

THE RESPONSE OF OKANAGAN INDIANS TO EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

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BRITISH COLUMBIA NATIVE INDIAN ADAPTATION to the intrusion of a capitalist economy and European institutions in the nineteenth century is not well understood by ethno-historians. The roles of external agents such as the colonial government, missionaries, and white settlers in this process have been examined, as has the response of particular Indian families to new economic opportunities.¹ But few historians have examined the response of particular Indian communities to the range of economic and social pressures exerted by European contact. The Okanagan tribe, in the southern interior of British Columbia, faced the challenge and opportunity of the new political and economic order with a remarkable willingness to adapt to the new circumstances.² However, the Natives failed to successfully integrate into the European socio-economic order in large part because of the institutional discrimination of the British Columbia settler society.

The complex traditional economy of the Interior Plateau involved seasonal hunting, fishing and gathering, and trading with other families or tribes to obtain a range of products.³ The resources on which the Okanagan Indians depended were widely scattered and available

¹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977 and Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: an Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1838-1930*, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978.

² Peter Carstens, in *The Queen's People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, has examined the Head of the Lake band of the Okanagan tribe, for which study he acknowledges extensive use of a preliminary draft of this paper as well as the author's dissertation. Despite this dependence, Carstens makes numerous errors of fact and interpretation, is unnecessarily deterministic in his approach, and totally ignores the impact of the Oblate missionaries on the political, economic, and social development of the Okanagan Indian community.

³ See Nancy Turner, Randy Bouchard, and Dorothy Kennedy, *Ethnobotany of the Okanagan-Colvile Indians of British Columbia*, Occasional Papers of the British Columbia Museum, 1980.

only at specific times of the year. This pattern of resource distribution required surplus food to be gathered, preserved, and stored during seasons of availability to ensure survival in seasons of non-availability. The Indians exploited the resources of their territory by deploying specifically organized task groups near to critical resources at various times of the year. This strategy had its own set of characteristics: a semi-permanent winter village site which served as a central storage depot, logistically organized resource procurement parties, field camps established near to important resources, field processing and temporary storage of large quantities of food, and transport of processed foods to the winter village.⁴

The winter village system implied a particular annual round for the Indian people.⁵ The Okanagan migrated in November to a low-elevation winter village at a location which provided water and fuel, had good drainage, and gave access to good winter hunting ranges. The major Okanagan winter villages north of the International Boundary were at Nkamip (Osoyoos), Penticton, Nkamaplix (Head of the Lake), and Spallumcheen. These villages broke up in April, with families going to fish for suckers at the forks of the Similkameen River, for trout in Vernon Creek, or perhaps to gather *spitlum* roots near Trout Creek. Throughout the plentiful months, until the fall deer hunt ended in October, the Okanagan people migrated as individual families to minor resource sites and, when necessary, reassembled in larger groups at major resource locations. When resources such as fish and berries were found in close proximity, lengthy or even year-round residence was possible. Penticton, which means in Okanagan, "people always there," may have been occupied by some permanent residents.

Life in these seasonal villages was loosely structured with each family retaining considerable independence as well as the freedom to change its association from one village headman to another. Headmen played a mediation role but had little real authority, except the influence which they acquired through their redistributive function, which in turn depended on their ability to organize economic activities, such as the fall deer hunt or the building of a fishing weir.

The multi-faceted economy of the Okanagan people was marked by insecurity of production, which necessitated a relative shifting among resources when one product was scarce. The Okanagan people were less

⁴ See Lewis R. Binford, "Willow Smoke and Dog's Tails, Hunter-Gatherer Settlement Systems and Archaeological Site Formation," *American Antiquity* (1980): 4-20.

⁵ For more detail see Duane Thomson, "A History of the Okanagan: Indians and Whites in the Settlement Era, 1860-1920," (hereafter "History") Ph.D. dissertation, U.B.C., 1985.

vulnerable to periodic bouts of starvation than the predominantly fishing tribes, such as the Thompson and Shuswap Indians, because they did not rely on a single staple resource. Nevertheless, life was precarious. The lack of any significant annual surplus required the Okanagan to develop a high degree of flexibility in their economic activity. They employed two alternative economic strategies. For major storable products, such as the salmon and deer obtained in the autumn, production and distribution were communal and operated through the office of a headman. For other products, such as roots, berries, and basket-making material, production was organized by individual families who retained ownership of the goods. Thus, the Okanagan Indian resource management regime recognized either band or individual ownership of resources. For additional flexibility and security, the Okanagan allowed regulated access to their resources by, and maintained extensive trade connections with, neighbouring tribes.

The traditional Okanagan economy was dynamic and flexible; as new organizational techniques, products, and technologies appeared, they were tested for possible adoption. For example, horses were introduced in the first half of the eighteenth century, well before the entry of white traders, and were widespread throughout the Interior Plateau by the time Simon Fraser arrived.⁶ This technological innovation had gained rapid and complete acceptance both because of the abundant grazing resources of Okanagan territory and because their economy depended on mobility, transport of bulky products, and long distance trade. Horses were versatile animals, suitable for riding, packing, eating or sale. Of course, stock-raising methods were adapted to the requirements of the traditional economy. Indian stock raisers left their horses to forage for themselves, even in winter, because they did not have the tools and could not devote the time for hay-making during the summer fishing and berrying season. Indians adopted horse technology because it provided greater wealth and security than they had previously enjoyed. However, this technology was not culturally neutral; it affected the territorial boundaries of the Okanagan tribe, their range of contact with other peoples, trade routes, and social relations such as the redistributive role of headmen.

