



**EQUIP Healthcare**

Research to Equip Primary Healthcare for Equity



CENTRAL INTERIOR  
NATIVE HEALTH SOCIETY

# **Prince George, BC:**

## **Socio-historical, geographical, political, and economic context profile**

Prepared by EQUIP Healthcare on behalf of Central Interior Native Health Society



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## Overview

Prince George is situated in central British Columbia, at the convergence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers and the junction of Highway 97 and Yellowhead Highway 16. The city is approximately 780 km north of the City of Vancouver, and has a population of 71,975 persons, 84,232 persons when including the surrounding suburban areas (Statistics Canada, 2012). Prince George is the fourth largest city in the province and the largest in the north, and is considered the Northern capital of British Columbia.

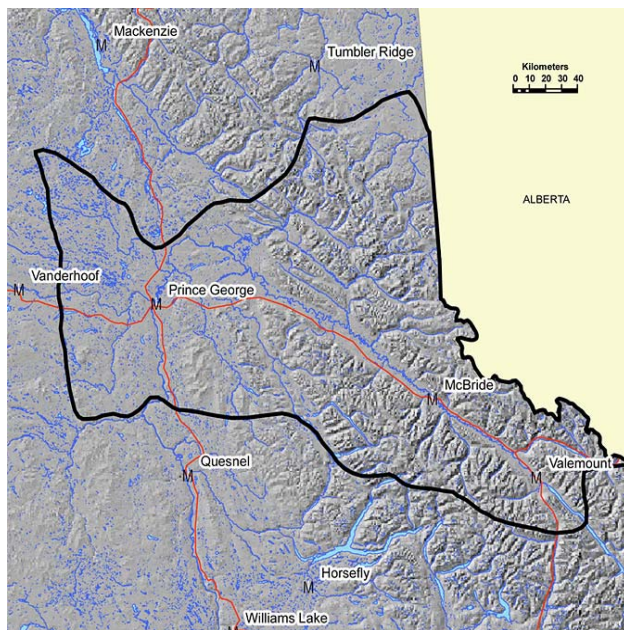


Figure 1: Original T'enneh Territory (retrieved from [www.lheidli.ca/Treaty/index.php](http://www.lheidli.ca/Treaty/index.php))



Figure 2: Current City of Prince George (retrieved from [www.britishcolumbia.com/Maps/?i](http://www.britishcolumbia.com/Maps/?i))

Being well connected by road, rail, and air the city acts as a hub, connecting larger centres to smaller communities within Northern BC and the territories. The development of Prince George into a northern hub followed the traditional migratory paths of British Columbia's Aboriginal peoples, specifically the pathways within and across the Dakelh people's territories.

The geographies, cultures, socio-economics, and political histories of this region overlap to create the realities of the individuals living in and around Prince George today. This document attempts to trace the ways that Aboriginal histories, the continual influences of colonialism, resource extraction-based economies, and contemporary events continue to influence the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, individuals experiencing poverty, and other marginalized populations, in diverse and multifaceted ways.



## **The Lheidli T'enneh Nation**

The Dakelh people are made up of several First Nations who share the Dakelh language; Dakelh (da-kelh) means people who “travel upon water” (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011a). The Dakelh are also referred to as the Carrier people; Carrier is the English translation of the Sekani’s name for Dakelh (First Peoples’ Heritage Language and Culture Council, 2013). Located amongst watersheds and networks of the Fraser, Nechako, Skeena, Bulkley and other river systems, the area has historically served as a central hub, connecting and facilitating travel through vast geographic areas.

The City of Prince George is built on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T’enneh Nation, part of the larger language group of Dakelh speaking people; Lheidli means “where the two rivers flow together” and T’enneh means “the People” (Lheidli T’enneh, 2013d). Traditional Lheidli T’enneh territory extends over 4.3 million hectares from the Rocky Mountains to the interior plateau, surrounding the City of Prince George, and including the watersheds of the entire upper Fraser River, as well as parts of the Nechako and Peace Rivers.

Currently, the Lheidli T’enneh have 320 enumerated band members. However, Prince George has a relatively large and diverse Aboriginal community that includes individuals from a variety of different bands, an historical artifact of its geographical location and connectivity. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 9,930 people identified as Aboriginal (including North American Indian, Métis and Inuit) in the city and the surrounding suburban areas, making up 11.9% of the population; of this group, 5,815 people identified as ‘North American Indian’ (Statistics Canada, 2013). This is more than double the proportion of Aboriginal individuals provincially (5.4%), and almost triple the proportion who identify as Aboriginal nationally (4.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2013). Prince George also has a number of visible minorities (6.6%), however this is considerably less when compared to the province (27.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2013).

