

# **Approaches to Indigenous Community History: Mapping the Cemetery at Soowahlie First Nation**

JILL LEVINE

*Abstract: This paper is a result of my work at the Ethnohistory Field School at the University of Victoria in 2019. I partnered with Soowahlie First Nation who asked the Field School to produce an updated map of the cemetery on their reserve. The work outlines what I found to be the most useful and relevant practices for researching and mapping Stó:lō community cemeteries. The paper also includes a narrative history of the cemetery itself and its role in the community.*

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The principles and purpose of the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre (SRRMC) are derived from traditional knowledge. One principle is: know your history.<sup>2</sup> The center, located on traditional Coast Salish Stó:lō territory, supports this principle through research in genealogy, mapping, archaeology, oral histories and procedures, and archive management. Every two years, the center hosts graduate students from the University of Victoria and the University of Saskatchewan who participate in an Ethnography History Field School, living with Stó:lō host families and in the center's cedar longhouse and working on research projects proposed by the community. I was invited to work with Soowahlie (The'wá:lí) First Nation, a member of Stó:lō Tribal Council in the summer of 2019. Soowahlie's proposed project was a map and history of their community cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This research was undertaken on traditional Stó:lō territory. The Stó:lō territory is comprised of twenty four First Nations that spans the area from Fort Langley to Yale BC. The territory is part of the Coast Salish region of southwestern British Columbia. I respect all of the Aboriginal people who have not ceded the land in the Lower Fraser Valley nor have had treaties signed. I'd like to thank the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre for making this research possible. I would especially like to thank Soowahlie First Nation community member and knowledge-holder Grace Kelly for her support throughout this project.

<sup>2</sup> "Rights & Title," Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, 2006, <http://www.srrmcentre.com/rightstitle>.

<sup>3</sup> There are two Stó:lō tribal councils: Stó:lō Nation and Stó:lō Tribal Council as well as several other unaffiliated Stó:lō nations.

Stó:lō means "river" in the traditional Halq'eméylem language of the Lower Fraser River watershed region. Traditional Stó:lō lands include the Fraser Valley and the lower Fraser Canyon of interior British Columbia. The concept of a cohesive Stó:lō culture and identity has been an area of discussion and debate for decades.<sup>4</sup> In my work with Soowahlie First Nation, I explored the notion of shared history and collective identity within the Soowahlie Community as well as funerary procedures that link Soowahlie with other Stó:lō nations. Ethnohistorian Keith Thor Carlson writes, to the Stó:lō, "the power of place—expressed through variously constituted geographical signifiers of shared identity—is profound."<sup>5</sup> Carlson focuses on place-based oral tradition, ritual, and other practices that create collective identities in wider Stó:lō territories. In mapping the cemetery at Soowahlie First Nation, I tried to follow Carlson's example by considering past and present cultural practices and beliefs regarding burial, death, community, and religion in order to create an accurate map of the cemetery. I hope to communicate the importance of the cemetery as a place through combining traditional mapping methods with ethnohistorical research. This approach can help display generations of cultural practice and community connections, showing the importance of the cemetery in Soowahlie collective identity.

### **Methodologies**

Place and space are important in Coast Salish history and creative non-standardized maps can help express this in nuanced ways. Indigenous counter-mapping, for example, can also be seen as inherently subversive, as it challenges dominant settler power structures and disrupts the concept of mapping as an objective process. As such, Indigenous counter mapping has the power to add new dimensions to settler-created historical narratives.<sup>6</sup> This practice has been used in the past in Stó:lō

---

<sup>4</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, The Problem with Time* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 22-24.

<sup>5</sup> Carlson, *The Power of Place*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Lee Peluso introduced the concept of counter-mapping in her 1995 work on Indigenous forest and land rights in Indonesia in Nancy Lee Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Antipode* 27, no.4 (1995): 383-406. These exercises can differ in nuanced ways. For example, Graham Fairclough's 2004 essay calls for counter-mapping other aspects besides traditional cultural heritage and outlines how experts should be used and consulted for mapping and heritage work. Graham Fairclough, "What Was Wrong with Dufton: Reflections on Counter-Mapping: Self, Alterity and Community," in *Who Needs Experts?: Counter-mapping Cultural Heritage*, ed. John Schofield, 241-248 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). Joe Bryan and Denis Wood detail the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, the

histories. Former Field School student Sabina Trimble's "Soowahlie Digital Mapping Project" includes a traditional map overlaid with community and traditional Stó:lō knowledge.<sup>7</sup> *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* includes a collection of counter-maps. One map displays Stó:lō transformer stones and the paths transformers traveled in oral histories, while another illustrates the genealogy and spatial familial connections of one Shxw'ow'hamel resident.<sup>8</sup>