Horticulture was also introduced to the Okanagan Indians in the pre-settlement era by the Hudson's Bay Company. From the 1820s the Company's Colville farm, adjacent to Okanagan territory in the south, grew enough potatoes, cabbages, turnips, peas, onions, corn, barley,

⁶ Simon Fraser. *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 63-64, 70-71, *passim*.

wheat, and melons to support itself and provide a surplus for distribution to other posts. By 1847, Colvile produced 1,000 bushels of wheat, 900 bushels of potatoes, and lesser amounts of other products.⁷ The Thompson's River Post, nearest to the Okanagan, was not nearly as productive. In 1848 John Tod, the commanding officer at Kamloops, reported that "farming is about to be added to our occupations here but it is doubtful if I shall succeed to the extent required."⁸ For a few years the Thompson's River farm experienced difficulties due to poor soil and mismanagement, and this negative demonstration undoubtedly delayed somewhat the Okanagan Indian adoption of horticulture.⁹

Okanagan Indians had grown potatoes at Nicola Lake as early as 1841¹⁰ and by 1860 potato cultivation was common among all interior tribes. Early in the decade, the Okanagan Mission priests reported travelling to the Head of the Lake in the first week of May to visit Indians congregated there "to fish and plant their potatoes."¹¹ These garden plots are located on W. G. Cox's 1861 map and were probably similar to a plot in the Spallumcheen described by A. L. Fortune as "a little patch of potatoes five or six yards square."¹² When the Head of the Lake reserve was reduced in size in 1865, the smaller area could not include both the fishery and the existing garden sites. Chief Moise Cinq-Coeur chose a new location which would keep his gardens within reserve boundaries,¹³ indicating that the Okanagan had come to value their gardens as a productive and secure source of food. The record demonstrates that by the time of permanent white settlement, Okanagan Indians had considerable expertise in stock raising and a familiarity with horticulture.

The fur traders introduced Okanagan Indians to a wide range of industrial products — steel traps, guns, tobacco, European clothes, and medicines — on which they came to depend. Trading opportunities generally affected British Columbia Indians by making them more efficient at certain activities, such as hunting, and by directing

⁷ Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), D5/19, fos. 491-494, Lewis to Simpson, 15 April 1847.

⁸ *Ibid.*, D5/21, fos. 559-560. Tod to Simpson, 21 March 1848.

⁹ *Ibid.*, D5/30, fos. 523-524. Fraser to Simpson, 1 April 1851.

¹⁰ PABC, John Tod, "Fort Kamloops Journal, 1841-1843." 15 October 1841.

¹¹ PAC, "Records of the Oblate Missions of British Columbia from Oblate Historical Archives, St. Peters Province, Holy Rosary Scholasticate, Ottawa." Microfilm, Reels 705-712 (hereafter Oblates), Jayol to d'Herbomez, 27 April 1865 and 2 June 1865.

¹² PAC, RG10, 80-1/51, Ledger 14, A. L. Fortune testimony to Royal Commission on Indian Affairs, transcript of evidence, (hereafter Royal Commission evidence).

¹³ See Duane Thomson, "Opportunity Lost: A History of Okanagan Indian Reserves in the Colonial Period." *Okanagan Historical Society Report* (hereafter "Opportunity Lost") 42 (1978): 43-52.

their activity more intensively to trapping. However, the Okanagan region was not highly productive in fur-bearing animals and there is no evidence that Okanagan Indians significantly redirected their energies towards trapping. On the contrary, the Hudson's Bay Company expected little from the Okanagan by way of furs and often traded for horses, potatoes, or guiding and packing services. Friendly relations with the Okanagan tribe were necessary, however, because they were well connected to other Interior Salish-speaking peoples and because the pack-horse brigade route by which furs were transported from the New Caledonia district ran through Okanagan territory.

To secure and maintain good relations, the Hudson's Bay Company provided substantial annual gifts of tobacco, clothes, and other items to influential headmen, who redistributed some among their followers.¹⁴ The Okanagan chief thus favoured was Nkwala, who jealously guarded both his position with the Company and his image as a culture-broker because they helped to legitimize his position in the Indian community.¹⁵ But the position that Indians such as Nkwala enjoyed with the Hudson's Bay Company was unequal and perilous. The *quid pro quo* for accepting its largess was that he represent and defend Company interests. As the Hudson's Bay Company became more secure and less reliant on Indian leaders' goodwill, officials began to treat Nkwala with condescension, even contempt.¹⁶ The final, incongruent, image that we have of Nkwala is from 1858, a year before his death, when he confronted a party of California gold miners who had massacred a body of unarmed Okanagan Indians. Dressed in his company-issue uniform and stove-pipe hat, with imperial medals on his chest, the chief cautioned the miners regarding the Okanagan Lake massacre, stating that "he did not think much of Bostons, or Americans, who would do the like." On the advice of the Hudson's Bay Company officials he did not retaliate, but instead referred the incident to the colonial authorities, who at this time had no presence in the area and could take no action.¹⁷ The incident reveals the degree to which Nkwala had been compromised by his long-standing client relationship and

¹⁴ See Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978, *passim*. For A. C. Anderson's comments on the practice, see HBCA B5/A/7, Fort Alexandria Journal (September 1845 — March 1848) entry for 14 July 1846.

¹⁵ See HBCA B 97/a/1, Kamloops Journal, entry for February 25 1823.

¹⁶ For example, see PABC, Donald Manson and John Tod, Thompson's River Journal, 1841-1846, entry for 28 January 1842.

¹⁷ Herman Francis Reinhart, *The Golden Frontier: Recollections of Herman Francis Reinhart, 1851-1869*, edited by D. B. Nunis, Jr. Austin: University of Texas Press, 129.

also the extent to which the Okanagan people had been encapsulated by imperial interests on the eve of the settlement era.

James Douglas proclaimed colonial government on the mainland in 1858, but civil authority was not established in the southern interior until Governor Douglas himself visited the middle Fraser, Similkameen, and Okanagan valleys in the spring of 1860. Indian concurrence was necessary before settlement could proceed, so Douglas sought public agreement to a proposal from Indians assembled at Cayoosh (Lillooet) and Lytton and from detachments of mounted tribesmen at points along the route through Okanagan territory. Douglas reported on the imperial agreement with the cognate tribes of the southern interior in a despatch to Newcastle:

I had the opportunity of communicating personally with the Native Tribes . . . [at Cayoosh, Lytton and the Okanagan]. I made them clearly understand that her Majesty's Government was deeply interested in their welfare, and had sent instructions that they should be treated in all respects as Her Majesty's other subjects; and that the local magistrates would attend to their complaints, and guard them from wrong, provided they abandoned their own barbarous modes of retaliation, and appealed in all cases to the Laws for relief and protection. I also forcibly impressed upon their minds that the same laws would not fail to punish offenses committed by them against the persons or property of others.