## The impacts of colonialism

### First contact, colonization, & early trade

In 1793, Alexander MacKenzie and other members of the Northwest Company passed from Sekani territory to the Dakelh territories, and by 1808 trading hubs were established in the Dakelh territories. These included Fort St. James, Fort Fraser and Fort George, all of which were part of the larger Northwest Company. Fort George, located at the site of present day Prince George, became a very successful trading post, and in 1821 the Northwest and Hudson Bay Companies (HBC) merged, making Fort George a central hub for HBC (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005). The trading relationships between the colonialists and the Dakelh people were characteristically patriarchal, racist, and discriminatory, and the Dakelh people were increasingly marginalized within their own lands. In 1828, HBC employees attempted to capture and execute two Dakelh men assumed guilty of killing two HBC traders, and tensions between the two began to escalate exponentially. Dakelh Chief Kwah responded by apprehending James Douglas, the Assistant Chief of the HBC, and although Douglas was later released, animosity increased between the Aboriginal and colonial communities. Douglas went on to become the Chief Trader for the Hudson's Bay, and by 1858 was first Governor of British Columbia, when the *British Columbia Act* proclaimed the new mainland a colony. In this role, Britain granted Douglas the "sole authority to allocate land in the colony to settlers and to establish Indian reserves" (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 16). Douglas was instructed by the Secretary of the Hudson's Bay Company, Archibald Barclay, to only "consider the natives as the rightful possessors of such lands only as they occupied by cultivation, or had houses built on, [...] *all the other land is to be regarded as waste, and applicable to the purpose of colonization*" (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs & Thalassa Research Associates, 2005, emphasis added). This disregard for Aboriginal land title had, and continues to have, significant negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples across British Columbia, as well as setting the stage for centuries of dispossession and marginalization, a truth felt poignantly by many in the Prince George area.

### The Cariboo Wagon Road & the Alaska Highway

The success of the trading forts in the Dakelh territory in the early 1800s meant that there was a need for transportation into these remote northern areas. This need for transportation intensified as gold miners entered the area in the mid-1800s. In the early 1860s, Governor James Douglas commissioned the building of The Cariboo Wagon Road as a means to access the north (BC Heritage, 1999). Dakelh territories are adjacent to and just north of the Cariboo Region, and by 1865, the construction of the road had flooded the area with over 10,000 European miners. As shown in Figure 3, construction of The Cariboo Wagon Road extended from Yale to Barkerville, through both Tsilhqot'in and Dakelh territories (BC Heritage, 1999), despite strong resistance from these Aboriginal communities.

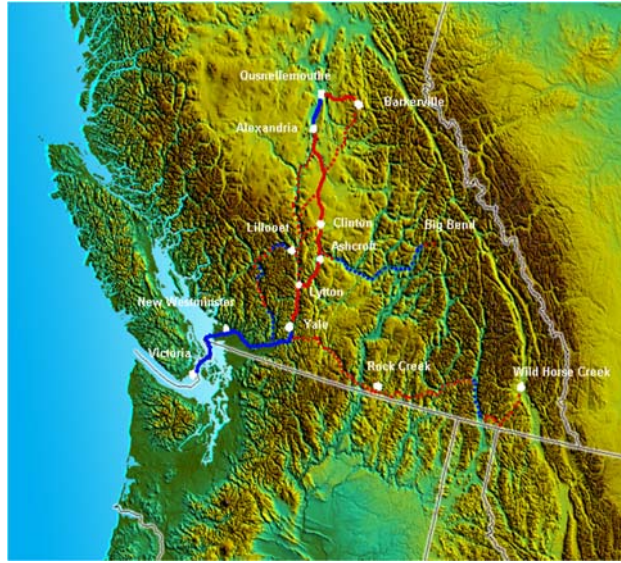


Figure 3: Map of the Cariboo Wagon Road (retrieved from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:South\\_BC-NW\\_USA-relief\\_CaribooRoad.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:South_BC-NW_USA-relief_CaribooRoad.png))



Figure 4: The Cariboo Wagon Road (retrieved from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cariboo\\_Road.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cariboo_Road.jpg))

Shortly after World War II, yet another wave of colonial immigration flooded the Dakelh territories, as the United States of America began construction on the Alaska Highway. Prompted by the Japanese threat from the across the Pacific, the Highway started from Dawson Creek, northeast of Prince George (see Figure 5). This highway increased contact with and between many Indigenous bands, forever changing the cultural geography of the area. Additionally, approximately 10,000 American soldiers were transported through the region within just a few years. These American soldiers and the European settlers and miners before them, brought with them tuberculosis, influenza, and famine (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).



