations with them [the Musqueam]," Borden reported.⁶⁸ For Borden, this meeting represented a complete shift in the way Aboriginal people viewed archaeological method and material culture.

From the Musqueam perspective, however, interaction with the university professor did not initiate an awakening to the relevance of "pre-history," nor was it their first experience with "archaeological artefacts." Rather, we could just as reasonably consider the Musqueam's decision to permit excavations on their reserve to be a form of intervention in the colonial narratives that disassociated their community from the ancient past. Charles Borden's emphasis on custodial and community education corresponded to Musqueam interests and expectations for archaeology. While

⁶⁶ This is likely a reference to Willard Sparrow's father, Edward Sparrow Sr. Leona M. Sparrow, personal communication, October 2006.

⁶⁷ Williams, "Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden," 37-8.

⁶⁸ "Enough Artifacts, in Fact, to Fill a Powerhouse," *Vancouver Sun*, 6 July 1972.

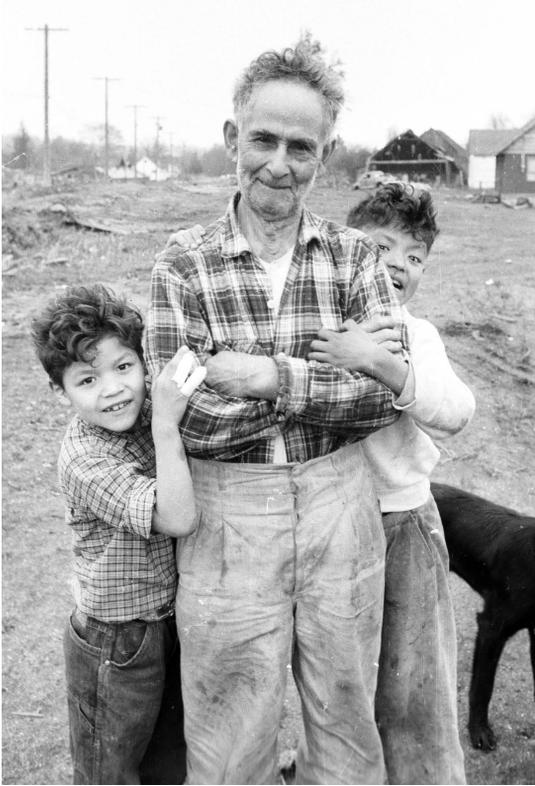


Figure 4: James Point with children Harvey and Johnny Louis, 1959. Charles E. Borden photograph collection, Laboratory of Archaeology, UBC. Published with permission of the Point and Louis families.

initially hesitant, Chief James Point allowed the excavations only after Borden agreed to show the Musqueam children what they had found.⁶⁹ When curious children rallied around the digs, Borden provided them with the tools of the trade to assist with surface collecting.⁷⁰ Today in the community, a story circulates about how young people planted arrowheads and other stone objects for Borden to find during his many walks in the village, collecting artefacts from the surface soil. We could read this as a sign of resistance to Borden's control over the production of archaeological knowledge – a form of resistance James C. Scott calls a “hidden transcript,” a subtle mixture of protest and deference to colonial authority.⁷¹ It is more likely, however, an example of youthful playfulness and Coast Salish humour and, therefore, speaks to the opposite of protest

– the community's acceptance of Borden. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the Musqueam permitted Borden to excavate a number of sites on the reserve: the basement of a house being built for Johnny Louis; a site on a piece of land belonging to James Point; the interior of a traditional cedar-plank longhouse belonging to the elder Frank Charlie; a site at the old village of Stselax (along 51st Avenue); “Old Musqueam,” the site in the 1960s of a new residential development; and a section of the bluff overlooking Mali, where old mortuary houses had been located. The participation and

⁶⁹ [Charles E. Borden], “Musqueam 1950,” unpublished field book, Charles E. Borden Papers, box 50, file 13, UBCA.