I also explained to them that the Magistrates had instructions to stake out and reserve for their use and benefit, all their occupied village sites and cultivated fields, and as much land in the vicinity of each as they could till, or was required for their support; that they might freely exercise and enjoy the rights of fishing the Lakes and Rivers, and of hunting over all unoccupied Crown Lands in the Colony; and that on their becoming registered Free Miners, they might dig and search for Gold, and hold mining claims on the same terms precisely as other miners: in short, I strove to make them conscious that they were recognized members of the Commonwealth, and that by good conduct they would acquire a certain status, and become respectable members of society. They were delighted with the idea, and expressed their gratitude in the warmest terms, assuring me of their boundless devotion and attachment to Her Majesty's person and Crown, and their readiness to take up arms at any moment in defence of Her Majesty's dominion and rights.¹⁸

¹⁸ PABC, B.C., Colonial Despatches, 1860: Douglas to Newcastle, 9 October and 25 October 1860.

The agreement was regarded by the Indians as a tentative one, to be followed by full negotiations, which would include compensation for abandoning exclusive ownership of their territory.¹⁹ These negotiations were never concluded, which led to a sense of betrayal on the part of the Indians. Clearly, the parties agreed on certain elements. The Okanagan and other interior Indians retained the right to hunt and fish on unoccupied Crown lands, that is, to pursue their traditional economy. They abandoned their exclusive right to other resources in their territory, except for those located on land reserved specifically for them, and they thereby provided the means by which the colonial government could provide mineral, land, and water resources to European immigrants. The Indians also became military allies of the Queen, which was important to Governor Douglas because the southern interior was beyond the reach of his meagre forces and was occupied by American miners who could expect support from the U.S. Army cavalry stationed nearby. Most significantly, the Indians welcomed the prospect of full citizenship, including the application of British justice and protection by the laws of the colony. Although the Indian response to his 1860 offer is nowhere recorded, except in Douglas' report to Newcastle, other evidence suggests that the Indians did welcome the prospect of full citizenship. Nkwala's decision to refer the issue of the Okanagan massacre to the colonial authorities and Chief Silihitsa's complaint in 1861 that an Okanagan youth had not benefited, as promised, from British justice both indicate a willingness to submit to British civil authority. The Okanagan's subsequent actions, discussed hereafter, such as adopting agriculture and converting rapidly to Christianity, indicate that they regarded the European presence as an opportunity for advancement.

The agreement which secured Okanagan Indian acquiescence in the settlement of their territory included the maintenance of exclusive Indian rights to resources on reserves of land of whatever size and location they demanded. The Okanagan people were not unaware of the value of their land in 1861. Asked by Magistrate W. G. Cox to stipulate the boundaries of their new reserves, they chose most of the good bottom land at the Head of the Lake and at Penticton. They retained their village sites, their fishery locations and garden plots, and a good base for winter-ranging their livestock.²⁰ However, both reserves were reduced to a small fraction of their previous size in 1865 after J. C. Haynes, the local Justice of the Peace, argued that the

¹⁹ Oblates, Pandosy to d'Herbomez, 25 July 1874.

²⁰ Thomson, "Opportunity Lost," 43-46.

reserve awards were excessive and beyond the requirements of semi-nomadic Indians. Haynes denied the authority of Cox and, in the absence of the majority of band members, but with the permission of a client chieftain from south of the international boundary, he completed his task.²¹ Land on both the Head of the Lake and the Penticton reserves was reduced from approximately 200 to about twenty-five acres of land per household, of which perhaps ten acres was arable. Under the new regime, Indian rights to the land off the reserve were impeded as they now needed the permission of the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council to pre-empt land. With Indian holdings thus reduced, white stock holders moved to acquire the newly available bottom land as the nucleus of their livestock operations.

The first white settlers to the Okanagan accompanied the Oblate missionaries who arrived in 1859; however, neither party could pre-empt land until after the conclusion of the Indian agreement with Douglas. Perhaps fifteen more immigrants arrived at the Mission by 1861 to farm and mine for gold, and by 1870, each district from Spallumcheen to the international boundary had a sprinkling of settlers, most of whom held 320 acres of bottom land with access to water and had begun cattle-ranching operations.²² Upon their arrival, the missionaries began to proselytize the Okanagan people. Father Paul Durieu constructed a residence at the Head of the Lake in 1863 and other priests established a residential school for Shuswap and Okanagan Indian children in 1865. All elements of European society which were to both inspire and impinge upon the Indian economy and culture were in place by the mid-1860s.

Indian adoption of agriculture must be considered in the context of their small and insecure land base, because the terms of access to land were critical in eventually limiting their success. When the restricted size of the Haynes reserves began to hamper Native agricultural production and the implications of the English concept of private property began to be felt by the presence of fences and trespass laws, the Okanagan and neighbouring Indians became agitated and threatened war. In an attempt to assuage Indian discontent, the federal and provincial governments established the Indian Reserve Commission (IRC) and dispatched it to the Shuswap and Okanagan in 1877.²³ The IRC scrutinized each reserve with a view to determining and meeting

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46-49.