The process of counter-mapping proves more challenging in cemetery maps, which call for detailed local precision. The new ethnohistorical methods outlined in *Towards a New Ethnohistory*, are more useful than counter-mapping practices.<sup>9</sup> For example, former Field School student Kevin Gambell created a map of the Stó:lō cemetery at Shx'wow'hamel First Nation (Hope, B.C.) that includes areas with unmarked graves identified by oral histories, using traditional local knowledge to supplement firsthand qualitative research.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in

---

first example of indigenous countermapping in Canada. Bryan and Wood's work on countermapping also gives a useful overview of historical and modern government land policy in British Columbia and its impact on indigenous land. See: Joe Bryan and Denis Wood, *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015). Gwilym Lucas Eades worked with Indigenous communities to create countermaps as a form of community healing. See: Gwilym Lucas Eades, *Maps and Memes: Redrawing Culture, Place, and Identity in Indigenous Communities*, (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's Press, 2015). Examples of countermapping not based on Indigenous traditional knowledge include Shelia Harrington (ed.), *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping Our Home Places* (Salt Spring Island, BC, 1999) and Shelia Harrington and Judi Stevenson (eds.), *Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas* (Victoria, BC: Touchwood Editions, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Trimble's 2015 field school report and 2016 MA thesis describe her countermapping exercises with Soowahlie community members, especially Gracie Kelly. Trimble's rich and detailed digital output map can be found here: <http://thewalimap.ca/>. See: Sabina Trimble, "Making Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2015; Sabina Trimble, "Making maps speak: the The'wá:li Community Digital Mapping Project" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, David M. Schaepe, and Keith Thor Carlson, "Making the World Right through Transformations, in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson *et al.* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001) 6-7.; Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of a Nation," in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson *et al.* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001) 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz and David Schaepe, "Decolonizing Ethnohistory," in *Towards a New Ethnohistory*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i (Albert "Sonny" McHalsie) (Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Gambell, "Cemetery Spaces of Shxwowhamel Stó:lō and The Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis" (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009), 85-6.

mapping the Matsqui cemetery, John Bird, another Field School student, used oral interviews alongside observational data to create, "a memory map' by attaching oral knowledge and cultural meaning to the physical space."<sup>11</sup>

Bird's term "memory map" best reflects the methodology used in my project. This project has a narrative component that employs new ethnohistorical methods, using Stó:lō oral tradition. This knowledge was collected through recent and past interviews with elders, historians, administrators, and other community members alongside traditional archival documents. Additionally, I worked with Soowahlie's band office to determine which format of map would be most useful for them. The final map uses traditional, archival, community-consulted and observational knowledge to weave together a map of the graveyard and stories of the ancestors buried there.

### **Soowahlie Reserve and Cemetery**

The boundary between the Soowahlie First Nation and fee simple lands<sup>12</sup> controlled by settlers is demarcated with a black iron gate accessible by passcode on each side of a winding tree-lined dirt road a few streets off the main drag of Cultus Lake, BC. Every summer, Cultus Lake becomes a crowded summer playground for non-Indigenous Chilliwack residents and others hoping to escape the valley heat. Due to safety and security concerns, the nation chose to become a gated community in 2016, but the gate mainly stays open in the low season.<sup>13</sup> Government records show Soowahlie has almost four hundred registered members, but not all live on the reserve.<sup>14</sup> Despite their status as a closed community, a large section of the reserve is an active quarry leased to sand and gravel company Linterra Aggregates. The Sweltzer Creek Campground on the reserve also remains publicly accessible.

---

<sup>11</sup> John Bird, "Coming Back Home:' The Connection Between Physical Space and Culture in Stó:lō Funerary Practices," Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2017, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Lands that can be owned and controlled by individuals, corporations, or governments.

<sup>13</sup> "Soowahlie is a gated community," *The Chilliwack Times*, August 11, 2016; Sabina Trimble's interview with elder Pearl Commodore notes some of the tensions between Soowahlie and the community about the gated road. Trimble, "Mapping Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," 25.

<sup>14</sup> "Soowahlie Indian Band," British Columbia, (accessed June 21, 2019), <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/soowahlie-indian-band>. In 2004, 218 people lived on Soowahlie reserve including 59 non-band members. There were 329 registered members. See: Tara Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past* (Cultus Lake: Soowahlie First Nation, 2005), 13.