⁷⁰ Andrew C. Charles, interview conducted by author, Musqueam/Vancouver, 20 March 2005.

⁷¹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

collaboration of community members, including children, sets Borden's Musqueam excavations apart from his off-reserve work.

While the change in James Point, Edward Sparrow Sr., and Willard Sparrow's attitude following the visit to the university may not have been as drastic as Borden claimed, he did discern a significant shift in the relationship between Native people and Canadian society during this period. The Canadian public was becoming increasingly aware of what Aboriginal politicians Harold Cardinal called "The Tragedy of Canada's Indians" and what George Manuel called Canada's "Fourth World."⁷² Growing public interest in the social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, ongoing discrimination and dispossession, and more forceful Aboriginal intervention and formal protest formed the backdrop to archaeological salvaging in the 1950s and 1960s. Salvage ethnography and archaeological practice responded to a sense of moral obligation that recognized the demoralizing effects of colonialism on indigenous cultures. "We had an obligation to at least salvage the pre-history of these Indians, [which] then could be used in ... recovering some of the later ethnographic culture," explained Borden.⁷³

But Borden's archaeology was not about trying to preserve objects or burial sites as part of an integrated indigenous landscape, nor was it about connecting burial grounds, recovered cultural objects, and territorial rights (a connection that Aboriginal people often made in their petitions in the early twentieth century). Borden acknowledged that indigenous "prehistory" belonged to the corresponding contemporary communities, but he thought it was acceptable to preserve material culture in a university laboratory that, much like a public archive or library, remained accessible to Aboriginal people as a resource on traditional culture. Early on, Coast Salish people found this archive useful. For example, in 1963, Willard Sparrow borrowed numerous "artefacts" from the university's archaeology lab to display at the "Indian Days" celebrations at Humiltschen Park

⁷² Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: MG Hurtig, 1969); and George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills, ON: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1974). In relation to this period, see also Sally Weaver, *The Making of Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1985 [1975]); Harry B. Hawthorn, C.S. Belshaw, and S.M. Jamieson, *The Indians of British Columbia: A Study of Contemporary Social Adjustment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958); and Harry B. Hawthorn, Kenneth Lysysk, and Alan Cairns, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: A Report on Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies* (Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch, 1966).

⁷³ Williams, "Interviews with Dr. Charles E. Borden," 64.



Figure 5: Ginger Louis with trowel. Charles E. Borden, photograph collection, Laboratory of Archaeology, UBC. Published with permission of Ginger Louis.

on the Capilano Indian Reserve.⁷⁴ However, indigenous groups in British Columbia used their heritage resources to further the larger aims of community improvement, cultural revitalization, and, especially by the 1970s, settling Aboriginal rights and title claims. The alignment of archaeological research and community education continues to forge a forceful partnership, as Terry Point explains: “Marpole’s significance is that it is one of the largest village sites Musqueam have occupied and it is the most studied by archeologists. For me as a Musqueam person it is significant to teach our youth about a physical history of our people through the material found at the Marpole site.”⁷⁵ In this way, for the

Musqueam, archaeology is linked to the reinforcement of community pride and cultural tenacity.

No doubt, Charles Borden had difficulty reconciling Aboriginal historical tradition and contemporary residency with his archaeological

⁷⁴ “Borrower’s Agreement,” 15 June 1963, Charles E. Borden Papers, box 24, file 15, UBCA. The popular “Indian Days” celebrations were organized by the Northwest Indian Cultural Society, an Aboriginal group established in 1963 by Chief Simon Baker of Squamish, Guy Williams (president of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia), and George Manuel (president of the North American Indian Brotherhood). The society was concerned with “bringing about greater unity between the tribes of our Province, and with promoting better understanding and appreciation of the ability, skills and traditional culture of our people.” See Chief Simon Baker, “North West Indian Cultural Society,” June 1963, Charles E. Borden Papers, box 24, file 15, UBCA.