²² Thomson, "History," 122-23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124-32. See also Robin Fisher, "An Exercise in Futility: The Joint Commission on Indian Land in British Columbia, 1875-1880," *CHA, Historical Papers* (1975): 79-94.

minimal Indian demands, and then recommended enlarged reserves (which were not formally granted until the early 1890s), based on a ratio of twenty-four acres per head of livestock then held. The new Nkamaplix (Head of Lake) Reserve, for example, with over 25,000 acres, plus a 25,000-acre grazing Commonage, was estimated to include 1,200 acres of arable land, or nineteen acres per male adult. Land was still not available to Indians on the same basis as to whites, but they had enough for their immediate requirements and, hence, they accepted the IRC settlements.²⁴ However, in 1880 the settler-dominated government categorically denied Indians the right to purchase land off the reserve,²⁵ and in 1893, the Indian Reserve Commissioner, Peter O'Reilly, was instructed to "cut off" the Commonages attached to the Nkamaplix, Penticton, and Douglas Lake reserves.²⁶ The Indian land base was eroded again in the 1890s when the government allowed white settlers to purchase land immediately adjacent to various reserves, thereby eliminating Indian access to Crown lands lying beyond. Further reductions were recommended by the McKenna-McBride Commission of 1912-1916, resulting in the Penticton, Westbank, and Spallumcheen reserves being reduced by 14,060, 1,764, and 1,831 acres respectively, and the Nkamaplix Reserve by the loss of various small outlying reserves.²⁷

As different white governments gave and took land, they confiscated Indian improvements and, hence, insecurity of land tenure was a severe disability to Indians attempting to become established as farmers. Even within reserves, Indians' security of tenure was limited. Until the 1890s, reserves were not officially assigned and no private property rights existed. After the reserves were surveyed, Indian farmers could obtain only a "location ticket" to reserve land, and continued access to this land was subject to the whim of the white Indian Agent and the current chief and his *claque*. Indian farmers were forced to apply to the Department of Indian Affairs for permission on such simple matters as building a fence or cutting logs on the reserve.²⁸ An inadequate land base, lack of access to off-reserve lands, insecurity of tenure, and an inability to make fundamental economic decisions combined to severely hamper Okanagan Indian progress.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-38.

²⁵ PABC, GR 440, British Columbia, Lands Branch, Letters Outward 1878-1884, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works to T. McK. Lambly, 13 July 1880.

²⁶ Thomson, "History," 140-43.

²⁷ *Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for British Columbia, Report*, 3: 696-723.

²⁸ For example, one farmer applied to the DIA to cut logs to build a house but received permission to cut only half the required material. See Royal Commission evidence, 220-25.

Enough records have survived to provide some appreciation of the performance of the Okanagan Indian agriculturalist in the face of these difficulties. Missionary letters reveal considerable progress on the Nkamaplix Reserve, where Indians appear to have been somewhat more agriculturally advanced than elsewhere. In 1866, Father Jayol reported that Chief Moise Cinq-Coeur, on the advice of whites, was attempting to persuade his people to build log cabins, to cultivate the land, and to farm like the whites.²⁹ Five years later, Father Baudre reported that nearly 300 acres of land were under cultivation at Nkamaplix with more Okanagan Indians wanting to farm, but lacking the tools.³⁰ By 1875, a significant proportion of the Nkamaplix band had decided to "gather around the church and build comfortable homes."³¹ This momentous decision required a considerable outlay of labour and capital and represented a distinct shift in their subsistence strategy. Of course, the practice of horticulture and the building of log homes were related developments; the productivity of cultivated fields justified permanent residences nearby.

Life in the new permanent villages was very structured relative to traditional Okanagan social organization. Under the guidance of priests, councils were established to direct the religious, social, and economic life of the village. Village officials maintained a rigid authority, based on Catholic precepts, and they subjected individuals to severe discipline, which greatly augmented the authority of the chief.³² The church bell regulated the daily routine, ringing at various times from dawn to dark to summon people to church or to announce the curfew. Okanagan Indian concepts of space, time, and social relations were revolutionized by this shift to a regulated agricultural economy. Nevertheless, Indian village communities were reported to be "extremely peaceable and orderly,"³³ and Indian economic advance appears to have been rapid.

Data from the IRC Census of 1877 and the Canada Census of 1881, summarized in tables 1 and 2, provide insight into the changing Okanagan Indian socio-economic condition. The 1877 nominal census data for Nkamaplix identifies forty four households, sixteen of which engaged in farming — that is, they owned property such as a stable, harness, plough, harrow, and scythe.³⁴ These farmers harvested wheat,

²⁹ Oblates, Jayol to d'Herbomez, 19 February 1866.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Baudre to d'Herbomez, 29 December 1871.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Baudre to d'Herbomez, 24 January 1876.

³² Oblates, Gendre to d'Herbomez, 26 May 1867.

³³ PAC, G. T. Denison Papers, Charles Mair to Denison (hereafter Mair), 6 October 1892.

³⁴ PAC, RG88, vol. 494, file Census-B.C. Indians, 1876-77.

oats, potatoes, peas, and other vegetables.³⁵ Farming households tended to be wealthier than others in the community, owning an average of twenty horses and eight cattle and nearly all of the hens and pigs. Forty-one of forty-four households owned an average of fourteen horses, while nineteen households (including twelve farmers) owned, on the average, ten head of cattle. The Penticton, Nkamip, and Spallumcheen bands showed a similar proportion of farmers and stock holders, while the Westbank Indians were not yet oriented towards agriculture.

TABLE I
Population and Property of Okanagan Indians, 1877

| BAND | ADULT TOTAL | | HORSES | CATTLE | PIGS | HENS | PLOUGHS | SCYTHES |
|--------------|-------------|------|--------|--------|------|------|---------|---------|
| | MALES | POP. | | | | | | |
| Spallumcheen | 41 | 118 | 74 | 14 | 13 | 0 | 6 | 4 |
| Nkamaplix | 63 | 247 | 585 | 190 | 125 | 178 | 14 | 12 |
| Westbank | 20 | 77 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Penticton | 32 | 144 | 612 | 476 | 0 | 40 | 8 | 6 |
| Nkamip | 34 | 117 | 382 | 57 | 0 | 21 | 9 | 2 |
| Total | 149 | 703 | 1,579 | 723 | 138 | 239 | 37 | 24 |

Sources: PAC, RG88, vol. 494, Census — B.C. Indians, 1876-77.

TABLE 2
Occupations of Okanagan Heads of Households, 1881

| BAND | TRADITIONAL/ | | TRADITIONAL/ | |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|
| | TRADITIONAL ^a | AGRICULTURE | LABOUR | AGRICULTURE LABOUR |
| Nkamaplix | 4 | 5 | 2 | 8 2 |
| Westbank | 1 | | 2 | 2 |
| Penticton | | | | 22 |
| Nkamip | | | | 7 2 |
| Similkameen | | | | 6 3 |
| Total | 5 | 5 | 4 | 45 7 |

^a The enumerator's occupational categories of hunting, fishing or gathering are listed as "traditional"; "labour" includes activities such as packing or guiding; "agriculture" includes farming and farm labour. Occupational information is not available for the Spallumcheen Band.

