

FROM IMBROGLIO TO PIG WAR:

The San Juan Island Dispute, 1853-71, in History and Memory

GORDON ROBERT LYALL

ON 15 JUNE 1859, AN AMERICAN settler on San Juan Island shot a pig owned by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). This pig was the only casualty in the San Juan Island Dispute, which apart from the Alaska Panhandle, was the last border conflict between Great Britain and the United States. How this event was remembered in the late nineteenth century and how it was interpreted over the course of the twentieth century changes considerably and is evident in four phases of historical writing. Prevailing interpretations broadly reflect the political concerns and historical fashions of each period.

Initially, details of the event were foggy, and the story was told to amuse more than anything else. This may be considered "the construction of memory" phase. Second came the "nation-building," or "state-forming," histories phase, with early twentieth-century historians placing the dispute in the context of boundary formation and the development of British Columbia and Washington State. "Pig War" histories emerged in the mid-1950s and have continued through the early twenty-first century. These histories focus on the resolution of the conflict. Historians and public authorities emphasize the settlement of the San Juan boundary and the "peaceful relationship which has existed between the United States and Canada for generations" as an admirable, and rare, phenomenon in world history – something that gives the region a unique history.¹ Twenty-first century histories continue to frame the event as the Pig War, but the San Juan Island National Historical Park (SJNIHP) is developing a more inclusive story, with greater acknowledgment of Indigenous presence on San Juan in tandem with the peace message. Finally, an examination of the relationship between this message and the popular acceptance of the term "Pig War" suggests that this seemingly playful name has ideological and symbolic meaning.

¹ Lucille McDonald, "Where Did San Juan Island's 'Pig War' Begin?" *Seattle Sunday Times Magazine*, 2 November 1958.

THE SAN JUAN ISLAND DISPUTE, 1853-71

The San Juan Island Dispute developed from the unclear language of the Oregon Treaty, 1846, which led to confusion over the water boundary in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This left the sovereignty of San Juan, an island of 143 square kilometres, approximately twelve kilometres east of Victoria, in question. British colonists in Victoria and American settlers in the Puget Sound quarrelled over the island for years.² In 1853, Governor James Douglas commissioned the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the HBC, to operate a sheep farm (called Bellevue) on San Juan as part of a plan to hold the island as “a *de facto* dependency of Vancouver’s Island.”³ Over the next decade, the farm was surrounded by American settlers, who saw Bellevue as an HBC infringement on American territorial rights.

In 1855, American officials for Whatcom County landed on San Juan and demanded eighty dollars in taxes from the farm. Charles Griffin, the clerk in charge of the Bellevue farm, refused to pay; and, on the evening of 30 March, “an armed party” of Americans “succeeded in carrying off with impunity, thirty four head of valuable breeding rams.” Douglas reported that this “outrage” would “lead to sharp reprisals.”⁴ He appealed to Isaac Stevens, governor of the Washington Territories, to “prevent the repetition of such acts of violence,” describing the sheep appropriation as “a fruitless and mischievous waste of energy,” and to find “other means” of resolving the border conflict.⁵ Despite these tensions, officials dealt with the issue in a strained but amicable joint commission charged with settling the water boundary.⁶

On 15 June 1859, Griffin recorded in his journal: “an American shot one of my pigs for trespassing!!!”⁷ He confronted the shooter, Lyman

² For a cogent analysis of the treaty, see James O. McCabe, *The San Juan Water Boundary Question* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964).

³ British Government, *Memorandum Respecting the Island of San Juan* (London: The Foreign Office, 1859), 13.

⁴ Douglas to Grey, 18 May 1855, Colonial Despatches, University of Victoria, bcgenesis.uvic.ca/getDoc.htm?id=V55105.scx.

⁵ Douglas to Stevens, 26 April 1855, Colonial Despatches, University of Victoria, bcgenesis.uvic.ca/getDoc.htm?id=V55105.scx.

⁶ For detailed correspondence of the boundary commission, see Viscount Milton, MP, *A History of the San Juan Water Boundary Question, As Affecting the Division of Territory between Great Britain and the United States* (London: Cassel, Petter, and Galpin, 1869); United States Government, *The Northwest Boundary. Discussion of the Water Boundary Question: Geographical Memoir of the Islands in Dispute: and History of the Military Occupation of San Juan Island: Accompanied by Map and Cross-sections of Channels* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868).

⁷ Charles Griffin, Journals, Belle Vue Sheep Farm Post, 1854-1855 and 1858-1862, Hudson’s Bay Company Records, microfilm, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Cutlar, and demanded payment, which Cutlar refused. Griffin reported to Douglas that a “lawless intruder” had destroyed a “valuable boar” and “added insult to injury” by refusing to pay “remuneration”; instead, he threatened to shoot Griffin’s cattle.⁸ According to Cutlar, it was the British authorities who had been “supercilious.”⁹ Cutlar testified to American officials that Griffin, accompanied by A.G. Dallas, “one of the directors of the Hudson’s Bay Company,” and Dr. William Fraser Tolmie, “a chief factor,” visited his home on San Juan and, in a manner both “insulting and threatening,” demanded payment for the pig and indicated that, if this was not forthcoming, they would arrest him and take him to Victoria for trial.¹⁰ Dallas denied these claims, insisting that they were “too absurd to require refutation.”¹¹

This “quarrel,” reported by the *New York Herald* to be “all about these hogs,” triggered a sequence of events that culminated in the final border settlement between Great Britain and the United States.¹² Cutlar and other American settlers took their grievances to the US Army, and, in response, General William Harney ordered troops to occupy San Juan. In turn, the Royal Navy sent ships to contest the landing of American troops. American soldier William Peck, stationed on the island, wrote in his journal: “Rumors of troubles concerning the rights of ownership of the Island of San Juan in Puget Sound are going the rounds . . . [It] is feared a collision will occur.”¹³ He observed: “it seems present difficulties all arose from an unruly hog, of which there are plenty here.”¹⁴ The shooting of Griffin’s pig made local and foreign news. American and British officials distributed clippings of articles on “the boundary difficulty” in their correspondence.¹⁵ But the pig was quickly overshadowed by the real issue, which was the rightful ownership of the island.¹⁶

⁸ Griffin to Douglas, 15 June 1859, San Juan Island Correspondence, etc., 1959, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Old MS K/RS/Sa5, vol. 1.

