

## EDITORIAL

Lynn Blake's article on the Oblates reminds me of a photograph I took in the spring of 1964 (photo 1) while on a geography field trip out from UBC. We were on a terrace at the mouth of Bridge River, overlooking rapids that have long been the site of a major Native fishery on the Fraser. The old church and the huddle of small log houses beyond it intrigued me, but I knew nothing about them. The log houses, much deteriorated, are still there, but the church has long since burned down, and my photograph, taken in ignorance, is now something of a record of what once had been an Oblate mission.

In recent years, I have often returned to the ruined village at the mouth of the Bridge. Even without the church, it is a moving place, a point of con-

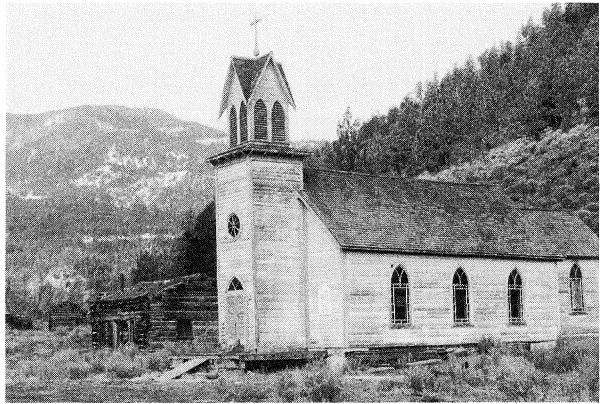


Photo 1: Oblate church, Bridge River, 1964.

vergence of a particular French Christianity and the Stl'atl'imx people. In this strange British Columbia, such places are precious. They are glimpses of our past, and they become rarer. South of Lillooet was Anglican mission territory, and for years there was an Anglican chapel on the terrace overlooking the mouth of the Stein. It too burned a few years ago; even its foundation (photo 2) is hard to find on a boulder-strewn terrace. A little farther south, where the ferry crosses the river, Harlan Smith, American archaeologist, took a picture a hundred years ago looking directly west across the river. In the foreground of his picture is a sharply defined circular housepit, measured some six feet deep and thirty-six across, the foundation of what was once a sizeable winter house. A few days ago, I stood in the same place and took much the same picture (photo 3). The view has hardly changed (though there are more trees now), but the housepit is gone, bulldozed out of recognition.

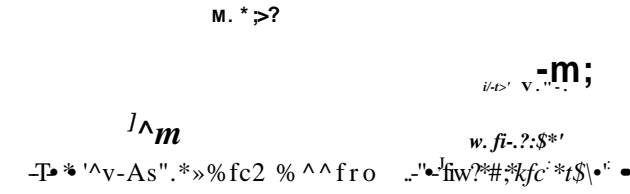


Photo 2: Transept of Anglican chapel, Stein River, 1998.

Whether by accident or design, we destroy our landscapes from the past. For those of us who have loved these human traces on the land, these losses are small wounds. More than that, I suspect that their

going affects the way we know ourselves and our society. Once there were hundreds of housepits throughout the benches and terraces of the middle Fraser. A few remain, but one has to know where to look for them. Without housepits, the illusion that wilderness preceded Europeans becomes that much more plausible. And if there are not mission churches to look at, the missionaries' hand in the "civilization" of Native people recedes a little farther from view. It becomes a shade harder to recognize colonialism's cultural power. Instead we encounter a pre-packaged past in local museums: usually a few Native artefacts, then the paraphernalia and progress of settler society. So armed, we construct our stories of the past, but would they not be better, more inclusive stories if we drew more from the land itself and kent something mere, besides scenery, to look at?

Photo 3: View across the Fraser River from just north of Lytton (where Harlan Smith took the same picture one hundred years ago).