Sources: PABC, Canada, Department of Agriculture, 1881 Census, British Columbia, District 189 Yale, Subdist. C, Nicola-Okanagan, microfilm, 1-26.

³⁵ Oblates, Baudre to d'Herbomez, 1874.

The 1881 Canada Census, not surprisingly, identified many Indian people as having multiple occupations, demonstrating that the changeover to agriculture had affected many more than those identified as farmers in 1877. The census data presented in table 2 lists only five of sixty-five family heads as making a living solely by hunting and fishing, while 68 per cent of Okanagan Indian families relied solely, and 75 per cent partly, on agriculture.

In his 1884 report, the Indian Agent indicated that all of the Okanagan reserves showed considerable economic advance.³⁶ The Nkamip and Spallumcheen bands farmed fifty and one hundred acres, respectively, while at Penticton and Nkamaplix much larger acreages were cultivated. The latter reserves also boasted several large haystacks in support of their livestock operations, marking a significant departure from their traditional stock-raising methods. In the Agent's mind, the Penticton people were particularly progressive, with a well-housed and industrious people priding themselves on keeping everything in order. The Nkamaplix band was also well housed and energetic, having recently built a "council house of prepossessing appearances." All bands had requested schools for their reserves and were "progressing more favourably than the most sanguine would have anticipated."

Okanagan Indian agriculturalists continued to advance agriculturally throughout the 1880s, their technology and practices differing little from those of their white neighbours. In the early 1890s, Indian Agent J. W. MacKay, in his numerous reports on Okanagan Indian agriculture, documented this progress.³⁷ By 1890, the 878 Indians of his Agency³⁸ cultivated 1,294 acres and owned ninety-three ploughs, forty-one harrows, twenty-two wagons, three fanning mills, seven mowing machines, and various other implements. They produced 9,740 bushels of potatoes, 1,693 bushels of wheat, 852 bushels of corn, 801 bushels of oats, 605 bushels of peas, 258 bushels of beans, 243 bushels of onions, and 691 tons of hay.³⁹ The Okanagan Indians produced a sufficient amount of food for subsistence purposes, enough grain and hay for their livestock operations, and a small surplus for sale. Agent MacKay reported Indians in "easy circumstances" in Nkamip and "thriving" in Penticton, although they apparently lacked capital to purchase improved equipment and had no market for anything but livestock. The Nkamaplix band produced a surplus of

³⁶ PAC, RG10, vol. 3756, file 31255-2, Howse to Powell, 19 October 1884.

³⁷ PAC, RG10, vol. 3905, file 104,939, MacKay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 25 August 1890.

³⁸ This agency included Shuswap as well as Okanagan Indians.

³⁹ *Vernon News*, 16 July 1891.

grain and livestock which they marketed, some of them becoming "comparatively rich." They had purchased mowing machines, sulky ploughs, wheeled vehicles, and a grist mill, and were considering enclosing their reserve with wire fencing. The access to markets via the railhead for horticultural products explains the greater acreage cultivated at the Nkamaplix reserve and the comparatively greater herd sizes in "the lower country" (see table 3). By 1893, the Nkamaplix band had brought 1,000 additional acres into wheat production and by 1895 the band was threshing a total of 400 tons of grain, mostly wheat.⁴⁰ White observers deemed some of the Indians to be in "very prosperous circumstances"⁴¹ and "of a better class and ahead of many white settlers in their habits, morality, etc."⁴²

TABLE 3
Economic Information on the Okanagan Agency, 1892

| BAND | BAND POP. | ACRES | | | HORSES | CATTLE | TOTAL LIVESTOCK | LIVESTOCK/ CAPITA |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------------------|----------------------|
| | | ACRES CULT'D | CULT'D/ CAPITA | | | | | |
| Spallumcheen | 151 | 50 | 0.3 | 100 | 38 | 138 | 2.2 | |
| Nkamaplix | 165 | 550 | 3.3 | 900 | 332 | 1,232 | 7.5 | |
| Penticton | 131 | 230 | 1.8 | 1,000 | 490 | 1,490 | 11.4 | |
| Nkamip | 29 | 70 | 2.4 | 300 | 76 | 376 | 13.0 | |
| Total | 476 | 900 | 1.9 | 2,300 | 936 | 3,236 | 6.8 | |
| Others ^a | 402 | 484 | 1.2 | 1,016 | 437 | 1,453 | 3.6 | |

^a Others in the Okanagan Agency include nine bands in the Similkameen, Douglas Lake, and Nicola regions.

Sources: PAC, RG10, Vol. 3871, File 88891, Reel C-10154. House of Commons, Order Calling For Detailed Information Respecting Indian Reserves in British Columbia.

Despite severe disabilities, Okanagan Indians had made an impressive changeover to agriculture in the 25 years after they settled at their new village sites. But this progress was slowed in the 1890s as production reached the capacity of their land holdings. The land shortage reached crisis proportions on Okanagan reserves as more Indians turned to agriculture, and each farm required more acreage to move beyond the subsistence level. Spokesmen for the Nkamip, whose land was severely restricted because most of their river-front had been, in effect, stolen by a white neighbour, asked repeatedly for redress of their

⁴⁰ *Vernon News*, 12 May 1892 and 14 November 1895.

⁴¹ Mair, 16 March 1893.

⁴² "Okanagan Correspondence," *Victoria Colonist*, 14 August 1888.

loss.⁴³ The chief of the Nkamaplix band requested more land to expand agricultural production but, instead, the Commonages were "cut off" in that and two other Okanagan locations.⁴⁴ Only the Westbank band obtained satisfaction by finally having its reserve assigned. The Okanagan Indians, with the largest reserves in the province, had only enough land to maintain a series of subsistence operations.