⁹ Lyman Cutlar, Deposition, 7 September 1859, in United States Government, *Northwest Boundary*, 183.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹ Dallas to Harney, 10 May 1863, British Government, *Correspondence Relative to the Occupation of the Island of San Juan by the United States’ Troops. August to October, 1859* (London: The Foreign Office, 1859), 79–80.

¹² *New York Herald*, 28 September 1859; British Government, *Correspondence*, 95.

¹³ C. Brewster Coulter, *The Pig War, and Other Experiences of William Peck, Soldier, 1858–1862, US Army Corps of Engineers: The Journal of William A. Peck Jr.* (Medford, OR: Webb Research Group, 1993), 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁵ British Government, *Correspondence*, 80–97.

¹⁶ United States Government, *Northwest Boundary*, 149; British Government, *Correspondence*, 33, 82.

Both sides regarded San Juan Island as a vitally important territory. Overlander Viscount Milton, who visited the island in 1863, wrote a few years later that the future of “British Columbia, [and] the entire British possessions in North America,” depended “on a just and equitable solution of the so-called San Juan Water Boundary Question.”¹⁷ He urged British officials to assert sovereignty over the island for strategic military purposes.¹⁸ On the American side, General Harney agreed that the island was of military value and indicated that he did not believe “the British would ever have attempted the hazardous game they are now playing, but for the immense prize at stake.”¹⁹

On 18 July 1859, Harney ordered Captain George Pickett to establish his “company on Bellvue [*sic*] or San Juan island in some suitable position near the harbour at the southeastern extremity.”²⁰ Pickett chose a location directly beside the Bellevue farm. On 27 July, Pickett issued “Order No. 1” to establish a military post on the island and to protect the rights of American settlers on San Juan.²¹ Griffin wrote to Pickett informing him that the site where his “camp [was] pitched” was “the property and in occupation of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”²² Pickett replied that he could not “acknowledge” HBC ownership.²³

Tensions between the two sides heightened until General Winfield Scott arrived at San Juan on 7 November 1859. Known as the “Great Pacificator” and recognized for his negotiation tactics during the “Aroostook Controversy,” which led to the peaceful settlement of the New Brunswick and Maine border dispute in 1839, Scott was ordered to mediate between British and American commanders.²⁴ He convinced both sides to station an equal number of troops on the island until the dispute was settled.²⁵ This arrangement continued for twelve years, until the German Kaiser awarded San Juan to the United States as a part of the so-called *Alabama* claims in the Treaty of Washington, 1872.

¹⁷ Milton, *History of the San Juan Water Boundary Question*, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 395, 445.

¹⁹ Harney to Adjutant General, 29 August 1859, in State of Washington, *Collection of Official Documents on the San Juan Imbroglia, 1859-1872* (Tacoma: The Washington National Guard, 1964).

²⁰ Harney to Pickett, 18 July 1859, in State of Washington, *Collection of Official Documents*.

²¹ George Pickett, “Order No. 1,” Military Post, San Juan Island, 27 July 1859, in British Government, *Correspondence*, 13.

²² Griffin to Pickett, 30 July 1859, in State of Washington, *Collection of Official Documents*.

²³ Pickett to Griffin, 30 July 1859, in State of Washington, *Collection of Official Documents*.

²⁴ Erwin Thompson, *Historic Resource Study: San Juan Island National Historical Park* (Denver: National Park Services, 1972), 64-67; Michael Vouri, *The Pig War: Standoff at Griffin Bay* (Friday Harbor, WA: Griffin Bay Bookstore, 1999), 166, 238-39.

²⁵ United States Government, *Northwest Boundary*, 2.

This non-war, generally referred to as “the San Juan Difficulty” or “imbroglio” by officials and the press, featured many colourful characters with personalities that would, according to local author David Richardson, “tax the skill of Hemingway.”²⁶ They included: General William Harney; Captain George Pickett, of later Gettysburg fame; Henry Robert Martyn, a famous military strategist; Winfield Scott, prominent US general, former presidential candidate, and veteran of both the War of 1812 and the Mexican War; and James Douglas, first governor of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. A travel guide to San Juan published in the 1960s offers the opinion that “a Friml or a Gilbert and Sullivan might well have used the plot [of the imbroglio] for one of their famous light operas.”²⁷ Yet, San Juan was soon “relegated to the status of a vignette, a footnote in history,” as the United States confronted the trauma of the Civil War and Great Britain re-evaluated its colonial situation.²⁸

CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY, 1871-1908

Late in the nineteenth century, reports of the San Juan Island Dispute were turned into historical accounts. The Foreign Office in Great Britain and the secretary of state in the United States were generally reticent about releasing official information; Viscount Milton’s history was the only contemporary publication to include these carefully concealed documents.²⁹ Other than Milton, writers had newspaper articles and a few eyewitness accounts at their disposal. As these resources were limited, histories of the dispute were scarce; however, they included a tale written for a children’s magazine, a travel guide to San

²⁶ *Victoria Gazette*, “To Readers in California,” 6 August 1859, *Colonial Despatches*, University of Victoria, bcgenesis.uvic.ca/imageBrowser.htm?image=co_305_11_00049r.jpg; *Illustrated London News*, “The San Juan Difficulty,” 15 October 1859; *New York Times*, 24 September 1859; British Government, *Correspondence*, 83; *New York Herald*, 24 September 1859; British Government, *Correspondence*, 85-86; *Washington Intelligencer*, 24 September 1859; British Government, *Correspondence*, 8; Commander R.C. Mayne, *Four Years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island. An Account of Their Forests, Rivers, Coasts, Gold Fields, and Resources for Colonisation* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1862), 39; Scott to Douglas, 2 November 1859, in British Government, *Part II Correspondence Relative to the Occupation of the Island of San Juan by the United States’ Troops. October 1859 to July, 1860* (London: The Foreign Office, 1860). *Correspondence*, 40; A.G. Dallas to Harney, 10 May 1860, in British Government, *Part II. Correspondence*, 82; David Richardson, *Pig War Islands* (Eastsound, WA: Orcas Publishing Company, 1971), 11.

