

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MEDIA: the Marpole Site

As many of our readers will be aware, there has been controversy surrounding a proposed construction project due to take place at the Marpole site, located near the mouth of the Fraser River. This sparked an ongoing protest by members of the Musqueam community. Rather than reiterate the now well-reported story here, we have compiled a series of perspectives to serve as both an archive of the events and a snapshot of heritage conservation and contestation in the province today.

ASBC's Statement on Marpole

ćəsna?m (Marpole Midden)

Susan Roy

Over the past 40 years, the Archaeological Society of British Columbia (ASBC) has advocated for the care of archaeological heritage and encouraged public awareness concerning heritage conservation issues. The Society's constitutional aims are to:

1. Encourage the protection of archaeological sites and materials.
2. Promote the spread of knowledge about archaeology.

In March 2012, members of the Musqueam community organized a demonstration at the ancient village site of Marpole in Vancouver, where construction of a condominium is being undertaken.

For archaeologists, the site of Marpole has played an important role in developing an understanding of human history in the area. There is a long legacy of excavation and study of the site, dating back to the province's first archaeologists. Since that time, Marpole has been significantly damaged by road and building construction and development, and what remains of the site is therefore even more critical to care for, yet it continues to be at risk.

For Musqueam, Marpole is a site of special significance: it is a place that connects them to their land, ancestors, history and culture. It is an important part of their identity as a people. Musqueam have condemned the damage to the village over many decades, and have gone so far as to purchase private property overlaying the area in an effort to prevent further destruction. The village site is also a cemetery, as it is home to the remains of their ancestors, whose peace continues to be disturbed unnecessarily.

The ASBC supports the protection and conservation of this historically important village and cemetery. We also support Musqueam's inherent right "to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage," as recognized in Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007.

We call on the Province of B.C. to likewise recognize this right and take action in support of this and of the British Columbia *Heritage Conservation Act*, the purpose of which is to "conserve" the places that matter. Marpole is a place that matters.

For more information about the ASBC please visit our website: <http://www.asbc.bc.ca/>

ASBC Executive

Recent efforts by the Musqueam First Nation to protect the village and burial ground known to community members as ćəsna?m has lately been the subject of a great deal of public commentary. Many people support Musqueam's proposal to make a land swap with the current owners and to transform this site into an interpretive park. Individuals such as AFN chief Shawn Atleo, BC regional chief Jody Wilson-Raybould, UBCIC chief Stewart Phillip, and Vancouver's mayor, Gregor Robertson, have visited the site and signed the Musqueam's petition.

Some observers, however, tend to downplay the connection that Musqueam people have to this place. A recent article appeared in the *Vancouver Courier* newspaper, which suggested that Musqueam's claims to the Marpole midden were based solely on context and history books. The author wrote in relation to the burials found there, "Even the bones remain shrouded in mystery." This notion of "mystery"¹—something obscure or unknowable—has been used to describe British Columbia's archaeological heritage for many years. In my book, *These Mysterious People*, I argue that public discourses of "mystery" have also served to discount Indigenous oral traditions that describe long histories of residency and mobility throughout their territories². The Musqueam First Nation, like other Indigenous communities in the province, have complex oral histories describing their relationships to the lands and waters, to deceased ancestors and to the unborn generations of the future. These oral traditions are not simple adjuncts to the research methods of radiocarbon dating or lab testing. Today many archaeologists have developed important research partnerships with First Nations based on respect, collaboration and keen attention to both oral tradition and science.

Archaeologists of the past stressed the midden's archaeological significance. In the 1940s and 1950s, when renewed urban development threatened portions of ćəsna?m containing intact archaeological deposits, Professor Charles Borden of the University of British Columbia conducted salvage excavations at the site. Borden was a vocal advocate of the importance of the province's archaeological heritage and he lamented the midden's destruction: "The recent history of this site is tragic and not a credit to Canada and the citizens of this Province." According to Borden, "The cultural remains that lie buried in the ancient sites of this Province are part of the cultural heritage of all mankind and...it is our duty not to let these archaeological resources go to waste through apathy and negligence."³ Many local Marpole residents hold memories of assisting Borden on the digs; as children they shifted soil on weekends and after school.

Today, tucked under the ramp of the Arthur Laing Bridge leading to Vancouver's airport, Musqueam community mem-

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bers—supported by First Nations leaders and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from the community and across Canada—are holding a 24-hour vigil in an effort to prevent further destruction to the burials located there. Community members hold signs reading, “Musqueam History is BC History,” attesting to Musqueam’s commitment to preserve this heritage site for all, Musqueam and non-Musqueam alike.