The agricultural crisis of the turn of the century was not limited to Indian operations. Increased competition from the Northwest Territories in both grain and cattle, falling prices, and high transportation costs forced both Indian and white wheat farmers and stock men out of business.⁴⁵ The cattle industry became heavily concentrated early in the decade, with three large integrated production and marketing firms dominating the provincial market. Small ranchers were forced to market through these firms or to convert their lands to hay production in support of these integrated operations. By 1910 virtually all of the white-owned ranches in the Okanagan were sold to British and European property developers, who applied large amounts of capital for irrigation projects and converted them to tree fruit production. The face of the land changed except on Indian reservations, where Indians continued as marginal livestock and hay producers.

The testimony and the census information taken by the Royal Commission on Indians of British Columbia reveals the stagnant economy of the Okanagan Indians in 1916. Although table 4 indicates that cultivated acreage had increased somewhat since 1892, nearly all of this was in hay, a product with a limited market. Okanagan Indian livestock holdings were somewhat reduced from 1892, and because population had increased by 40 per cent in the intervening years, their per capita holdings had declined from 6.8 to 4.5 head. Furthermore, the market for horses, especially Indian cayuses, collapsed in the 1890s.⁴⁶ The income derived from the production of such small herds was totally inadequate.

Indian agriculturalists were unable to make the necessary adjustments at the turn of the century. It was not because they lacked familiarity with fruit culture that they failed to turn from subsistence farming and stock-raising to intensive horticulture because substantial orchards and gardens were found on every reserve. Intensive agriculture required capital investment, and capital was scarce in the Indian community, especially after the collapse of the wheat and livestock

⁴³ Thomson, "History," 143-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 140-43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 292-93.

TABLE 4
Economic Information on the Okanagan Agency, 1916

| BAND | BAND POP. | ACRES | | | HORSES | CATTLE | TOTAL LIVESTOCK | LIVESTOCK/ CAPITA |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------------------|----------------------|
| | | ACRES CULT'D | CULT'D/ CAPITA | | | | | |
| Spallumcheen | 168 | 2,000 | 11.9 | 300 | 100 | 400 | 2.3 | |
| Nkamaplix | 256 | 2,250 | 8.8 | 600 | 250 | 850 | 3.3 | |
| Penticton | 167 | 2,000 | 12.0 | 356 | 430 | 786 | 4.7 | |
| Nkamip | 70 | 600 | 8.6 | 225 | 725 | 950 | 10.4 | |
| Total | 661 | 6,850 | 10.4 | 1,481 | 1,505 | 2,986 | 4.5 | |

Sources: Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for British Columbia, Report 3: 696-723.

markets. Poor terms of trade prevented capital accumulation. Indian workers laboured off the reserve for \$1.50 a day, much less than white or Oriental labourers commanded, yet their costs for borrowing capital and for consumption items were higher than those of the white community.⁴⁷ The Department of Indian Affairs considered selling Indian lands, under the pretext that the sale was "for the benefit of the Indians,"⁴⁸ that is, to raise capital to improve their remaining lands. Indians expressed total opposition to the sale of their lands, but without avail. When the McKenna-McBride Commission recommendations of cut-off lands were finally confirmed in 1927, no money returned to the reserves. This lack of access to capital hindered development, but it was just one element of a complex situation confronting the Okanagan people. Even if capital had been available, it might not have been applied. Land tenure was extremely insecure, as the series of actions culminating in the McKenna-McBride Commission cut-offs indicate. No rational person could justify a major capital outlay under these circumstances, especially one which required years to show a return.

Another reason the Okanagan Indians were unable to engage in fruit farming was their lack of access to water for irrigation, without which fruit farming was (and is) impossible in the area. The provincial government consistently denied Indian applications for water records, or licences, because they were not owners of land in fee simple. As late as 1925, W. E. Ditchburn, Indian Commissioner for British Columbia, wrote:

⁴⁷ PABC, Probate Records, Henry Harland Probate, GR 1304, 1220.

⁴⁸ PAC, RG10, vol. 4020, file 280-470-2. John McDougall, Interim Report Re: Vernon Indian Reserve.

It is impossible for us to obtain justice for the Indians so long as we are bound by the provisions of the *British Columbia Water Act*, for the British Columbia Government will not give any consideration to Indian claims for water except [if] they are in full conformity with the provisions of that Act, to which provisions there has always been a string attached, in the way of having Orders-in-Council passed, or as is now the case, the consent of the minister. Old allotments made by the Indian Reserve Commissioners have been ignored entirely.⁴⁹

In 1911, for example, Paul Terrabasket attempted to obtain a water record to irrigate land which his family had cultivated for decades.⁵⁰ Terrabasket had fifty acres under cultivation, including a fine orchard, on Reserve No. 6, in the Lower Similkameen, but he had no water record. His application was refused and, instead, the Board of Investigation confirmed the water record held by the Similkameen Fruitlands Company, successor to the title of land and the water record once owned by the pioneer rancher, Manuel Barcello. The Similkameen Fruitlands Company's title was conditional on their making beneficial use of the water by 1916, which they failed to do. In 1921, the company secured an extension until November 1922. When the company finally began to use Barcello's ditch, after decades of non-use, it attempted to prevent Terrabasket from using water which he had used all of his life and upon which his orchard depended. The company obtained a restraining order from the Supreme Court; however, Terrabasket ignored the order in an attempt to save his crops and consequently was jailed. Terrabasket lost his historic right to water through an obvious miscarriage of justice. This would deter the most industrious Indian from attempting to farm fruit.

Obviously, the economic options available to the Okanagan people were narrowing in the early years of the twentieth century. They fell back on subsistence farming, occasional cattle sales, seasonal off-reserve employment, and the more productive traditional activities of fishing and hunting. Even here, however, Indian access to resources was diminished by restrictive fishing and game legislation.⁵¹ The Indians of the region were marginalized economically despite a half century endeavour to establish themselves as agriculturalists.

From 1860, when the Okanagan people agreed to let white immigrants share their territory, they had attempted to assimilate the new

⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 3661, file 9755-7, Ditchburn to Scott, 23 June 1925.

⁵⁰ Ibid., file 9755-6, Ditchburn to Pattullo, 28 August 1923.