²⁷ C.T. Morgan, *The San Juan Story: Brief History, Tourist Guide, Pictures of Points of Interest, and 4-color map*. 16th ed. (Friday Harbor, WA: C.T. Morgan, San Juan Industries, 1966), 5.

²⁸ Tim O’Gorman, “The Pig War” (MA thesis, University of Idaho, 1980), 4.

²⁹ Milton, *History of the San Juan Water Boundary Question*, 8.

Juan, a conspiracy theory, a memoir, and a discussion in the first serious history of British Columbia.

American journalist Julian Ralph was the first person to connect, in print, the shooting of the pig with the start of the San Juan Island Dispute. In 1888, he told the story of “A Pig That Nearly Caused a War” as an amusing anecdote to entertain young folks.³⁰ Seventeen years after this curious event, he wrote:

In no history that I have been able to find, and in no popular book of reference that I have seen after a great deal of searching, is there any account of the fact that in the year 1859 a pig almost plunged us into a war with Great Britain. Yet when I was in the beautiful, rose-garnished English city of Victoria, on Vancouver Island, close to the Pacific coast of Washington Territory, I found many English subjects who had a great deal to say about that pig, and about the mischief caused by it.³¹

Ralph’s tale, a mixture of historical facts and hearsay, largely derived from interviews with residents of Victoria and included incorrect names as well as inaccurate details. For example, he reported that it was Paul K. Hubbs, an American customs collector, and not Cutlar, who shot “Griffiths” pig.³² Ralph’s informants were not the only ones to inaccurately record certain details of the event. William Peck, while stationed on San Juan, wrote in his journal that it was a “Mr. Sawyer” who shot the pig.³³ Both instances suggest how quickly events and actors can be forgotten, altered, and mythologized in the absence of firm documentation.³⁴

Ralph reported that, after the Kaiser’s arbitration decision, only people in Victoria continued to discuss “the pig that nearly caused a war.” From an American perspective, Ralph characterized the San Juan “war” as a “comparatively slight incident” by contrast with his compatriots’ violent memories of the Civil War. But “it was very different with the people of Victoria ... [T]heirs was then, and has since been, a peaceful existence, and the shock and excitement caused when one of their pigs all but brought war to their doors made a deep impression on their minds.”³⁵ Ralph’s framing of the pig’s role in the war was intended to be therapeutic; his emphasis on the pig implied mere mischief and offered a delightfully

³⁰ Julian Ralph, “A Pig That Nearly Caused a War,” *St. Nicholas Magazine for Young Folks* 15, 5 (March 1888), 371.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 372.

³³ Coulter, *Pig War*, 99.

³⁴ Ralph, “Pig That Nearly Caused a War,” 372.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

innocent story from the United States' past to a generation marked by the tragedy of the American Civil War.

In a January 1896 article, in which he promoted San Juan to the British as a sportsman and nature lover's "paradise,"³⁶ an American army officer, Major John Brooke, also saw the pig shooting as a catalyst for conflict. Brooke, stationed on San Juan during the dispute, recalled that "the 'San Juan question' was the weightiest topic of the hour."³⁷ Nonetheless, he lightheartedly related a local magistrate's theory that "there was a woman behind every trouble," only to point out that, in this case, "the originator of the quarrel which well-nigh brought two great nations together by the ears was a pig – a stupid, groveling pig."³⁸

Another American army officer, Colonel Granville Haller, was less concerned about the pig than with refuting historical claims that were "wholly groundless."³⁹ On 16 January 1896, he presented a paper on the "controversy" at San Juan to the Loyal Legion at the Tacoma Hotel in Tacoma, Washington.⁴⁰ Haller was stationed at Fort Townsend during the dispute and had been a vocal opponent of Harney's administration of affairs. During his speech, later published, Haller called Harney's actions "inexplicable" and alleged that Harney sought to aid the cause of southern secession by creating a war with Britain to distract the union government.⁴¹ Haller claimed that Pickett was also involved in this conspiracy. Pickett's prominent rise in the Confederate Army gave a certain weight to Haller's suggestion.

Haller argued that Harney intentionally subordinated General Silas Casey when he posted Pickett to San Juan with "complete and exclusive control." According to Haller, Pickett and Harney acted treasonously in their attempt to initiate a violent conflict with Great Britain in spite of the fact that it was not a "propitious moment to fight England, from a military point of view." He described Pickett as "displeased" when Haller advised a joint military occupation of the island. Because Haller outranked Pickett, Pickett had not wished him present at negotiations with the Royal Navy.⁴²

³⁶ Maj. John Brooke, USA, "San Juan Island," *Recreation* (Edinburgh) 4, January 1896.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Granville O. Haller, *San Juan and Secession: Possible Relation to the War of the Rebellion - Did General Harney Try to Make Trouble with English to Aid the Conspiracy? - A Careful Review of His orders and the Circumstances Attending the Disputed Possessions during the Year 1859* (Tacoma, WA: The Tacoma Sunday Ledger, 1896), 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

Haller was a strong supporter of the North in the American Civil War as well as a military and political rival to Harney. This rivalry undoubtedly coloured his interpretation of Harney's actions. Not all of Harney's moves were inconsistent with military tactics. Posting Captain Pickett to San Juan, for example, instead of General Casey, gave Casey "latitude to deviate from the order based upon his considerable military experience." Haller's opinions remain speculations and no records exist to support his arguments.⁴³

In 1908, Charles McKay gave one of the last eyewitness accounts of the "hog scrape that nearly caused a war between two great nations."⁴⁴ His narrative is personal and describes Fourth of July celebrations, the raising of an American flag (seen by Harney from the Strait of Juan de Fuca), as well as "lots of fun" had at feasts shared by American and British soldiers. By McKay's account he convinced Cutlar to hide from Victoria officials rather than to shoot them, as he threatened to do, and thus "saved bloodshed."⁴⁵ McKay ended his recollections of the "hog scrape" with a pitch for his new-found religious belief, claiming that he was healthier and "happier than ever before in [his] lifetime" and advising his "fellow brothers and sisters to set all old prejudices aside and investigate Christian Science, which will teach you to be happy, healthy and prosperous, with good will toward all."⁴⁶