Susan Roy is a post-doctoral research fellow in the Department of History at York University. She is the author of *These Mysterious People: Shaping History and Archaeology in a Northwest Coast Community* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), which examines the history of the Musqueam First Nation’s relationship to the Marpole Midden.

Notes

1. “Musqueam protest in Vancouver covers same old ground,” May 28, 2012, *Vancouver Courier*.
2. Susan Roy, *These Mysterious People: Shaping History and Archaeology in a Northwest Coast Community* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).
3. Charles E. Borden, “An Ancient Coast Indian Village in Southern British Columbia,” reprint from *Indian Time*, 2, no. 15 (December 1955): 9-19. Copy from the Laboratory of Archaeology, UBC.

The Musqueam Protest

Craig Rust

Development of the heritage site of *ćəsnaʔm*, also known as the Great Fraser Midden, the Eburn Mound and the Marpole Site (DhRs-001), has been the subject of an ongoing protest. Initiated and led by Musqueam community members, the protest strives to protect Musqueam ancestors and heritage. Protest was sparked by spreading word of discovery and disturbance of archaeological materials and human remains at the site during the construction of a 5 story mixed-use structure.

My visit to the protest was during the afternoon of March 12th. It was cold and raining, but it seemed to do little to dampen the spirits of the protesters. I was presented with a variety of posters and signs, stating “protect our ancestors” and “protect our heritage.” Passing motorists were quite willing to reminded us of their presence, and that of the protest. I spoke with Aaron Wilson, the group’s spokesperson, who was quick to identify this as a “grass-roots, community protest to protect our ancestors.” Aaron also noted that permits were being issued for excavations based on the assumption that there would be no intact archaeological material. There was a clear dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy of archaeological resource management, and this sentiment was echoed casually by other protesters.

While seeking shelter under the on-ramp to the Arthur Land Bridge, I was introduced to Rose Point. After exchanging pleasantries, Rose spoke of the protests and direct action taken by the Musqueam community. The transfer of property to the University Endowment Lands was emphasised, along with the presence of

the Musqueam Warrior Dancers. Despite a strong Musqueam presence, the public did not echo the support being demonstrated for the ongoing protest. However, this was not the case this day. Public support for this protest was strong. This sentiment echoed by Cecilia Point, making special note of support she received from residents of the Marpole neighbourhood.

The protest I visited in early March was short lived. A land swap proposed by Musqueam to the developers which would exchange *ćəsnaʔm* for land of equal development value elsewhere. Proposal of this swap stopped activities impacting heritage material at *ćəsnaʔm*.

The hiatus in action ended on May 3rd with a march and protest, highlighted by speeches given by First Nations Chiefs. On May 8th the land owner began activities at the *ćəsnaʔm*, which Musqueam community members feared would directly disturb heritage material. As a result, Musqueam members re-assembled at *ćəsnaʔm*. Negotiation between Musqueam Chief Campbell and the land owner, in the presence of the Vancouver Police Department, has temporarily halted any digging at the site. This action resulted in a continuous occupation of *ćəsnaʔm*, up to publication of this piece.

So why care about the development of the Marpole Midden and this ongoing protest? Beyond issues of Indigenous self determination, which this protest is obviously mired in, this is also an important site for archaeologists. The likes of Harlan Smith, Charles Hill-Tout, Charles Borden, and Andrew Charles have all been involved in the collection and analysis of artefacts from Marpole. Despite controversy in Marpole’s archaeological past, it is important to recognize that the material identity of archaeology of the Gulf of Georgia region includes artifacts which have been taken from *ćəsnaʔm*.

Marpole is a namesake in Northwest Coast archaeology. The importance of Marpole was recognised by archaeologists in the 1920’s, resulting in the 1933 designation of the Marpole Midden as a National Heritage Site.

Development in the Lower Mainland is increasing the threat to many other heritage places, such as Locarno, Glenrose, and St Mungo sites. Support for the conservation of a significant heritage site, such as *ćəsnaʔm*, should be an instinct, not the object of debate.

Craig Rust is a PhD Candidate in the Archaeology Department at Simon Fraser University. His doctoral research uses new data modelling techniques for archaeological resource management. He is also President of the ASBC.