⁵¹ Thomson, "History," 201-09.

political and economic order. As they struggled to establish themselves in agriculture in the five or six decades after white settlement, they frequently requested that they be allowed access to land equal to that of white people. Their demands for inclusion extended to other elements of European society. They quickly adopted a European religion, and with it, a form of social control quite alien to their traditional culture. In their relations with the civil authorities, Indians also expressed the desire to be judged under English law, on the same basis as white men.⁵² Although the initial residential school experiment at the Mission had failed, every surviving Indian Agent's report contains a demand for schools from the residents of the Okanagan reserves. Commissioner John McDougall wrote from the Spallumcheen in 1910:

The chief expressed himself as strongly desirous of having a Public School for their young people. To quote himself, not a church school but all the same a white man's school.⁵³

Rapid conversion to Christianity and demands for equal access to the courts and schools were all elements of the Okanagan Indians' effort to gain "respectable" status. They were prepared to renounce all that might be seen by whites as "savagery," and thereby qualify for the rights of full citizenship, as had been promised by Douglas in 1860.

At the turn of the century, the generally tranquil and progressive nature of Indian villages appeared to disintegrate. One element in this change is evidence of alcohol abuse on the major Okanagan Indian reserves. Historically, alcohol consumption had been insignificant among Okanagan Indians. The Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company considered alcohol to be a destabilizing and destructive influence, and hence, they chose not to trade spirits. The sale of alcohol to Indians was illegal during and after the colonial era, and abstinence was reinforced by the Oblate priests who persuaded Okanagan Indians to sign temperance petitions and fly temperance flags over their villages. Alcohol usage was not significant before 1900 at Nkamip, Penticton, Spallumcheen or Nkamaplix, although the Mission (later Westbank) Indians, historically situated near a white and Metis community, had a record of usage. Nevertheless, by 1910 John McDougall claimed that Indians living near Vernon were "the worst in the country," and that "drunkenness and immorality . . .

⁵² For example, see Reuben Ware, "Silhitza's Petition to Governor James Douglas." *OHS* 42 (1978): 53-59.

⁵³ PAC, RG10, vol 4020, file 280-470-2. John McDougall, Interim Report Re: Indian Reserves near Enderby, B.C.

[prevailed],”⁵⁴ although he allowed that some Indians living on the large Nkamaplix Reserve were “good progressive Indians”. Other evidence from police reports and DIA files confirms increased alcohol abuse.

Community violence also appears to have increased dramatically in the same period, especially at Nkamaplix and Penticton. For example, *The Vernon News* reported that an Indian named St. Pierre had been charged with stabbing Indian Constable Victor in 1900,⁵⁵ and Joe Cawston, the Indian Constable at Penticton, resigned because he could not control liquor violations and other infractions on the reserve.⁵⁶ Lawlessness on the Penticton Reserve was the subject of an editorial in the *Penticton Herald* on 1 November 1910, which reported violence, drunkenness, prostitution, and other evidence of social disorder. The Chief Constable of the Provincial Police at Greenwood reported: “Disgraceful conditions appear to exist on the Penticton Reserve, there being a lot of unchecked drunkenness . . . which has at last led to a very serious assault and possible murder.”⁵⁷ Porous boundaries allowed “tough characters” from elsewhere to reside on Okanagan reserves. This phenomenon was complained of especially in Penticton, where “outlawed white men from across the border [were] allowed to live.”⁵⁸

The breakdown of the authority of the Oblate-inspired village councils and the inability of village officials to maintain community isolation in the face of a dramatic increase in the numbers and influence of the immigrant population undoubtedly contributed to the related phenomena of Indian alcohol usage and lawlessness. But other factors were significant. Okanagan Indians turned to alcohol and related lawless behaviour out of frustration with their poverty and with the barriers which disenfranchised and marginalized them. Also, because Indians were barred from participating equally in most aspects of white culture, they turned to alcohol usage, which they viewed as a status symbol, a visible and public demonstration of acceptable and “civilized” behaviour as practised by their white neighbours.

Another element in the breakdown of peaceful and progressive life on Okanagan reserves was the increasing influence of the DIA bureaucracy, which gradually broadened and strengthened its control over nearly all aspects of reserve life. The DIA was instrumental in

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Interim Report Re: Vernon Indian Reserve.

⁵⁵ *Vernon News*, 24 May 1900.

⁵⁶ PABC, B.C., Provincial Police, GR56, vol.9, file 14, Aston to Dinsmore, Fairview, 2 July 1911.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, file 13, Bunbury to Aston, Greenwood, 29 November 1910.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

destabilizing Indian village politics, and here the example of Nkamaplix is instructive. In 1895, Louis Jim was elected chief by the people, but Indian Agent Irwin found him of a "turbulent nature" and "not tractable enough," and hence refused to appoint him.⁵⁹ Louis Jim was re-elected in 1897 and received a temporary appointment, and then was re-elected in May 1901 and appointed chief for a three-year period, despite Department policy that terms of appointment be indefinite.⁶⁰ Then, in 1909 Irwin deposed a successor chief, Pierre Michel, and replaced him with a compliant immigrant, Isaac Harris, although this time the DIA decided Irwin had gone "beyond his powers." After protests from Michel and from a band lawyer, A. Bridgman, a band election was held after which Baptiste Logan was appointed chief in March 1909.⁶¹ Irwin then attempted to have Chief Logan removed from office on grounds of intemperance, submitting a petition allegedly signed by fifteen Indians, including Isaac Harris and Pierre Michel.⁶² His recommendation was not accepted because the Department thought Irwin was "stretching the point on intemperance instead of giving the real reason"⁶³ and, hence, Irwin was himself dismissed on 11 February 1911. Nevertheless, Logan was deposed on the advice of Inspector of Indian Agencies, T. Cummisky, when he opposed the sale of the Long Lake reserve to Cummisky's friend, and was replaced by Pierre Michel.⁶⁴ Then, following his election and appointment, Chief Gaston Louis was dismissed by the new Inspector of Indian Agencies, A. Megraw, because he refused to accept a very unfavourable lease which Megraw had arranged with one Henderson.

⁵⁹ *Vernon News*, 2 March 1893 and 28 February 1895.