The most important contribution to the San Juan story during this period is a small part of the first official history of British Columbia. In 1887, Hubert Howe Bancroft included a chapter on the "San Juan Island Difficulty" and a brief description of the "affair of the hog" in his history of the province.⁴⁷ Like Ralph, he observed that, due to the "courteous" manner of the British colonists, the San Juan situation was a conflict that "the Yankees could well afford to cheer." But Bancroft's history stands apart from other late nineteenth-century histories due to its treatment of context.⁴⁸ As historian Chad Reimer notes, Bancroft was in the business of writing state-formation histories. His "unifying theme" was British Columbia's "move into civilization and into history itself."⁴⁹ For Bancroft, the resolution of the San Juan "difficulty" was evidence

⁴³ Vouri, *Pig War*, 84.

⁴⁴ Charles McKay, "History of San Juan Island," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 2, 4 (1908): 293.

⁴⁵ McKay, *History of San Juan Island*, 291-93.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁴⁷ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*. Vol. 32: *History of British Columbia, 1792-1887* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1887), 605-49.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁴⁹ Chad Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History, 1784-1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 37.

of progress in the region. It marked the last border dispute between two great nations and helped usher in a civilized era of modernization.

PHASE 2: NATION BUILDING, 1909-64

At the turn of the century, historians inspired by Bancroft saw the early history of the Pacific Northwest from a state-formation perspective. American historians saw the settlement of the Pacific Northwest as a Manichean battle between American pioneers and the Hudson's Bay Company, viewing the San Juan Island Dispute as a microcosm of the larger battle. Canadian historians defended the HBC and its role during the dispute and contrasted the British colonial experience with the American.

In his 1909 history of Washington State, Edmond Meany viewed the "San Juan Island episode" as a great victory for American settlers over the "bravado and grasping boldness on the part of the Hudson [*sic*] Bay Company and its backers."⁵⁰ His sentiments were echoed in Pacific Northwest histories written at the time. Writing in the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Alfred Tunem indicted the HBC for its role in the controversy.⁵¹ "When conflict actually began," he wrote, "the Hudson's Bay Company did everything within its power to have England hold San Juan Island."⁵² He argued that HBC officials "urged the Indians of the north to molest the American citizens in order to frighten them from the island. The British subjects were never disturbed."⁵³ There is no proof that the HBC or Governor Douglas acted thus. In fact, evidence from beyond the islands suggests that the British helped defend American settlers in the Puget Sound region from such attacks.⁵⁴ Scapegoating of the HBC was typical for American historians of the time.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Edmond Meany, *History of the State of Washington* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 242.

⁵¹ Alfred Tunem, "The Dispute over the San Juan Island Water Boundary," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 23, 1 (1932): 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³ Alfred Tunem, "The Dispute over the San Juan Island Water Boundary," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 23, 3 (1932): 196.

⁵⁴ Tunem cites an unknown source speaking at the 35th Congress; his evidence amounts to little more than political hearsay. See Tunem, "Dispute," vol. 23, no. 3, 196; Evidence of the British helping Americans can be found in a memorial given by the San Juan residents to General Harney in which they thank the British authorities for protection given. See "Memorial of American Citizens on San Juan to General Harney," in United States Government, *Northwest Boundary*, 149.

⁵⁵ See Meany, *History of the State of Washington*; Tunem, *Dispute*; Lionel H. Laing, "The Family-Company-Compact," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 22, 2 (1931): 117-28.

Early twentieth-century BC historians also sought to legitimize their society.⁵⁶ Bancroft's well-known *History of British Columbia* offers a prototype, but Canadian historians were "embarrassed" that the first history of the province had been written by an American. According to Reimer, they were harshly critical of Bancroft's work being "strongly anti-British" and countered by espousing the virtues of the HBC.⁵⁷ Frederick Howay, for example, defended the HBC by contrasting the violence of the American frontier with the peace, order, and good government considered typical of Canadian development.⁵⁸ Canadian historians lionized the British actors of the "San Juan Island Trouble" for their heroics and their efforts to resolve the issue peacefully.⁵⁹

As the professionalization of historical scholarship proceeded in the twentieth century, the work of local historians became marginalized, and little attention was given to the San Juan boundary dispute.⁶⁰ Most Canadian histories of this period pay scant attention to the shooting of the pig or to the dispute. Donald Creighton's well-known works on Canadian history fail to mention San Juan, although they discuss the *Alabama* claims and the Treaty of Washington.⁶¹ Edgar McInnis couches San Juan within the claims and the treaty but does not explain the dispute.⁶² Likewise, Arthur Lower dedicates the subordinate clause of one sentence to San Juan.⁶³

During this period, the major contribution to studies of the San Juan Island Dispute came from American lawyer and international treaty scholar David Hunter Miller, who published verbatim much of the official correspondence between the British and Americans during the conflict as well as the arbitration decision.⁶⁴ He conducted little analysis of the event, but he was one of three writers in the 1940s to describe "the

⁵⁶ Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History*, 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 44

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 68; F.W. Howay, *British Columbia: The Making of a Province* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1928), 183.

⁶⁰ Hunter Miller, *Northwest Water Boundary: Report of the Experts Summoned by the German Emperor as Arbitrator under Articles 34-42 of the Treaty of Washington of May 8, 1871, Preliminary to His Award Dated October 21, 1872*, ed. and trans. Hunter Miller (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1942), iii.

⁶¹ Donald Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957); Donald Creighton, *The Story of Canada* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1959).

⁶² Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Political and Social History* (Toronto: Rinehart and Co., 1958), 317-22.