For news on the Marpole situation
and related information:

<http://www.asbc.bc.ca/marpole>

<http://www.musqueam.bc.ca/>

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Open letter from Musqueam Indian Band regarding treatment of Musqueam Heritage and the 'Marpole Midden'

compiled by Rich Hutchings

An open letter was sent on April 18th, 2012 by the Musqueam Indian Band to Premier Christy Clark and Mayor Gregor Robertson regarding treatment of the 'Marpole Midden' specifically and Musqueam heritage broadly. Copies were also sent to: (1) Aboriginal Groups, Nations, and Councils; (2) The United Nations: Secretary General; Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; (3) Federal Government: Prime Minister, Minister Indian and Northern Affairs; Minister of Heritage; (4) Musqueam/Marpole Vancouver MP(s); (5) Provincial Government: Premier; Minister Forestry (where the BC Archaeology Branch resides); Minister Aboriginal Affairs; Musqueam/Marpole Vancouver MLA(s); and (5) City of Vancouver: Mayor and Council; City Manager. Provided here are excerpts; a complete copy of the letter can be accessed on Musqueam's website (http://www.musqueam.bc.ca/sites/default/files/open_ltr_premier_mayor_marpole_april_18_2012_final_1.pdf).

The letter's introduction states that it is

written to clearly set out the position of the Musqueam regarding the Marpole Midden. It is intended to make unequivocally clear what has been stated for over 25 years and restated to both City and Provincial elected officials and their senior staff. It will create certainty where others misinterpreted the meaning of our communications or, indeed, through a lack of understanding, misrepresent them. We copy this communication to the Developers who persist in developing a condominium project on the site of our ancient village and burial areas and thereby place their commercial interest above the just and right assertion of the Musqueam that this site not be developed.

Regarding Ancestral Remains:

The site is an ancient Musqueam Village containing intact ancestral remains (as well many remains that have been disturbed by the previous activities over the past 100 years).

a. We have also consistently stated that the 're-disturbance' of these disturbed ancestral remains should not now be permissible simply because they have been previously disturbed, broken up, and pushed aside and otherwise desecrated to make way for the buildings on the site. Note that one of the 'disturbances' was to build a body shop on the site that has caused environmental damage to the midden (another indignity to these remains with oil and other petro-contaminants leaked onto their burial site.)

b. That the intact remains must remain where they are and not be further disturbed. They are the final rest-

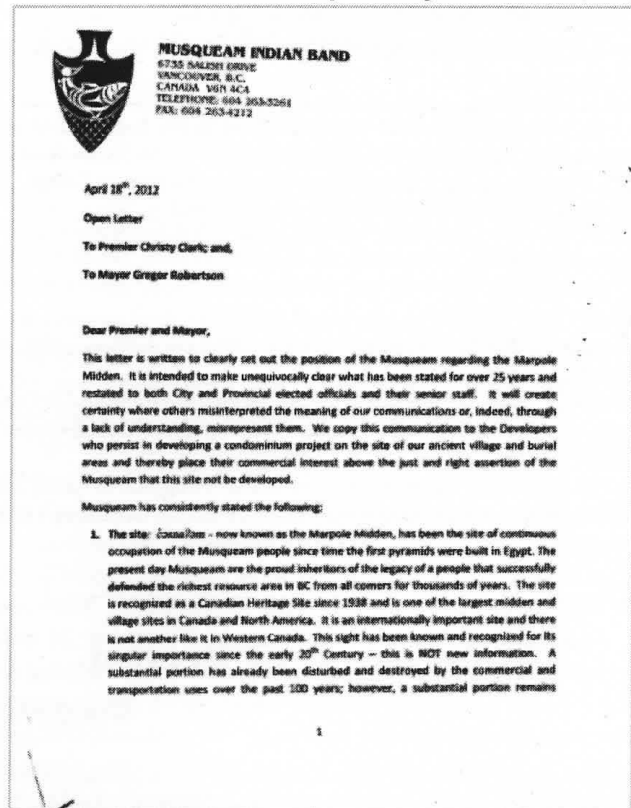


Figure 1. Page one of an open letter sent to government officials from Chief Ernest Campbell of the Musqueam Indian Band.

ing places of our ancestors, not something to be dug up, moved, and stored.

Regarding Archaeology:

The site contains priceless artifacts dating back over 4,000 years. These artifacts should not be disturbed for commercial purposes or to satisfy the curiosity of archeologists and scholars. If and when Musqueam is ready to investigate the archeology of the midden it will be when we are in charge of the investigation and in control of our ancestral heritage—not to have our heritage shipped off to some academic institution outside of our control as has happened so often before. For example, artifacts and human remains from the Marpole Village Site have been sent to Vancouver, Victoria and New York museums as well as the Royal College of Surgeons in London where they were destroyed in a bombing raid. Musqueam has stated that investigation of the site, even by competent archeologists, is still desecration of the site. As stated above, it can and must only happen under a plan approved by Musqueam, at the time and pace of Musqueam, under our control and in accordance with our cultural proto-

cols. The current development plans would destroy and remove a large portion of the site. Little meaningful data will be collected and stored, leaving the site destroyed.

