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HIGHLIGHT: * Indian Centre opens in
Bella Coola

N. Russell
Editor

HOUSE OF NOOMNST

by R. Jack Meek

A building of interest to archaeologists was opened at Bella Coola on April 11, 1970. The House of Noomnst is to be used, to quote the official invitation, "to serve as a museum, a place to make and sell our native art, a coffee house for youth, and a place to teach our language and dances".

The idea of the building began with a youth organization associated with the United Church at Bella Coola. To their great credit, they organized the dismantling of a building several miles up the valley. Reconstruction utilizing traditional designs in several areas gives the House a most interesting appearance. Entrance is through the gaping mouth of the low man on the totem pole; the upper part of the 30-foot totem towers over the roof. Painted slabs on the outside eaves are in traditional designs. The carved rear door with killer whale design is a delightful work of art.

Inside the hall the central area is used for meetings, shows, and native dancing. A workshop occupies a corner and it is here that instruction in woodcarving, traditional designs, basketweaving, and silverwork will be given. A museum occupies another section of the House but the display cases cry out for artifacts, photos and models of a past culture. Bella Coola is singularly rich in remains and vestiges of a vigorous unique culture. Those who had the pleasure of hearing Professor Hobler's lecture on the dig at Kwatna Inlet (including underwater archaeology) know of the wealth of material culture in the area, and the potential for further investigation.

I had the pleasure of attending the colourful ceremonies which were opened by a group of traditionally costumed singers approaching the House of Noomnst and singing very special songs to bring good fortune upon it. It was part of my duties to convey to the young Master of Ceremonies, Walter Tallio, greetings and best wishes from the Archaeological Society of British Columbia.

(Ed.'s note: Mr. Meek was in fact one of the guests of honour, as the following newspaper report, which adds a few details, makes clear.)

What could well be the key to the renaissance of Indian culture and tradition on the continent, was realized last Saturday afternoon in the fishing village of Bella Coola, with the official opening of the "House of Noomnst". Generally referred to as an Indian Center, the massive building sided with cedar over two feet wide and highlighted by a huge 30 foot hand carved total pole at the entrance, it was officially opened with the ribbon cutting performed by Miss Liz Lyle, a field worker with the B.C. Kairos movement and Walter Tallio, chairman of the project.

Well over 300 people from all parts of the valley and officials representing the province, came to inspect the project which is believed to be without match anywhere on the continent. As the official pair made several attempts to cut the stubborn ribbon at the entrance, the tasteful smell of smoking salmon circulated in the air, bring a physical and mental thirst to those assembled.

The "House of Noomnst" project was originated in early November by the local minister, Rev. David Smith, and the handful of Kairos members in the village. After considering much reference to early native culture, the group began the task of building a dream, centered around a huge totem pole, which was carved by the workers according to traditional design. Even several larger total poles were carved for the interior as a roof support. The entire community assisted with money, supplies and labour.

Not a coffeehouse

Although the "House of Noomnst" will have a role as a coffeehouse and recreational center in the community its main function will serve more as a cultural center, where young and old will assemble to learn the native language, dance the traditional dances and start on the educational program about the true history and traditions of the native population.

The facilities will also serve for those interested in wood carving, leatherwork and native handicrafts. The main aim of the center will be to turn back the pages to the rich Indian culture as opposed to following the white man's blueprint for assimilation.

Fanfare opening

A colorful highlight of the opening included traditional Indian dancing in the afternoon and evening, featuring dancers in complete costume and singing of traditional native songs. Preceded by project manager Walter Tallio, addresses were given by Miss Liz Lyle of the Kairos movement, Lawrence Pootlass, Chief of Bella Coola, Jim Kelley, Chief Counsellor of Bella Coola,

Jack Meek, representing the Indian Affairs and Northern Development Dept., Rev. Dave Smith, local minister, and Lawrence Seiber, Supt. of the U.C. Home Mission. A special presentation of souvenir plates was made to all members appearing in an official capacity for the opening.