An historical oral interview recorded with resident Amy Cooper in 1962 helps document Soowahlie's origin story.<sup>15</sup> The community is descended from two historical peoples: the Chilliwack peoples who immigrated to the Cultus Lake area and the Nooksack-speaking peoples originally living there. Historical tensions between the two groups lingered, despite peace-making efforts like marriage-alliances.<sup>16</sup> Cooper said Soowahlie was the first Chilliwack settlement: "Well, Soowahlie was the motherland of Chilliwack. And all the peoples lived up there. There wasn't any other reserve, you see."<sup>17</sup> Cooper's knowledge adds depth to the settler-documented political history from a century before: In 1864, Sergeant William McColl, under the order of British Columbia Governor James Douglas, created one large reserve for the Chilliwack tribe. Three years later, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works Joseph Trutch reduced the reserve by 91% and spilt it under smaller nations, including Soowahlie.<sup>18</sup>

The Soowahlie cemetery is located on Sweltzer Creek Crescent across the road from Sweltzer Creek. The creek connects Cultus Lake with the nearby Chilliwack River. The quarry is directly behind the cemetery. It creates a constant noisy din and large trucks pass through on the dirt road. Before the quarry was dug, railway tracks ran behind the cemetery. Soowahlie elder Marge Kelly said the railway was not in use when she came to Soowahlie as a young woman, but people walked along the tracks to get to the lake.<sup>19</sup>

Given the lack of concrete data on the early years of the Soowahlie cemetery, it is unsurprising that the date of its founding remains contentious within the community. Historically, the cemetery was linked to the Soowahlie United Church. Local historian Tara Kelly dates the construction of the church to 1869, while archivist Kelly Harms from the Chilliwack Museum and Archives places it between 1885 and 1888.<sup>20</sup> The church was founded by a joint project between the reserve

---

<sup>15</sup> Amy Cooper at Soowahlie, February 8, 1962, Oliver Wells Interview Collection, Stó:lō Archives, 74.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, personal correspondence with author, May 16, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Amy Cooper at Soowahlie, February 8, 1962. Oliver Wells Interview Collection. Stó:lō Archives, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Amber Kostuchenko. "'I am Indian and live on the Indian Reserve': History, Culture, Politics, Colonialism, and the (Re)Making of Chief Billie Hall" (MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2012), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Marge Kelly, interview with Author and Karen Wagner, Soowahlie Reserve, May 30, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*, 11.; Kelly Harms, "Soowahlie United Church: An historic part of Cultus," *The Chilliwack Progress*, September 16, 2001.

and the Methodist Indian Mission; chief Captain John Sewalis helped with its construction.<sup>21</sup> While there is little information on the founding of the cemetery, the oldest grave site dates to 1898.<sup>22</sup> In the past, only Methodists could be buried in the cemetery. Catholic community members were cremated or buried in cemeteries attached to Catholic churches. Marge Kelly remembers that in the 1980s, most of the Soowahlie community were practicing Catholics rather than Methodists.<sup>23</sup> Late elder Myra Sam revised the rules in 2001 when she allowed Daniel Kelly's family to bury him in the cemetery.<sup>24</sup> Now, all Soowahlie community members can be buried there. There are no federal records of the cemetery, but the band office hopes to get it federally zoned and registered.

Archaeologists have determined that the land around the cemetery has been in continuous use for thousands of years. Pit houses that might have been inhabited as late as 1860 have been uncovered around the cemetery site.<sup>25</sup> Archaeologist Dave Schaepe said earth mounds were used in ancient times to mark burials. Rock cairns were sometimes used, but this was more common on Vancouver Island. Schaepe described the evolution of pre-contract burial practices: "And then ultimately, it's almost as if at some point in time the shift to people being put in boxes and trees and then wrapped, and later on after their flesh has decomposed to [have] their bones prepared, wrapped and put in grave houses."<sup>26</sup> Ancestors were not always buried but interred in representations of houses like grave houses and boxes.

It is difficult to know if the exact space itself was used as a cemetery before contact. Historical researcher and cultural interpreter Naxaxalhts'i Albert "Sonny" McHalsie noted, "Most burial grounds or burials end up right behind the village site. So that's why that cemetery is there, right behind the church and right behind the pit houses."<sup>27</sup> Cooper told local ethnographer Oliver Wells that before the current cemetery,

---

<sup>21</sup> "100 Year Old Church Destroyed By Fire," *The Chilliwack Progress*, May 21, 1969.; Kelly, *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Plot 41: Infant Son of George and Sarah Cooper (see Figure 1 below)

<sup>23</sup> Marge Kelly, interview with Author and Karen Wagner, Soowahlie Reserve, May 30, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous Soowahlie Community member, personal communication with Author, May 24, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Dave Schaepe, interview with Author, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 22, 2019; "Soowahlie Band Works on Restoring Dwellings," *The Chilliwack Progress*, February 8, 1967, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Dave Schaepe, interview, May 22 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Albert "Sonny" McHalsie, interview with Author and Harris Ford, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, May 23, 2019.