⁷⁵ Terry Point quoted in *Site to Sight*.

classification of cultural phases for the Lower Fraser Valley. As a leading Coast Salish anthropologist, the late Wayne Suttles, recalled in relation to the Marpole excavation:

I remember when Charles Borden was digging there ... I was told [by Musqueam people] the Musqueam name for the place, was told it was a Musqueam village, and got a couple of stories about the Marpole people. I mentioned this to Charles, and he bristled and said in effect that this was impossible, "That site hasn't been occupied for hundreds – or some big number – of years." I don't know whether Charles ever changed his mind or when his successors began to consider the possibility that it was occupied by people related to the Musqueams.⁷⁶

In a number of publications, Borden suggested that the Marpole Phase for the Fraser Delta, occurring between approximately 450 BC and 500 AD, was replaced by an immigrant culture, identified as the Whalen II Phase.⁷⁷ This suggests, as did Charles Hill-Tout's theory on the subject, that Borden's emphasis on population migration downplayed a longer association of local First Nations with Marpole.

With ongoing urban development threatening the Marpole Midden, Borden returned to his excavations throughout the 1950s. During this period there was a dis-

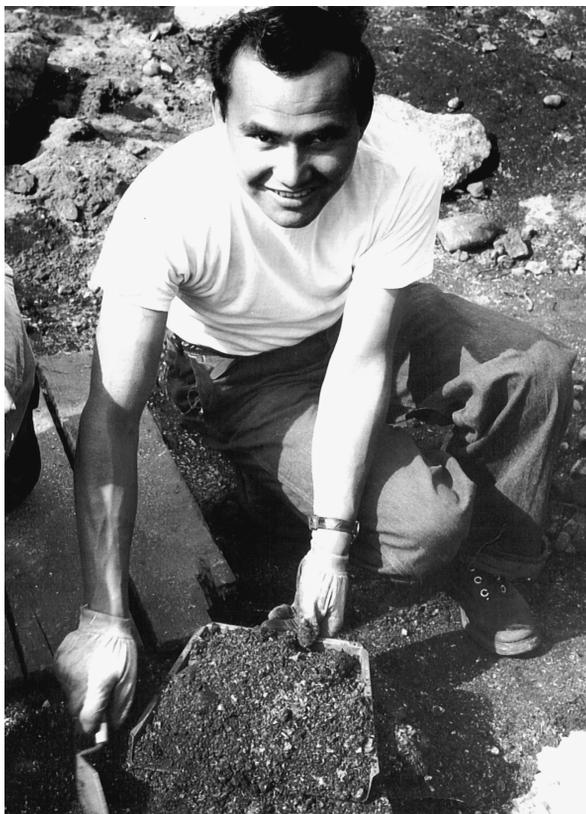


Figure 6: Andrew C. Charles at the Marpole dig. This photograph accompanied the 1955 article in the *Vancouver Province*. Photograph in the collection of Andrew C. Charles.

⁷⁶ Wayne Suttles, interview conducted by author, San Juan Island, January 2004.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Borden, "Prehistory of the Lower Mainland"; and Charles E. Borden, "Culture History of the Fraser Delta Region: An Outline," *BC Studies* 6, 7 (1970): 255–63. See also Burley, *Marpole*, for a review of Borden's work in the context of disciplinary critiques and history.

cernable shift in the relationship between archaeological researchers and Aboriginal communities, characterized by more intensive fieldwork, longer-term affiliations, and the hiring of Native people on digs. Along with UBC archaeology students, Borden hired a young Musqueam man, Andrew C. Charles, for the highly publicized Marpole dig. The press marvelled at Charles's presence in 1955 among the crew, identifying him as the first Aboriginal archaeologist in British Columbia: "Andy 'Smitty' Charles, a handsome 22-year-old Indian of the Musqueam Reserve, is unique among his people. To all known records he is the first BC Indian to scientifically explore and excavate into the pre-history remains of his ancestors."⁷⁸