⁶³ Arthur Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 361.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Hunter Miller, *San Juan Archipelago: Study of the Joint Occupation of San Juan Island* (Bellows Falls, VT: Wyndham Press, 1943).

affair of the pig.” And, on a visit to San Juan, he “examined the probable locus” of its death.⁶⁵

In the post-war era, both Margaret Ormsby and James McCabe viewed the dispute through the “state-forming” lens. Ormsby’s monumental 1958 history of British Columbia offers only a handful of sentences on San Juan. It presents a perspective shaped by her mentor, Walter Sage, and her writing echoes Creighton’s in style.⁶⁶ Ormsby’s discussion of the incident mirrors early twentieth-century accounts and fails to closely engage it. San Juan clearly had to be addressed in a history of British Columbia, but Ormsby provides no new detail in her thoroughly orthodox interpretation. McCabe’s history of the “San Juan Water Boundary Question” (1964) describes the pig-shooting incident briefly and cites Cutlar’s decision to build “what he euphemistically called a farm” right on the HBC’s sheep run as the start of the conflict.⁶⁷ However, as in earlier histories, local details are overshadowed by a discussion of diplomatic procedures and the impact of the settlement on Anglo-American relations. The pig shooting itself is largely ignored.

In this context, San Juan Island resident Sylvia Rank Landahl’s unpublished 1943 manuscript, “San Juan County,” is remarkable for its inclusion of a chapter entitled “The Pig War.”⁶⁸ Landahl’s connections to the island and to the dispute were strong. As part of the Rosler family, whose patriarch arrived on San Juan in Pickett’s infantry, she undoubtedly heard many tales from the pioneering days and adopted the colloquial language used to describe the event, which suggests that the term “Pig War” may have originated on San Juan Island.⁶⁹ Curiously, however, the term was also employed almost simultaneously on the other side of the United States. In 1949, a PhD candidate at Duke University, John Long Jr., wrote a dissertation about Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth century entitled “The San Juan Island Boundary Controversy.” It includes a chapter entitled “The ‘Pig War’: the Harney-Douglas Conflict.”⁷⁰ Long did publish a version of his dissertation in article form in *Pacific*

⁶⁵ Ibid., preface.

⁶⁶ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: Macmillan, 1964), 256; Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History*, 129–34.

⁶⁷ McCabe, *San Juan Water Boundary Question*, 37.

⁶⁸ Sylvia Rank Landahl, “San Juan County,” San Juan Island National Historical Park Archives, 1943.

⁶⁹ Sylvia Rank Landahl, “Some Rosler-Landahl Family History,” San Juan Island National Historical Park Archives, January 1972; 1860 US Census, San Juan Island Precinct, San Juan P.O., enumerated 27, 28, 29 June 1860.

⁷⁰ John W. Long Jr., “The San Juan Island Boundary Controversy: A Phase of 19th Century Anglo-American Relations” (PhD diss., Duke University Press, 1949), 65–66, 200.

Northwest Quarterly, but he makes no reference to the Pig War.⁷¹ Neither Landahl's nor Long's works achieved wide circulation or entered the public imagination.

PHASE 3: THE PIG WAR, 1955-2000

In the 1950s, the San Juan story was less frequently presented as an episode in the formation of British Columbia and Washington State than as a narrative of peace, and the dispute became widely known as the "Pig War." With the pig's death once more a focal point, the incident was often framed as a ridiculous circumstance that nearly resulted in catastrophic war. Unlike the late nineteenth-century commentators, American authors writing about the San Juan Island Dispute argued that there was a moral lesson in this story – one that should be heard by world leaders. The memories of two world wars, Cold War tensions, and wars in Korea and Vietnam shaped these reinterpretations of the dispute.

In 1955, American journalist and historian Joseph Kinsey Howard was the first to articulate the San Juan story with an anti-imperial message. He views the shooting of an "imperial pig," and the backlash that ensued, as a symbolic example of the aggressive nature of imperialism. One of Howard's legacies is the conclusion that the "rational" parties in the conflict were those who sought to prevent violence, such as Admiral Baynes and Scott.⁷² "Harney and Pickett were spoiling for a fight," Howard states, "but on the other hand, it was the forbearance and common sense manifested by two other professional fighting men which saved America and Britain from plunging blindly into the silliest war ever fought, a war over a pig."⁷³ Rather than making states or nations the heroes or villains of his piece, Howard turns his narrative on the actions of violent and non-violent actors. He also formalizes the notion that it would have been "silly" for the two nations to go to war. His approach provides a template for later historians of the San Juan Island Dispute, such as Washington State senator Warren Magnuson, who, in 1960, wrote: "Perhaps the best, if silliest, war this country ever fought was caused by the death of a rooting pig." Like Howard, Magnuson

⁷¹ Long, "San Juan Island Boundary Controversy," 595; John W. Long Jr., "The Development of the San Juan Island Water Boundary Controversy," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 43, 3 (1952): 187-213.

⁷² Joseph Kinsey Howard, "Manifest Destiny and the British Empire's Pig," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 5, 4 (1955), 23.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 21.

credits “the skill and patience of responsible officials” for the peaceful settlement.⁷⁴

Although Howard’s treatment of the “imperial pig” refocused historical attention on the pig-shooting incident, he did not use the term “Pig War.” This term first appears in print in Lucille McDonald’s 1958 article for the *Seattle Times* entitled, “Where Did San Juan Island’s ‘Pig War’ Begin?”⁷⁵ Based on “extensive research” in British Columbia and Washington State, neither this article nor the others in the series it initiated traced the origins of this name, which suggests that it may have been in colloquial use by this time.⁷⁶

In 1965, during debates about the creation of a national park on San Juan, the 89th American National Congress argued about whether “Pig War” was an appropriate name for the event. The name was favoured by the Loyal Order of the Moose, Friday Harbor Chapter, on San Juan, which advocated for “Pig War National Park” because “the sites concerned in the border dispute, known locally as the Pig War, [were] in danger of being lost.”⁷⁷ Not all San Juan residents were of similar mind. Sam Buck of San Juan testified before Congress that he was opposed to the name “Pig War National Park.”⁷⁸ The mayor of Friday Harbor agreed, declaring: “On this matter of the pig, we have tried to appease our British Columbia neighbors. We have sent pigs over there. They have sent them back. They have sent pigs over here, and we have sent them back. So the ‘Pig’ part should be forgotten.”⁷⁹ Many residents considered the pig’s death to be a distraction from the main theme that they hoped to emphasize in the proposed national park. As Etta Engeland, of the San Juan Historical Society, noted in 1965:

A few years ago, a little ceremony took place down at the water front, in which a pig was given back to the Canadians. It was all in the spirit of geniality and good fun, but how many other places in the world can boast of such a relationship between two countries? The affair of the

⁷⁴ Warren G. Magnuson, “One-Shot War with England: It Lasted for Years and the Outcome Was Decided by the Kaiser. The Total Casualties: One Dead Pig,” *American Heritage: The Magazine of History* 11, 3 (1960), 63.