residents were buried "where [community member] John Wallace is living," which seems to be near the current cemetery.<sup>28</sup> In addition, she describes customary burial practices: "They didn't bury them. They had them in boxes. They made boxes, and they put them in. And they didn't lay them down. They put the knees right up here, and then when another one there died, they put that one in until the box is full."<sup>29</sup>

When I spoke to Soowahlie community members about the cemetery, there were two histories that most people included in their interviews: the destruction of the church and the unmarked graves of Chinese miners. The historic church burned down in 1969 and the firefighters blamed the oil-fuel furnace installed in 1961.<sup>30</sup> In 1961, the church underwent extensive renovations including the construction of a community hall.<sup>31</sup> Some community members believe the destruction of the church was deliberate. "I remember hearing of the church being burned down, and I believe there was people that didn't want to have it in the community," said community member and knowledge-keeper Gracie Kelly.<sup>32</sup> With their place of worship destroyed, Soowahlie United Church members held services at nearby Cultus Lake Church for an unknown length of time.<sup>33</sup> In 1975 there was a committee to rebuild the church, but original church committee member and Elder Marge Kelly said, "Ever since it burnt down, nothing's been the same and nobody seemed to wanna bother about building. Because there wasn't enough of us."<sup>34</sup> Myra Sam, along with Marge and Gracie Kelly also led an effort to fundraise to build a new Church, but they ran into an issue with the church's account at the Bank of Montreal, and as a result efforts to see the church rebuilt have halted.<sup>35</sup>

All community members I spoke to mentioned a mass grave of Chinese immigrant workers in or near the graveyard associated with the

---

<sup>28</sup> In 1960, vandals targeted the cemetery, church, and John Wallace's house so it is likely they were in the same general area; "Wilful [sic] Damage and Vandalism. 'Keep Out' Say Soowahlies," *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 15, 1960, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Amy Cooper, interview, February 8, 1962, Oliver Wells Interview Collection, Stó:lō Archives, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, *History of Soowahlie: Echoes of the Past*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> "Soowahlie Resident Heads 10-Band Council," *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 3, 1965, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview with Author, Soowahlie Reserve, May 29, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Mrs. P.H. Bartindale, "Review Activities at Church Meeting," *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 28, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Marge Kelly; "At 80, she is a bridge across several cultures," *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 12, 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview, May 29, 2019.

historic construction of the railroad. Community members are not sure where the workers are buried, but a large section of the back of the cemetery is now inaccessible and covered with thorny blackberry bushes. While individuals have their own memories of the cemetery, these two histories seem to be shared and foundational in Soowahlie community memory. A large wave of Chinese immigrants entered Canada in the 1880s as laborers for the construction of the Canada Pacific Railroad. The Fraser Valley was an arduous place for workers with its steep cliffs and dense forest. Thousands of Chinese miners died in accidents, explosions, and collapses.<sup>36</sup> White settler society discriminated against both Chinese and Indigenous peoples with segregationist policies, overt racism, and violence. Professor of history Henry Yu explained in an interview with *The Global and Mail*: "The Chinese dealt in reciprocal ways with First Nations. They didn't take, they asked. They brought gifts, they shared foods. They did relationship-building."<sup>37</sup> McHalsie noted in the same article that many Stó:lō have Chinese ancestors.<sup>38</sup>

Soowahlie First Nation follows the general Stó:lō rules of conduct for behavior in cemeteries. The band office instructed me to leave by three in the afternoon and not to eat or drink in the cemetery. On a tour of an overgrown cemetery at the abandoned Stó:lō Union Bar Reserve #15 (Iwowis) in Hope, McHalsie warned about making sudden movements or loud sounds while in a cemetery.<sup>39</sup> This veil between the living and spirit worlds can be so precarious that young children are not allowed at burnings or in graveyards.<sup>40</sup> Stó:lō artist and educator Nicole LaRock warned against upsetting the spirits through overly emotional conduct at cemeteries:

There are people that do go to, there's quite a lot of First Nations people that will go into the graveyards and they'll lay in there and they'll cry. Cause our rule is you can't be in a graveyard after three and they will go in there, they'll lay there, they'll drink there and

---

<sup>36</sup> Huang Annian, *The Silent Spikes: Chinese Laborers and the Construction of North American Railroads* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2006), 106.

<sup>37</sup> Justine Hunter, "Forgotten ties," *The Globe and Mail*, May 9, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Hunter, "Forgotten ties."