Today, Andrew C. Charles recalls that his involvement in the dig was a source of pride and accomplishment for his family and that the oral teachings he had received from his parents Andrew and Christine Charles – that Musqueam's ancestors had lived in the area since before memory – corresponded to the archaeological findings:

I believe that is the only physical evidence that we have of pre-contact existence. There is some theory that some of the artefacts predate the occupation of the Coast Salish people on the coast. I don't know if they can substantiate that or not, but ... what Dr. Borden used to say is that Musqueam people along with the people on the Fraser River and Vancouver Island all migrated from the interior. Now it's hard for me to believe that as I am led to believe otherwise. We were here from time immemorial.⁷⁹

"Culture is always in transition," explains Charles. For many Aboriginal people such as Charles, there were no "racial" or "cultural" interruptions of residency as proposed by Hill-Tout and Borden, respectively. The important thing was that the archaeological record showed that their people lived here thousands of years ago. "And it is only natural to assume," pronounces Charles, "that because we were the Aboriginal people of the day when Europeans came to North America, the artefacts in those middens were from our ancestors."⁸⁰ A far-reaching network of

⁷⁸ *Vancouver Province*, 22 June 1955. Also cited in West, "Saving and Naming the Garbage," 37. While he was working at the St. Mungo cannery, Charles independently discovered and excavated the St. Mungo site near New Westminster using the procedures learned while working with Borden at Marpole. Borden named the "regional phase" characterized by the site the "Charles phase" in recognition of Charles's initiative. See Charles E. Borden, *Origins and Development of Early Northwest Coast Culture to about 3000 BC* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1975), 96-7.

⁷⁹ Charles interview, 20 March 2005.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

genealogical ties connects contemporary Aboriginal people with those from the past.

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At a time when elite white Vancouverites grappled with the physical presence of Aboriginal peoples, reserves, and relics within the city's boundaries, the research of Charles Hill-Tout and the Vancouver City Museum contributed to the notion that the indigenous people of the Fraser Delta were not the first peoples of the area. I have described the effects of this theory as a kind of distancing (in both time and space) of Aboriginal people from their past – a discourse that acknowledged a more recent connection to place but did not credit a lengthy uninterrupted history of residency or ownership. Such distance essentially ensured, intentionally or not, that Aboriginal claims to land and belonging would not overwrite the Euro-Canadian position. The local culture was an extension of a colonial culture that simultaneously distanced contemporary Aboriginal people from the past and situated authentic Aboriginal people in the past. To be sure, Aboriginal people were denied access to modernity, but they were also denied the history and ownership of village and burial sites that had not been established as Indian reserves.

What happened to these civic narratives of dispossession when, in the second half of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people intervened and archaeological research took place on Indian reserves? In relation to the Marpole Midden and other sites of the Fraser Delta, Charles E. Borden posited a chronological series of cultural phases and proposed that changes in culture were sometimes the result of disruption through population migration rather than indigenous innovation.⁸¹ Seen in this light, Borden was part of an institutionalized academic culture that controlled the production of archaeological knowledge and ascribed meanings to archaeological finds that were often at odds with indigenous histories.⁸² However, when viewed in the context of his lengthy relationship with the Musqueam community, Borden's work marks an important shift towards an anti-colonial, or reclamation, culture. While Borden's concern was for increased public awareness regarding the importance of archaeological sites to provincial heritage, he also recognized that First Nations were interested in formal archaeological research. Thus, his excavations on the Musqueam Indian Reserve mark

⁸¹ Burley, *Marpole*, 9–10.

⁸² For an articulation of this view, see West, "Saving and Naming the Garbage."

an important turning point in the colonial culture of archaeology as they established connections between contemporary peoples and those who came before.