Grants assisted

The building according to project manager Walter Tallio was made possible through the generous grant of \$7,000 from the Department of Indian Affairs, a \$5000 grant from the First Citizen Fund and many donations of time, money and supplies from the people of the local area.

The key to the house of Noomnst was presented during the opening ceremonies to Horace Walker, who will assume overall management of the activities in the center. It is believed that the activities will be held mainly in the evening and weekends, when the school students will turn from the formal role of education to that of their native studies and activity.

Purpose echoed

Because of the importance of such a center to the Indian culture, each address given at the official opening echoed the hope that the young people would continue working hard and making this project an example of what could be done in a community for and by the native people. In the future, centers as this one could be constructed in most communities and carry a new meaning and image for the native people of the province.

As one speaker at the opening put it "This will be a white man's smokehouse, if the Indian people do not come forward and make full use of it." There is much doubt that any further interest would be shown by the various agencies and communities, if this initial project were to lose its aims and purpose. On the other hand, its total success could have an "explosive" effect on similar projects in the area, the province and the continent.

(From the Cariboo News Tab, 16 April 1970)

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Curses to be placed upon vandals: to be intoned by the light of a full moon:

"May you dig ten feet in the pouring rain and find nothing useful...."

"May you count half of 2-million salmon vertebrae then lose your place..."

"May all your hammer stones be unused..."

THE MEEK ARTIFACT GIFT

(Ed.'s Note: This is beginning to look like a special Jack Meek edition, but we asked him to write some notes on his archaeological collection and why he recently donated it to Simon Fraser University.)

During the Autumn of 1969 a series of lectures on archaeology was given at the Vancouver Main Library. One of the presentations was by James Baker, a graduate student at S.F.U. who spoke on recent excavations at Lillooet. The entire Lytton-Lillooet area is singularly rich in prehistory, having been continuously occupied for many hundreds of years. Mr. Baker concluded his lecture by stating that as S.F.U. was new their archaeological lab. would welcome artifacts, particularly a related collection.

I lived in Lytton for ten years where I was Indian Agent, and having known James since his early 'teens, I decided it would be most appropriate to give my collection to the university through him. He came out to my home and went through the major part of the collection, taking all the interesting artifacts and discarding chips, flakes and such.

I had a couple of acres of property a mile or so out of the town on Lytton Creek, and all my artifacts were found on the surface within the property with a few exceptions. Apparently Indians had been living in every part of the area for artifacts were everywhere. One evening Don Abbott, archaeologist at the B.C. Provincial Museum, spent about half an hour wandering along the creek and came back with a big handful of artifacts. How rewarding it would be to dig!

The items included projectile points - laurel leaf and willow leaf types, burins, scrapers, a few slate knives, small simple pestles, arrowheads, and miscellaneous things. Most are black basalt but a few are red igneous type of rock, and a few are slate. Not a big collection - possibly 100 individual pieces - but all of a type, all found within 200 yards of my home, and many described in my notebook in some detail, although there isn't a great deal of detail you can use for surface finds.

The enormous quantity of artifacts in such a small area indicates an active busy type of early inhabitant. The high quality of most of the artifacts points to a tradition of excellent workmanship. This is further borne out by the exquisite microliths found by Dr. Dave Sanger a few miles further north.

Several investigators have written about anthropology of the Lytton area, possibly the best known being Harlan I. Smith's "Archaeology of Lytton", American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 3, Part 4, 1903. And there are others: James Teit, Douglas Leechman, H. K. Haeberlin, Helen Roberts, and Dave Sanger.

Dr. Leechman wrote about a couple of trephined skulls found across the Thompson River from Lytton. I was pleased to be able to give S.F.U. a trephined skull recently found at Lillooet during farming operations. The skull had been examined by Dr. K. N. Edwards, the town's only doctor and an enthusiastic physical anthropologist. His observations were "off the record" but an official report is being sought from him.