<sup>39</sup> This is also described in Patrick McBride, "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō: Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment," *Ethnohistory Field School Report* 2013, 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> A description of a burning ceremony can be found in McBride, "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō," 8.

sob. But the aftermath of that is so creepy. Have you seen *The Exorcist*?<sup>41</sup>

### **Mapping the Soowahlie Cemetery**

A past attempt to map the graveyard using only observational data fell short. My map combines the knowledge collected and passed down through Soowahlie community members including the late Ken Wallace who managed the cemetery for decades,<sup>42</sup> information collected by the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center's genealogy office in 2001, and my own data collection from the site itself in 2019. These three sources, when used together along with new ethnohistorical methods, can provide a clearer picture of the cemetery's use, evolution, and deterioration.

Late community member Ken Wallace held much of the knowledge about the Soowahlie cemetery. He created a map that was passed on to the band office after his death. The map is a sketch of the cemetery divided into a grid with ancestor names roughly where their burial sites are. The map was originally a sketch map of the graveyard. This is a counter-mapping exercise in itself, as it lacks measurements and orientation. In addition, because of issues with missing markers and grave sinkage that will be discussed later, several of the plots listed in the map are no longer visible. This underlines the presence of unmarked graves in the cemetery, something that would be more difficult to prove without the map.

The Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center genealogy office created a more traditional map of the cemetery in 2001. The map is most concerned with specific measurements, and a handwritten notebook gives fence measurements and documents the spaces between grave markers. The researchers tracked observable features without considering ethnohistorical research methods including oral tradition and community private knowledge. As a result, the map does not document several important historical figures buried in the cemetery, including early Soowahlie chief Captain John. Additionally, unmarked graves are simply marked as unknown persons, showing that the researchers did not consult the Soowahlie community-created map which identifies several of the unmarked graves. However, in tracking the positions of these unmarked graves before their deterioration, we can

---

<sup>41</sup> Nicole LaRock, interview with Kristina Celli and Author, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 28, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview, May 29, 2019.

cross-reference the study with the Soowahlie community-created map to infer the location of several of them. This map also gives an important window into the state of the many of the unmarked graves before their current level of deterioration.

In the creation of a cemetery map, I initially considered following Sabina Trimble's footsteps in making a digital counter-map, but I worried about accessibility and privacy concerns. Digital tools can make history more inclusive, but they can also further the "digital divide" between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not.<sup>43</sup> When we were unable to meet in the cemetery itself, Soowahlie elders like Marge Kelly enjoyed handling a paper map or photos. The advantage of a digital resource, however, is that it can be updated and maintained easily. I settled on using a more accessible digital tool that can be easily updated by the band office: Microsoft Excel. I used the fence around the cemetery to create a grid like the one used in a standard Excel spreadsheet.

---

<sup>43</sup> The "digital divide" is the idea that people of different socio-economic backgrounds, levels of education, and cultural backgrounds use digital technology differently. The most common example is that many people with a lower socio-economic background do not own a personal computer and use a smartphone to access the Internet. See: Andrew Hurley, "Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets with Digital Divide," *The Public Historian* 38, no. 1 (2016): 69-88, for an analysis of a digital community project that ended up being inaccessible to the people it hoped to serve.

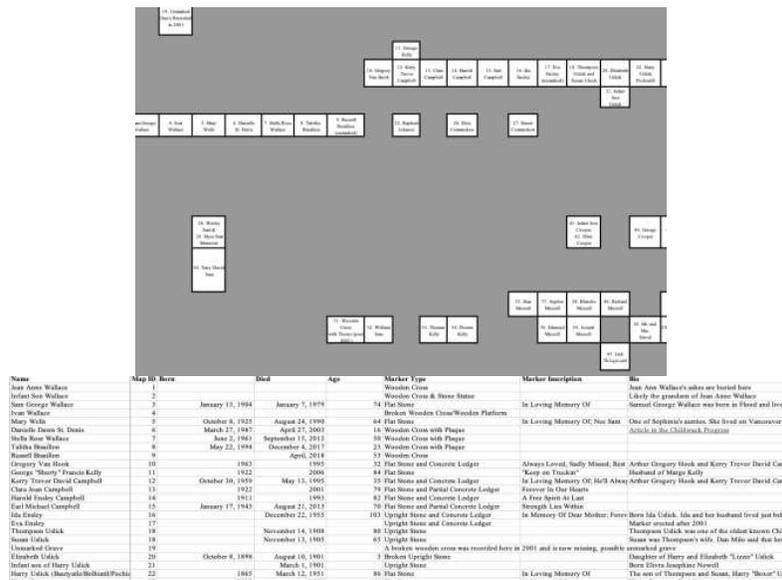


Figure 1: Screenshots from the author's Excel map of the Soowahlie Cemetery. Reduced resolution for privacy reasons.