Regarding the BC Heritage Act:

The Province of B.C. continues to state they 'have no part in this discussion' under the rationale that they are following the legal requirements of the Provincial Heritage Conservation Act. The purpose of this Act is "to encourage and facilitate the protection and conservation of heritage property in British Columbia" (section 2) and not, as the Province appears to believe, to oversee its destruction in incremental steps. The Act also provides for the Province to enter into an agreement with a First Nation with respect to the conservation and protection of the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people who are represented by the First Nation. However, the Province has refused to consider such an agreement with Musqueam.

Setting legalities aside, the solution lies with Doing the Right Thing. The fact is, at least as currently implemented by the Province; the Heritage Conservation Act is a dated piece of legislation—a post-colonial remnant—that does not serve the Province, its people or this situation well. It is being implemented so as to destroy historical First Nation sites so development can take place. It places little value on pre-colonial history or First Nations wishes. To the best of our knowledge, it has never prevented a commercial development despite generations of First Nation protest. Now it is being used to legalize the destruction and desecration of one of the largest and most significant remaining archeological sites or Middens in Canada for a few condominiums that could be built elsewhere. This is despite . . . provisions under the Act for partnering with First Nations to preserve this and other sites. The Province willfully ignores this provision and has issued permits over the protest of the Musqueam elected leadership who have been supported by organizations representing the Aboriginal peoples of the Province. A narrow legal interpretation is being used to justify this destruction. The Province maintains it has legally issued the permits and now has no other role except to try and be helpful and to assist the Band, City, and developer to solve the problem that their legislation and blind adherence to narrow legal interpretations has created. Does the Province not have responsibilities to its citizens and future citizens and to the Aboriginal citizens now and in the future, to preserve this singular historic site? The governments of Europe, Asia and Africa are working hard to preserve their pre-history, why not B.C.?"

Regarding the Developers:

The developers have proceeded with their project, while being fully aware that the midden is a historical site and of great significance to Musqueam. Their disclosure statements for prospective purchasers did not mention the midden and they did not consult with Musqueam prior to starting their work. They earlier agreed to a four-week cessation of the most provocative of their site work

but are now re-engaged in their work and seeking to have the one intact ancestral remain so far discovered, removed from the site. Further, they wish to continue this development despite the evidence that the site contains undisturbed remains as cited by Musqueam. Note there is a new development: the developers are calling in their archeologist to investigate and apply to the Archeology Branch of the Province of B.C. to remove the intact burial remains.

Regarding the Role of Canada:

to date the Federal Government has wished us well but has not engaged in any substantive way. We believe they have a duty to act to protect Aboriginal interests on this site. In November 2010, the Government of Canada endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 8 requires Canada to provide an effective mechanism for prevention of, and redress for any action which has the aim or effect of depriving Indigenous People (Musqueam) of their cultural values. Articles 11 and 12 recognize Musqueam's right to protect their culture, including cultural, archaeological and historical sites, human remains and artifacts. Canada has a duty to provide redress through effective mechanism developed in conjunction with Musqueam. Under section 38, Canada has a duty, in consultation and cooperation with Musqueam, to take appropriate measures to achieve the ends of the Declaration.

In Summary:

For more than a generation, the Musqueam have a stated history of a preference to negotiate and have a long history of working towards successful and collaborative solutions. We believe that governments have failed to deal with this critical issue, and this lack of clarity has resulted in unintended consequences. We have expressed our determination to see the site preserved and we will continue that effort with all that it takes to succeed. This site is one of the last and certainly the most significant Musqueam site that connects to our past and to our identity: an identity that was almost destroyed by the Indian Act, residential schools, and other colonial indignities. It is surrounded by a sea of pavement and development that has obliterated almost all of the traces of our past life on our territory.

We have been told to hold this site close to our hearts and to protect it by those that have passed on before us. Our ancestors protected the site for millennia and we will honor the remains of that ancestor located by the current work by continuing that fight. We find it troubling that the City and the Province and associated interest groups will preserve an old falling down cedar tree in Stanley Park, old buildings in the city and throughout the province and indeed, that the Federal Government will preserve the "ancient Viking village site in Newfoundland" that is an infant by comparison with the age and significance of Musqueam's Marpole Village site.