⁶⁰ PAC, RG10, vol. 3944, file 12,698-54, Secretary, DIA to Vowell, 2 September 1909. See also *Vernon News*, 20 August and 3 September 1896; 12 August and 2 December, 1897; and 24 February and 14 and 24 April 1898. Contrary to the limited terms operating elsewhere in Canada, DIA policy regarding terms of chiefs in British Columbia (except in Metlakatla and Port Simpson), repeatedly made explicit in instructions to agents, was that chieftainship be either hereditary or for life or appointive with an indefinite term. See, for example, RG10 Vol. 3944, file 121,698-16, DIA to Irwin, 9 May 1905; file 121,698-54, McLean to Vowell, 20 December 1909; McLean to Gahan, 28 May 1910; and McLean to MacDonald, 13 March 1911.

⁶¹ RG10, vol. 3944, file 121,698-54, Père Nequalla (Pierre Michel) to McLean, 7 December 1908; Bridgman to Pedley, 12 February 1909; McLean to Vowell, 20 February 1909; McLean to Bridgman, 20 February 1909; Irwin to Vowell, 8 March 1909; and Irwin to Vowell, 13 December 1909.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Irwin to SGIA, 1 April 1910.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Ross to McLean, 19 April 1910; McLean to Irwin, 4 May 1910.

⁶⁴ RG10, vol. 3945, file 121, 698-64, Cummisky to McLean, 15 May 1912; McLean to Cummisky, 10 June 1912; Ross to McLean, 11 June 1912; Order-in-Council, 21 June 1912; Cummisky to McLean 19 July 1912; and McLean to Michel, 26 July 1912. See also PABC, "Correspondence between J. H. Christie, Armstrong, B.C., and the Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, in the past twelve months" (Armstrong, n.p., n.d.), (hereafter Christie), Christie to Roche, 10 October 1916.

In the words of J. H. Christie, a white farmer to whom Indians appealed for assistance, Chief Louis was "the only stumbling block between the accredited official's dominant will, and the right of these people for protection from spoliation and every criminal intent against their peace, property, and personal liberty."⁶⁵ By 1916, affairs on the Okanagan reserves had reached such an aggravated state that demands surfaced for a public enquiry. An Okanagan Indian Rights Defence League was formed, statements from various Indians of the Nkamaplix, Penticton, Spallumcheen, and Westbank reserves were taken, and allegations of corruption, high-handed behaviour, and misconduct were made against both the Indian Agent and the Inspector of Indian Agencies.⁶⁶ Little came of the subsequent departmental investigation.

The manipulation of chiefs and interference with village social structures were not phenomena peculiar to the era of DIA domination. Traditionally, in the plateau culture, chiefs had exercised limited authority. During the fur trade period Chief Nkwala acquired authority and prestige based on favours granted by the Hudson's Bay Company. His chimerical authority was dramatically exposed when he meekly referred the problem of the massacre of his people by miners to the white authorities. In the settlement era, Oblate priests were even more intrusive than Hudson's Bay Company had been. Encouraged and buttressed by the priests, chiefs assumed civil, judicial, religious, and economic power. This indirect rule masked, but did not diminish, the extent of the priests' authority. Village officers were part of the church hierarchy and village regulations were based on European Catholic, not traditional, precepts. At the turn of the century the DIA replaced the church as the controlling agent, and thereafter the management of village life by a Euro-Canadian institution became increasingly apparent. Okanagan chiefs became little more than clients of the local agents, and if they offered competition or acted independently, they were summarily deposed. In each era, the dominant European institution buttressed chiefly authority and manipulated chiefs to achieve its goal, whether that goal was making corporate profits, attaching the Indians to the church, or building a bureaucratic feudal empire. In these unequal relationships, support for chiefs lasted only as long as they remained useful and compliant.

For a half century after reaching agreement with Governor Douglas on their future, Okanagan Indians appear to have adapted well and

⁶⁵ Christie, 24 August 1916.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-29.

advanced rapidly toward their goal of achieving economic security and acceptability in the Euro-Canadian world. They accepted fundamental changes in their society and were eager to grasp economic opportunities and thereby demonstrate their worthiness for full participation in British Columbian society. They were prevented from moving beyond a subsistence economy, and that, combined with the elimination of other opportunities, such as a return to traditional pursuits, or advancement through education, condemned the Indian people to a marginal, poverty-stricken existence. Evidence of increasing poverty, social disorder, and political instability on Okanagan reserves after 1900 suggests that social harmony prevailed only as long as economic opportunities and the hope of assimilation remained.

Okanagan Indians were thwarted in their attempts to integrate into the Euro-Canadian socio-economic system and were condemned to poverty largely because of official discrimination, in the form of separate legislation governing such aspects as landholding, water rights, education, and even alcohol use. Euro-Canadians discriminated against Indians at every turn for a variety of reasons. Racism was a factor with some officials, but inter-racial marriages by fur traders, by Governor Douglas himself, and by many Okanagan settlers casts doubt on its significance. Competition for resources was certainly important. The Hudson's Bay Company needed the fur, food, and human resources of the area to succeed in their enterprise, and hence they co-opted headmen such as Nkwala to act as culture brokers to ensure their access to them. Settlers were in direct competition with Indians for rangeland and water, and they could not gain access to these scarce resources without limiting Indian access. Governments that set the rules were responsive to vested settler interests, not those of unenfranchised Indians. Government officials justified the unequal treatment of Indians by whites by referring to "barbarous" or "uncivilized" Indian behaviour. Douglas and succeeding officials dangled the promise of full membership in the "commonwealth" before the Okanagan people, but the very success of the Natives in achieving that goal entrenched the forces aligned against them, denying them an escape from their subsistence existence. Certainly settlers and fruit farmers preferred that Indians provide cheap labour rather than offer them competition, either for resources or in the marketplace. And finally, the individuals to whom Indians looked for support had little influence on provincial or national policy and little concern regarding full citizenship for Indians. In their own interests, fur traders, priests, and DIA agents, respectively, preferred a dependent and compliant

Indian population, and Indian confidence in their motives and objectives was simply misplaced. European society was unwilling to accommodate Douglas' promise.