⁷⁵ McDonald, “Where Did San Juan Island’s ‘Pig War’ Begin?” 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁷ United States Government, *Pig War National Historical Park Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate; Eighty-Ninth Congress. First Session on S. 489. An Act to Authorize the Establishment of the Pig War National Historical Park in the State of Washington, and for Other Purposes, April 17, 1965* (Washington: US Government, 1965), 142–43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

pig has been remembered over the years, probably because it piques the imagination; but it should be seen in its proper perspective; as a symbol of the much larger issue.⁸⁰

Peter Ristuben of the Washington State Historical Society recommended the name “San Juan National Park” rather than “Pig War National Park,” asserting that the real “significance of the jurisdictional dispute is that it did not escalate into war but was settled by pacific means.”⁸¹

Supporters of the “Pig War National Park” designation acknowledged as much but argued differently. Roger Pegues, representing the Western Outdoor Clubs, testified: “I must say that I prefer the colorful title of ‘Pig War’ to the mundane and meaningless title, ‘San Juan.’ The words ‘Pig War’ add meaning. They connect the park to a crucial occurrence in our history. In addition, the very significance which those words connote symbolizes the irrationality of going to war when disputes can otherwise be solved.”⁸² Senator Henry Jackson noted that the stone markers memorializing the peaceful settlement of the dispute, erected by Edmond Meaney and the Washington State Historical Society early in the twentieth century, “ha[ve] always been described as the Pig War Monument, but this does cause some problems, because they think we are spending a lot of money on a pig war out here. But from a historical point of view, the area and the problem has been referred to as the ‘Pig War Conflict.’”⁸³

In 1966, the enabling legislation for the creation of the park declared: “[It] shall be known as the San Juan Island National Historical Park and shall commemorate the final settlement by arbitration of the Oregon boundary dispute and the peaceful relationship which has existed between the United States and Canada for generations.”⁸⁴ This declaration became the predominant message associated with the San Juan Island Dispute from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The fact that there was no war became the crux of the story.

An SJINHP prospectus, released in 1971, identifies “the park’s major interpretive theme to be the Pig War.” It emphasizes “its cultural and political circumstances, and most important, the idea ... that discord and dissension between nations can, if subjected to rational behavior, lead to justice and friendship and a feeling of well-being, and also to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁸¹ Ibid., 34.

⁸² Ibid., 86.

⁸³ Ibid., 17; Kelley June Cannon, *San Juan Island National Historical Park Administrative History* (Seattle: National Park Service, 1997), 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 165.

a realization of the senselessness of freewheeling attitudes and clashes of arms.”⁸⁵ At the centennial of the dispute in 1972, the National Park reaffirmed this message of peace. Washington State historian Keith Murray delivered a speech in which he declared that “this tiny dot of earth on the beautiful bay will always be a reminder that senseless wars over insignificant causes do not need to happen.” The National Park Service printed these words in a brochure distributed at the park.

Murray’s 1968 book, *The Pig War*, is the first scholarly work to refer to the entire San Juan Island Dispute as the “Pig War.” His interpretation of the event complements the National Park’s message of peace, and he follows Howard’s line of thinking, crediting “responsible men” from each country with preventing war. Murray observes that “such rational behavior in international affair was rare, and the incident deserves more attention than it has received by historians.”⁸⁶ Writing at the height of the Vietnam War, Murray saw a world engaged in unnecessary war, and he concluded that “wars started over incidents as trivial as the killing of the San Juan pig” should not “mushroom into murderous affairs.”⁸⁷ His message had heightened importance as the conflict in Vietnam divided Americans. The Pig War was now viewed as a clear example of positive conflict resolution.

In 1971, Vancouver author and journalist Will Dawson echoed Murray’s sentiments in a creative non-fiction historical narrative inspired by events at San Juan. He, too, saw that the dispute was “a war unique in the annals of war in that the only casualty was one pig.”⁸⁸ In *The War That Was Never Fought*, he asserts: “Discussions between nations over problems may take up time, but they are infinitely preferable to the impetuous, warlike behavior of men like General Harney. Where war leaves bitterness, peaceful settlement leaves friendship.”⁸⁹ Dawson claimed that the Pig War distinguished the border between British Columbia and Washington State as a globally unique demilitarized border. “Instead of forts bristling with guns looming over the Puget Sound and British Columbia,” he says, “there stands near Blaine, Washington State, the 67-foot-high Peace Arch, the only arch of its kind in the world.”⁹⁰ To Dawson, this was incredible because “never before in all recorded

⁸⁵ Ibid., 137.