The map can be printed for Elders and can be easily updated by the Land Use Committee or other administrators. Trimble's work notes privacy issues with open-access digital maps in an interview with late Elder Myra Sam. There is a "concern that when digitized or publicized, private knowledge becomes public, and thus is at risk of misinterpretation and misunderstanding."<sup>44</sup> I therefore decided to create accessible tools for the community that will not be available to the public. This format also allowed me to add information about grave sites and ancestors in a separate tab, creating a "memory map" that can be easily updated on Excel by the band office or community members.

### Challenges to Mapping the Cemetery: Unmarked Burials

The band office hoped that the new map would work to identify or address some of the unmarked burials in the cemetery. Schaepe said unmarked graves are an issue in many Stó:lō cemeteries: "That's a common need among the communities in this kind of the style of funerary practice and cemetery."<sup>45</sup> As knowing one's history is an important Stó:lō principle, communities fear losing knowledge of their ancestors. Many of the graves in the cemetery have all or some identifying information missing already,

<sup>44</sup> Trimble, "Mapping Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," 24.

<sup>45</sup> Dave Schaepe, interview, May 22 2019.

which must be recovered by the community or it will be lost forever. Unmarked graves are also a practical concern. McHalsie said, "quite often because we don't have registered burial sites and don't have maps, quite often with the people that go to dig for a new plot, they hit coffins, then they have to move over."<sup>46</sup> See *Supplemental Information* for inferences on some of the unmarked burials in Soowahlie cemetery.

Stó:lō cultural funerary procedures can accidentally result in unmarked burials. Many of the graves in the Soowahlie cemetery follow the same practice: an individual is buried, and the community holds a funeral and a burning. The initial grave is marked by a wooden cross. The cross might not have the deceased person's name or other identifying information. At the time of this study, family members of deceased had decorated many of the more recent wooden crosses in the cemetery with trinkets and flowers. In approximately four years after the burial, the family holds a memorial in the winter or summer in which they feed hundreds of people and purchase a stone or more elaborate wooden marker for the cemetery plot.<sup>47</sup>

Practices can vary among different families. McHalsie and Marge Kelly both said the amount of time between an initial burial and memorial service can be different—not all adhere to the four-year window.<sup>48</sup> Families can combine forces to pay for memorials. Marge Kelly said when her husband died, "Like he passed away, four years, and then we have some kind of a ceremony. Yeah, I did that with my husband and his sister in law. We combined and then that way it was a lot cheaper to feed hundreds and hundreds of people." She continued, "It costs a lot of money. You gotta pay out all these workers."<sup>49</sup> Soowahlie elder Sophinia said at one point a lot of families decided to purchase gravestones at the same time when the band office organized a good deal for community members.<sup>50</sup> Traditionally, there was no money exchanged on reserves. The introduction of money to the region after contact and subsequent

---

<sup>46</sup> Sonny McHalsie, interview, May 23, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Missionaries and settlers did influence the changes in Coast Salish practices from the fore-mentioned grave house, box, and tree burials were influenced by missionaries and settlers. In a well-referenced B.A. thesis, Kathryn McKay argues that these influences were in many ways very surface-level as concept of death itself and burial is quite different in Coast Salish culture. For more information on change over time in Coast Salish burial practices see: Kathryn McKay, "Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices" (B.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Marge Kelly, interview, May 30 2019; Sonny McHalsie, interview, May 23, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Marge Kelly, interview, May 30 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Sophinia, personal communication with Author, May 27, 2019.

disenfranchment of First Nations peoples likely made it more difficult for those living on reserves who did not have the money to arrange memorials. This often results in wooden crosses deteriorating without being replaced by stones.

Families often do not have the resources to pay for a memorial, or they move away, or the deceased person has no close family in the area. Barb and Susan Kahama, two community members buried in the Soowahlie cemetery have no family in the area.<sup>51</sup> One plot has a wooden marker with no identifying information and the other is unmarked—we only know they are Barb and Susan's plots because of Soowahlie community knowledge.<sup>52</sup> To make matters more complicated, there are proper procedures for discarding the initial wooden crosses outside the cemetery, but they are not always followed.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, some of the older wooden crosses might not be marking graves, but could have been tossed to the side when the stone was placed. This is not a common practice in Soowahlie and all wooden crosses are likely individual plots.<sup>54</sup>