During my years at Lytton I was most fortunate in meeting many anthropologists who came into the area, or were just passing through. It is so interesting to realize the many facets of knowledge which combined to give us information of a bygone people. One day I might accompany a soils expert to a big clay bank I knew about, and we'd discover all sorts of animal and floral remains; then a geologist would take me sliding down a cliff to look at some interesting layers of a certain period; or a linguist would tell me how the Indian languages changed over the course of milleniums, and at what rate of change, and how language is used to trace early migration routes; then a sociologist would talk to Indians about clans and status and ancient customs; and characters like the late "Pinky" McKelvie would talk about the very early history of B.C. at the drop of a trowel.

I hope others will contribute to our universities and museums to add a tiny bit of knowledge towards that most interesting of all disciplines: Anthropology - the Study of Man.

R. J. Meek

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- May 20 Tour of Dr. Borden's archaeological lab
University of B. C.
8 p.m.
- May 22, 23 Desert People (documentary film on Australia's
 stone-age aborigines)
Centennial Museum Auditorium
8 p.m.
Admission: Adults 50¢
 Children 25¢
- June 10 A.S.B.C. monthly meeting
Speakers: Bill Lane and Nick Russell
Subject: The Society's 1969 Dig at Tsawwassen
 Bluff Site
Centennial Museum Auditorium
8 p.m.

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DR. BORDEN RECEIVES GRANT

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Borden has received a Canada Council grant which will allow him to carry on his work at Yale, B. C. We wish him every success. It is hoped that during the summer we will be able to have a field trip to this site. It may be possible to arrange for some of our members to dig at Yale with the U.B.C. group.

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INDIAN-METIS EDUCATIONAL CLUB

The project of the above Club, whose members are in the B. C. Penitentiary, is to present, in book form, the cultural, economic and social history of the British Columbia Indians through their early transitional stages up to the present time, from an Indian point of view. This projects requires a great deal of research, time and group participation, which unfortunately the members cannot carry out on their own. The assistance of any Society members would be greatly appreciated if they could supply any books, magazine articles, clippings, etc. on Indian folk lore, traditions, customs, historical facts, etc. Please send any material to: I.M.E. Club, c/o The Warden, B. C. Penitentiary, P.O. Box 150, New Westminster, attention of Mr. R.W. Pugsley. Or, if you would call Miss Anna-Marie Dahlke, of our Society, after 5 p.m. at 733-6194, she would be pleased to call and collect any material.

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BOOK REVIEWS

by Sharon Russell

Leakey, L.S.B., and Vanne Morris Goodall. Unveiling man's origins; ten decades of thought about human evolution. Cambridge, Mass., Schenkman, 1969, \$5.95.

The aim of the book, according to its senior author, Dr. Leakey is "to give the serious student of man's evolution some background concerning the many changes of opinion, and the setting up and discarding of theories" from 1600-1968. This it does, setting out each decade in a separate chapter to be read as an entity, rather than as a consecutive narrative. It is a mine of facts, dates and names, a good prelude to more intensive reading on the subject.

Throckmorton, Peter. Shipwrecks and archaeology: the unharvested sea. Boston, Little, Brown, 1969. \$6.95.

The author is concerned, as he was in his previous book, The lost ships, with the difficulties which confront the genuine marine archaeologist in his attempt to salvage and document underwater antiquities before they are destroyed by treasure hunters. Collectors are as dangerous underwater as they are on land. He discusses the still recent development of marine archaeology, in which he has played an important part, and narrates his adventures and those of others in the field - particularly in the Mediterranean. There are a number of books on this subject now, but most are highly technical, and few certainly are as readable and entertaining as this one and its predecessor.

Rackl, Hanns-Wolf. Diving into the past; archaeology under water. New York, Scribners', 1968.

Another interesting book on this subject, this one available in the Archaeological Society library. Rackl, while also concerned about the destruction of underwater sites, writes at the same time about the history of underwater archaeology, and describes in more detail some of the incidents mentioned by Throckmorton. He also discusses Throckmorton's place in the story. The book has fascinating accounts of searches for sunken ships, harbours and cities, and of the development of techniques in underwater archaeology.

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A terrible fate
is lying in wait
for those who go digging unbidden:
They're condemned to forever
Wash rocks and yet never,
find one that has come from a midden.

S.R.