⁸⁶ Keith Murray, *The Pig War* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1968), 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁸ Will Dawson, *The War That Was Never Fought* (Princeton: Auerbach, 1971), 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

history has the world witnessed such a near miracle of tolerance and understanding between nations.”⁹¹

Also in 1971, David Richardson of Orcas Island published *Pig War Islands*, another San Juan history espousing the Murray/Howard perspective. He argues that it was “an altogether different kind of pig-gishness that actually brought two frontier forces eyeball-to-eyeball.” According to Richardson, the “chief engineers” of the conflict “were in fact an American general who wanted to be President, and a British governor who could not forget he was a company man.” He describes it as an “egoistic contest” over a “gaggle of sparsely inhabited islands.”⁹² Richardson agreed with his contemporaries that this “San Juan pig episode” was an “unlikely kind of war” that could have had profound effects on “the course of the great American rebellion over slavery, the map of North America [and] perhaps even the future shape of the British empire.”⁹³ But, instead of war, the legacy of the dispute was “the beginning of a long-lasting period of friendship, one token of which is the long totally undefended border between Canada and the United States.”⁹⁴

Erwinn Thompson’s 1972 study of San Juan for the National Park Service provides a deeply detailed account of the crisis, including the “day of the pig,” as well as a “structural history” of the island and recommendations for the park’s infrastructure.⁹⁵ According to Thompson: “Wars have been caused by incidents as trivial as Cutlar’s shooting of a pig. For a brief moment in 1859 an outbreak of warfare had threatened the peaceful charm of the San Juans.”⁹⁶ Thompson invokes Howard at one point of his “grim” narrative to give his story a “lighter vein.”⁹⁷ And he, too, praises “responsible men” with “common sense” for their victory over the “war hawks.” Thompson declares: “the principle of peaceful negotiation, as established by the San Juan issue, would rule the day.”⁹⁸

Dawson, Richardson, and Thompson all embraced Murray’s message of peace, but it is not universally accepted. Historians Barry Gough and Stuart Anderson, writing articles for the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* in the 1970s, while not denying Murray’s message, did not incorporate it in their works. In his assessment of the Royal Navy’s role in relations

⁹¹ Ibid., vii.

⁹² Richardson, *Pig War Islands*, 14.

⁹³ Ibid., 14, 207.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁵ Thompson, *Historic Resource Study*, viii, 1, 17, 229.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 123.

between the United States and Great Britain during the Oregon Boundary Dispute, Anderson did not comment on the significance of the San Juan settlement.⁹⁹ And Gough, in his study of British policy during the dispute, merely noted that the “Anglo-American rivalry over San Juan Island, as in the Oregon dispute, led not to war but to peace,” which was “a signal of success” for officials in Great Britain.¹⁰⁰

By the 1980s, however, Howard’s and Murray’s interpretation of the Pig War was becoming axiomatic. In 1980, Tim O’Gorman wrote an MA thesis in Idaho that focused on the press coverage of the conflict. He reaffirmed the Howard/Murray thesis, stating: “Hindsight enables us to view the Pig War as a small event that was allowed to get out of hand by strutting sabrerattlers[] but [was] stopped short of conflict by reasonable men.”¹⁰¹ Further: “There was not a fight[,] and reason prevailed in an atmosphere filled with possibilities for a war.” O’Gorman concluded that it was “reason” that turned the conflict into something more “absurd” than “trag[ic].”¹⁰²

Also, in 1987, San Juan residents and authors Jo Bailey-Cummings and Al Cummings wrote: “If such a conflict had broken out, it is certain that the warmth and rapport that now exists between the people of British Columbia and Americans might never have developed. The patriotic scars of death and bloodshed might have become permanent.” They describe “the war of the pig” as a “charming historical artifact ... possibly the evidence of a guardian angel who hovered over the newly-born American frontier.” Like Thompson, they quote Joseph Kinsey Howard to put the significance of the story in “perspective.”¹⁰³

At the end of the century, Mike Vouri contributed another book to the Pig War bookshelf. A resident of San Juan and historical interpreter of the SJINHP since 1995, Vouri had frequent contact with Keith Murray while a student at Western Washington University, and it was Murray who encouraged him to write his book.¹⁰⁴ *The Pig War: Standoff at Griffin Bay* exemplifies Murray’s Vietnam War-era message of peace. Vouri was a veteran of that war, having served overseas from 1968 to 1969. When asked about his book, and what he hoped its lasting impact

⁹⁹ Stuart Anderson, “British Threats and the Settlement of the Oregon Boundary Dispute,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 66, 4 (1975): 68.

¹⁰⁰ Barry M. Gough, “British Policy in the San Juan Boundary Dispute, 1854-72,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 62, 2 (1971): 68.

¹⁰¹ O’Gorman, “Pig War,” 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 66

¹⁰³ Jo Bailey-Cummings and Al Cummings, *The Settler’s Own Stories: San Juan - The Powder-Keg Island* (Friday Harbor, WA: Beach Combers Inc. (1987), 54-55.

¹⁰⁴ Vouri, *Pig War*, acknowledgments; personal correspondence with author, 19 November 2014.

would be, Vouri replied: “World peace.” He recognized that the “the Pig War could’ve escalated into a tragic conflict” and that, because it did not, it stands as a good model for international affairs.¹⁰⁵ His book is rich in military detail, especially concerning vessels and tactics, but Vouri explicitly reminds readers that “despite the word ‘war’ in the title of this book, the story is about peace.”¹⁰⁶

PHASE 4: THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Today, the San Juan Island National Historical Park maintains “the peaceful settlement” theme. A resource guide designed for Washington State schoolteachers, available online, reaffirms the importance of this message. “The best lesson about the Pig War is that there was no war,” the guide reads, “both countries were winners ... [T]oday, the international border between the United States and Canada is the longest unfortified boundary in the world and certainly the most peaceful. This is the greatest lesson of the Pig War.”¹⁰⁷ The new General Management Plan for the SJNHP, issued in 2008, revitalizes Murray’s message of peace in the post-9/11 climate, stating that the park “is the only site that illustrates, in its dramatic and largely intact physical setting, how war can be averted and peace maintained through positive action by individuals and governments – a powerful message in unsettled times.”¹⁰⁸

Historians also continue to make use of Murray’s 1968 conclusions. In 2004, for example, historian Scott Kaufman praised the “cool heads” from the Royal Navy for avoiding violence.¹⁰⁹ He “could not believe that such a seemingly minor event could have such enormous ramifications.”¹¹⁰ And, in 2009, E.C. Coleman, a naval historian from the United Kingdom, underscored the didactic element of the Pig War narrative by describing it as “an act that found governors and generals eager for war, politicians and diplomats vying for position, presidents and prime ministers posturing, whilst sailors, soldiers and marines, from both sides, learned the value

¹⁰⁵ *San Juan Journal*, “Interview with ‘Pig War’ author Mike Vouri,” 21 August 2008, www.sanjuanjournal.com/lifestyle/27247989.html.