Over time, the Musqueam have increasingly appropriated archaeological methods and museum practices for their own community and public-education goals. As early as 1936, Harlan I. Smith wrote that the Musqueam were not interested in selling their “prized possession,” the stone sculpture *qeysca:m*, as they planned to build a museum of their own on the site of the old longhouse.⁸³ The community goal of having their own museum to exhibit “Musqueam treasures” continued to animate Musqueam interest in archaeology, and, in the 1970s, the community asked Borden to conduct further excavations on the reserve with the retrieved objects to be held in trust by UBC’s Laboratory of Archaeology until their museum could be realized. More recently, the original 1937 National Historic Sites and Monument Board’s plaque commemorating the Marpole Midden was transferred to the collection of the Musqueam Indian Band, on long-term loan from Parks Canada. Even though many Musqueam individuals do not consider the plaque something worth collecting, preserving, and displaying, this incident points to the prominent public Aboriginal mapping of the area and a shift towards mainstream recognition of First Nations’ culture, history, and geography.

The Musqueam redirected the archaeological practices of preserving, cataloguing, dating, and analyzing objects – practices that could be viewed as forming part of the colonial apparatus of power – towards the important task of settling long-standing grievances regarding the public and legal recognition of Aboriginal rights and title. Their comprehensive land claim, submitted to the federal government in 1984, includes an academic archaeological history of the Lower Mainland but emphasizes an eight-thousand-year history of cultural evolution and continuity. The land claim notes that, instead of cultural disruption, Borden’s “‘cultures’ document the uninterrupted development of the Central Coast Salish ‘cultures’ found in the Strait of Georgia area at contact.”⁸⁴ In October 2004, the Musqueam argued in the BC Court of Appeal that the provincial government arranged to sell the University Golf Course adjacent to UBC at the very time that it was sitting with the band at the treaty table – an act of bad faith. The Musqueam claimed that archaeological evidence, including old village sites, hunting trails,

⁸³ “The Musqueam Stone,” Harlan I. Smith Collection, box 9, file 7, CMCA.

⁸⁴ Musqueam Indian Band, “Musqueam Comprehensive Land Claim,” 13.

and middens, showed that their ancestors traditionally occupied the area where the Golf Course was situated. During the case, Justice Southin noted that the Marpole Midden was buried beneath the Fraser Arms Hotel and added, "There seems to be little doubt ... that the Musqueam had village sites all over this place ... There is plenty of evidence on the ground. After all, they weren't going to the Safeway to get their groceries."⁸⁵

This present discussion has only touched upon the subject of how Aboriginal peoples of the Northwest Coast, and the Musqueam in particular, have navigated the colonialist practices of archaeological classification and engaged in research collaborations that are useful to them. The archaeology of Charles Hill-Tout and Charles E. Borden presented varied theories regarding the racial and cultural identity of the people who lived in the Vancouver area a long time ago. Certainly, for Charles Hill-Tout and his colleagues, human skeletal remains and cultural objects revealed "indisputable evidence of the existence of a primitive people here in ages long gone by."⁸⁶ But these removed ancient objects and skeletal remains represent a much larger "living landscape," as Howard E. Grant of Musqueam describes it.⁸⁷ For the Musqueam and other First Nations communities, they speak to an enduring web of genealogical connections to those ancestors. They provide a physical and spiritual connection to an integrated territory where their people have lived since time immemorial. Thus, the Marpole Midden itself can be viewed as a kind of artefact, with its own history of meaning and representation. And, as First Nations increasingly intervene in colonial narratives and appropriate Western archaeological and museum practices for their own purposes, the archaeological history of places such as *čəsna:m* becomes an important component in redefining First Nations's own cultural traditions, protocols, and identities.

⁸⁵ "BC Golf Course Constructed on Band Land, Court Hears," *Globe and Mail*, circa October 2004, news clipping in possession of the Musqueam Indian Band.

⁸⁶ St. John, "Whence Came the North American Indian?"

⁸⁷ Howard E. Grant, personal communication, February 2006.