There are other explanations and factors for unmarked graves. Marge Kelly and Sophinia both spoke about vandalism by outsiders. In 1960, vandals from outside the community broke windows in the Soowahlie United Church, knocked over and broke some of the gravestones in the cemetery, and broke windows in John Wallace's house, demanding money from him. The reserve had previously turned a blind eye to illegal small-time hunting and fishing on their land, but this incident led the community to ban trespassers and not allow passersby to stop on the land without permission.<sup>55</sup> Wooden crosses and carvings have likely been stolen or broken as well in recent years—a photo in Nadine Commodore's obituary shows a carved wooden marker at her grave site that has since disappeared and has not been replaced by a stone.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous Soowahlie Community member, personal communication with Author, May 24, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> The graves were identified through a walk in the graveyard with Sophinia and another Soowahlie community member who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>53</sup> Sonny McHalsie, interview, May 23 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous Soowahlie Community member, personal communication with Author, May 24, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> "Wilful [sic] Damage and Vandalism. 'Keep Out' Say Soowahlies." *The Chilliwack Progress*. January 15, 1960, 7; Marge Kelly, interview, May 30 2019; Sophinia, personal communication with Author, May 27 2019.

<sup>56</sup> "Chilliwack Road safe at posted speed, says City of Chilliwack." *The Chilliwack Progress*. May 6, 2003, 4.



*Figure 2: The Chilliwack Progress (January 15, 1960)*

In addition, stress on the land because of continuous use might cause plots to sink. Gracie Kelly spoke about her experience with a sunken gravesite in her youth.

It was our job to go and help mow the lawn. And so they had a riding lawnmower. And so, I remember just going, oh, I'll just, I'll ride on the back with [Mitzy], of the lawnmower with her. And you had to like sit very carefully because it was really hot. So I sat in close to the top and as we were going around the grave site, the grave site fell and, we've never seen that before and we've been doing it pretty much all summer. So, we were like really scared and we were happy that we didn't fall in. And, I ran all the way and Mitzy ran home, she ran all the way home here and went into my mom and I said, the grave, the grave fell like that. I was just really scared, you know, she goes, oh yeah, that happens.<sup>57</sup>

There are five visible unmarked plots with wooden crosses that the community and I were unable to identify in this report. Nine visible unmarked plots could be identified through Soowahlie records and community-consulted work. In addition, at least three wooden markers

---

<sup>57</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview, May 30 2019.

were visible in 2001 and have since been destroyed. There is also a section with a sunken plot and possible other plots around it.<sup>58</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A cemetery map informed by Stó:lō cultural practices that weaves community memories and information about ancestors with qualitative data is the best way to create a map of the Soowahlie cemetery. The paper and map together will help non-Indigenous researchers better understand the role of the cemetery in Soowahlie and Stó:lō collective identity. The map will hopefully create a foundation for the band office to move forward to shape the cemetery into a federally recognized living historical site.

The band office is planning a cemetery revitalization project that includes a new fence and sign. Gracie Kelly pointed out the little pathways at the Squiala First Nation cemetery and little benches at Matsqui First Nation as good examples of creating inviting community space in Stó:lō cemeteries. Gracie Kelly also mentioned the monument at the cemetery at Squiala First Nation as an example of what the Soowahlie band office could strive for in the future. She said, "It would be great to dedicate something to Kenny, to Kenny Wallace for all the work that he's done in there. And, uh, you know, and then I think of the other people that were connected with our United Church, um, they could be placed on there as well cause they, they helped assist us with, with the church."<sup>59</sup>

Gracie Kelly also spoke about the need for a community plan for care and maintenance of the cemetery. In the past, the late elder Ken Wallace prepared the graves and knew the correct teachings and procedures.<sup>60</sup> Myra Sam later oversaw the cemetery and helped families select grave sites. Now, elder Ab Kelly mows the lawn, but is often hesitant about cleaning the graves themselves. When Wallace oversaw the cemetery, he would organize older youth to help clean up and maintain it. In June 2019, Gracie Kelly reached out to other community members and they plan to start planting shrubs along the fence in a beautification effort.<sup>61</sup> In an email update the next year, Gracie shared that she had planted azaleas near the cemetery sign She and two other community members did work around the fence. She added that funding for a new fence had become available.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Sophinia, personal communication with Author, May 28, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview, May 30 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Gracie Kelly, interview, May 30 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Gracie Kelly, personal communication with Author, June 25, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Gracie Kelly, personal communication with Author June 1, 2020.

I recommend researchers or archaeologists use ground penetrating radar to check several sections of the cemetery for unmarked graves. A metal detector that can identify nails used in now-deteriorated wooden crosses could be useful as well if funding for ground penetrating radar cannot be obtained. There are also many other important histories to investigate that relate to the cemetery. Important figures in Soowahlie history including Captain John, Andy Commodore, George Cooper, Amy Cooper, and others are buried there. The ancestors in the cemetery are all related as kin, showing the familial ties in the Soowahlie community. The Methodist church has a complicated history in the reserve, but many at Soowahlie, including Marge and Gracie Kelly remember it positively, as a place of warmth and community. These histories underline that cemeteries are more than a place to remember passed loved ones; they are a place for the living to gather and to continue to build community.

## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources**

#### **Newspaper Articles**

- "100 Year Old Church Destroyed By Fire." *The Chilliwack Progress*. May 21, 1969.
- "At 80, she is a bridge across several cultures," *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 12, 1975.
- "Chilliwack Road safe at posted speed, says City of Chilliwack." *The Chilliwack Progress*. May 6, 2003.
- "Review Activities at Church Meeting," *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 28, 1970.
- "Soowahlie Band Works on Restoring Dwellings," *The Chilliwack Progress*, February 8, 1967.
- "Soowahlie Resident Heads 10-Band Council," *The Chilliwack Progress*, November 3, 1965.
- "Soowahlie United Church: An historic part of Cultus," *The Chilliwack Progress*, September 16, 2001.
- "Wilful [sic] Damage and Vandalism. 'Keep Out' Say Soowahlies," *The Chilliwack Progress*, January 15, 1960.

#### **Interviews (Archived)**

- Cooper, Amy. At Soowahlie Reserve, February 8, 1962. Oliver Wells Interview Collection. Stó:lō Archives

#### **Interviews by Author**

- Kelly, Gracie. Interview with Author, Soowahlie Reserve, May 29, 2019.
- Kelly, Marge. Interview with Author and Karen Wagner, Soowahlie Reserve, May 30, 2019.
- LaRock, Nicole. Interview with Kristina Celli and Author, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 28, 2019.
- McHalsie, Albert "Sonny." Interview with Author and Harris Ford, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, May 23, 2019.
- Schaepe, Dave. Interview with Author, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Center, May 22, 2019.

## Secondary Sources

- Bird, John. "Coming Back Home: The Connection Between Physical Space and Culture in Stó:lō Funerary Practices." *Ethnohistory Field School Report*, 2017.
- Bryan, Joe and Denis Wood. *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2015.
- Carlson, Keith Thor. *The Power of Place, The Problem with Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Carlson Keith Thor, John Sutton Lutz and David Schaepe. "Decolonizing Ethnohistory." In *Towards a New Ethnohistory*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i (Albert "Sonny" McHalsie), 1-38. Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2018.
- Eades, Gwilym Lucas. *Maps and Memes: Redrawing Culture, Place, and Identity in Indigenous Communities*. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's Press, 2015.
- Fairclough, Graham. "What Was Wrong with Dufton: Reflections on Counter-Mapping: Self, Alterity and Community." In *Who Needs Experts?: Counter-mapping Cultural Heritage*, edited by John Schofield, 241-248, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- Gambell, Kevin. "Cemetery Spaces of Shxwowhamel Stó:lō and The Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis." MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009.
- Harrington, Shelia, ed. *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping Our Home Places*. Salt Spring Island, BC, 1999.
- Harrington Shelia and Judi Stevenson, eds. *Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas*. Victoria, BC: Touchwood Editions, 2005.
- Huang Annian. *The Silent Spikes: Chinese Laborers and the Construction of North American Railroads*. Beijing, China: Intercontinental Press, 2006.
- Hunter, Justine. "Forgotten Ties." *The Globe and Mail*. May 9, 2015.
- Hurley, Andrew. "Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets with Digital Divide." *The Public Historian* 38 no. 1 (2016): 69-88.
- Kelly, Tara. *History of Soowahlie, Echoes of the Past*. 2005.
- McBride Patrick. "Still Images, Transitioning Practices among the Stó:lō: Post-contact mortuary images and practices in a changing environment." *Ethnohistory Field School Report* 2013.

- McHalsie, Albert (Sonny). "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of a Nation." In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson *et al.*, 32-33. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- McHalsie, Albert (Sonny), David M. Schaepe, and Keith Thor Carlson. "Making the World Right through Transformations. In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson *et al.* 6-7. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- McKay, Kathryn. "Recycling the Soul: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices." B.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1999.
- Peluso, Nancy Lee. "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Antipode* 27, no.4 (1995): 383-406.
- "Rights and Title." Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre. Web. Accessed June 9, 2020.  
<http://www.srrmcentre.com/rightstitle>.
- Schaepe David M., Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, Keith Thor Carlson, and Patricia Ormerod, "Changing Households, Changing Houses." In *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson *et al.*, 40-47. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001.
- "Soowahlie Indian Band." British Columbia.  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/soowahlie-indian-band>  
(accessed June 21, 2019).
- Trimble, Sabina. "Making Maps Speak: The Soowahlie Community Mapping Project," Ethnohistory Field School Report, 2015
- Trimble, Sabina. "Making maps speak: the The'wá:lí Community Digital Mapping Project." MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2016.