¹⁰⁶ Vouri, *Pig War*, acknowledgments.

¹⁰⁷ San Juan Island National Historical Park, *The Pig War: Conflict and Resolution in the Pacific Northwest: A Resource Guide for Washington State Teachers* (Friday Harbor, WA: San Juan Island NHP), 98, www.nps.gov/sajh/forteachers/upload/Trunk-1.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ National Park Service, *San Juan Island National Historical Park: Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Friday Harbor, WA: San Juan Island National Historical Park, 2008), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Scott Kaufman, *The Pig War: The United States, Britain, and the Balance of Power in the Pacific Northwest, 1846–1872* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 184.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.

of co-operation and common sense – a lesson still to be learned by their leaders.”¹¹¹ Coleman regards the “forbearance and pragmatic approach of the Royal Navy” as the reason behind the peaceful resolution of the dispute.¹¹²

In recent years, the SJINHP staff have reconfigured their historic prospectus “to incorporate a broader range of themes, including pre-European history and the natural environment.”¹¹³ With the support of local Native groups, as well as the public and businesses, the park is “enhancing the interpretation of Native American culture and pre-history,” which Diana Barg, cultural resource program manager for the Samish Indian Nation, believes “will strengthen an important element of the Park.”¹¹⁴ This is an important development aimed at redressing the neglect of Indigenous history on the San Juan Islands due to a focus on the Pig War. There are few nineteenth-century documents that deal with Indigenous peoples during the conflict, and these generally characterize them as “foreign savages” and “pirates.”¹¹⁵ Few historians view the island as a Native landscape because, in the mid-nineteenth century, Indigenous peoples used the islands seasonally. Claims that “recurring outbreaks of disease” led to the abandonment of settlements on the island imply that San Juan was once a thriving hub of Native activity.¹¹⁶

The SJINHP’s adoption of “the preferred alternative of the Samish Indian Nation,” designed to “broaden the scope of resource management and interpretation programs to emphasize the connections and inter-relationships between the park’s natural and cultural resources,” places greater emphasis on the park’s “natural resources in defining the cultural landscapes and influencing the settlement and historic events of San Juan Island.”¹¹⁷ This will “benefit cultural resources located on the properties through protection and preservation” and help the public to “better understand and interpret the resources in a more complete context.”¹¹⁸ This initiative has encouraged the study of Indigenous stewardship of the land. The Lummi Nation’s participation in the San Juan Island County Fair (where it shared stories of its heritage) and a series of free

¹¹¹ E.C. Coleman, *The Pig War: The Most Perfect War in History* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 212.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹³ National Park Service, *San Juan Island National Historical Park*, 163.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹¹⁵ United States Government, *Northwest Boundary*, 135, 207; Council of Washington Territory, 7th session, 7 January 1860.

¹¹⁶ Richardson, *Pig War Islands*, 235.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 269.

lectures about First Nations on San Juan (hosted by the park from July to September 2014) are two examples of these projects.¹¹⁹

A brochure for the free lectures states: “When the Hudson’s Bay Company arrived on San Juan Island to establish a sheep farm, they encountered an island ecosystem that had already been shaped by human hands for thousands of years.” The lectures, held at the Skagit Valley College’s Friday Harbor Campus, explore the “activities and accomplishments of Native Americans/First Nations regarding stewardship of the land and sea, as well as their interactions with European Americans locally and regionally.” The park plans to “expand these themes” to show that “native peoples inhabited these islands for 9,000 years or more before the coming of Europeans, building a culture that utilized the abundant natural resources of the area.” Superintendent Lee Taylor states: “Not only is it the mission of the park to educate the park visitors about the joint occupation, but also relate to them the early habitation of the island and the culture that first shaped the [San Juan] archipelago.”¹²⁰ The efforts of the SJNHP are emblematic of the new reframing of the San Juan narrative: it continues to emphasize a message of peace while offering a more inclusive and complex story.

CONCLUSION

This account of the San Juan Island Dispute shows how histories are framed and then reframed. The events on San Juan in the mid-nineteenth century have been portrayed as an amusing anecdote for survivors of a catastrophic civil war, as a small piece of a larger nation-building narrative, and as a story of peace. By the end of the twentieth century, accounts of the Pig War found their meaning in the moral message that war is “boorish” behaviour and that true heroes negotiate instead of fight.¹²¹ Semioticians might assess the significance of the term “pig” within its “webs of meaning” and note that “pig” holds derogatory connotations when it is used to describe a person who is uncouth and unrefined.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Lummi Youth Academy, *Return to the Ancestral Lands of Our People: Invitation from the Friends of San Juan and National Parks Services*, Brochure, August 2014.

¹²⁰ National Park Service, Native American Stewardship Series, www.nps.gov/sajh/historyculture/copy-of-native-american-stewardship-series.htm.

¹²¹ Hayden White famously and rhetorically asked: “Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?” See Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 25.

¹²² Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

Might the term “Pig War” suggest that those who would go to war over a pig possess these negative qualities?

Prominent semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure argues that there is often a taxonomy of choices in the process of assigning names to events or objects and that the selection reveals tacit or implicit values placed on the interpretation of its meaning.¹²³ Rosemary Neering, a historian from Victoria, comments that the San Juan conflict could have been called “the sheep war” or the “customs inspector war” after the 1855 sheep incident. Vouri also proposes this line of thinking in his article entitled “The San Juan Sheep War.”¹²⁴ Yet the pig retains centre stage, perhaps because death is a more certain route to martyrdom than incarceration. To call the dispute the “Pig War” rather than the “Sheep War” is to elicit a very different emotional and intellectual response. Seen in this light, the term “Pig War” becomes an appropriate name for a historical event framed as a victory of peace over war. Scholars in this century of post-colonial studies have moulded the peace message into a more inclusive history – one that delves into the heterogeneous cultural history of San Juan Island and further emphasizes that the San Juan story is a good model for peace and progress.

¹²³ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 84.

¹²⁴ Michael P. Vouri, “The San Juan Sheep War,” *Columbia Magazine* 14, 4 (2000-01), 22-30.