Figure 5: The Alaskan Highway (retrieved from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alaska\\_Highway1.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alaska_Highway1.png))

### Smallpox, influenza, and famine

Disease followed shortly behind each wave of settlers, devastating British Columbia's Indigenous populations. From 1782, smallpox spread overland from the south, killing "one-third of affected communities in BC, mostly in Salish territories. By 1840, smallpox, influenza and other diseases kill[ed] roughly 65 to 95 per cent of Indigenous populations in the area" (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 14). The spread of disease throughout Aboriginal communities was expedited by forced displacement and relocation by the colonialists, as well as the gradual destruction of Indigenous health and healing practices.



Figure 6: Coast Salish Territory (retrieved from: <http://www.seattleu.edu/artsci/ethnobotanical/default.aspx?id=15866>)



Britain established colonial authority after the War of 1812, and the political agenda shifted from conquest to development. The British Crown reinforced the European ideal of colony development, with a particular focus on agriculture and industry (Furniss, 1995). The continued migration of Aboriginal peoples within their traditional territories, which had been advantageous to white settlers during the time of the fur trade, began to interfere with these agricultural and industrial pursuits (Furniss, 1995). Traditional nomadic practices were essential to maintaining alliances with neighbouring Aboriginal communities, successful hunting and fishing practices, and the preservation of safe and clean living environments. These relationships, both with each other and the land, ensured food security in the extreme environmental conditions of northern BC, and had *successfully protected Indigenous population health for centuries* (Furniss, 1995). The Crown viewed the establishment of reserves as the ideal solution to this ‘problematic’ competition for land and resources, however, limiting the movement of Aboriginal people and impeding Aboriginal individuals from properly caring for and feeding both themselves and their communities.

When a second epidemic of smallpox erupted in 1862, it devastated Indigenous communities near Fort Victoria, the site of present-day City of Victoria. At this time, infectious diseases began to be used as *an aggressive technique of colonial power*. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs recounts the spread of the disease, as “infected people [were] forced (some by gunboat) back to their communities. By 1864, Indigenous communities [had lost the] majority of their population” (2005, p. 17).

The geographic spread of smallpox increased in the mid-1860s as it was brought from the coast into the remote northern regions of the Dakelh territories; this was facilitated, as previously mentioned, by the Cariboo Wagon Road and the influx of gold miners. Kelm (1999) argues that the Aboriginal death rates were systematically underestimated in official records, allowing the Aboriginal health crisis to be easily disregarded and neglected by officials and settlers. Incredibly high mortality rates, concurrent with an influx of white settlers, meant that Indigenous people were outnumbered by settlers by the 1890s (Fisher as cited in Kelm, 1999).

Assumptions that “Aboriginal bodies are *naturally*, inevitably stressed once in contact with Europeans” (Kelm, 1998, p. xvi, emphasis original) legitimized the shift from conquest to paternalistic protection. Colonialists imagined the Aboriginal body as inherently weak, with a genetic inability to fight infectious diseases; this supported an increasing number of policies and practices that were not only detrimental to Aboriginal people, but that *detracted attention from the broader historical, social, and political contexts undermining Aboriginal peoples’ health and wellbeing*. Many Aboriginal people understood these policies as negatively affecting their communities, however some did believe that Western medicine might offer relief for suffering Aboriginal communities, and many Indigenous peoples willingly engaged with Western medical practices. Racist assumptions that Aboriginal people were unsanitary made the detrimental health effects of colonization easily ignorable, and this *further legitimized any and all colonial attempts to assimilate Aboriginal persons into settler culture*.

Medical practices offered on reserves<sup>2</sup> were funded through the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA). This department, initially founded in 1755 to manage Britain’s military alliances, and by

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the formation of Indian reserves please see

the late 18<sup>th</sup> century responsibility for the department was assigned to the colonial government. By the mid-1800s, as the military significant of Indigenous people decreased, the Department of Indian Affairs began focusing on ‘civilizing’ Aboriginals through various colonial projects, including the organization and control of culturally inappropriate Aboriginal healthcare (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2011). This care was notoriously inconsistent, as attracting and retaining quality staff in rural communities was challenging. Additionally, even competent and committed practitioners divided their practice between the DIA and other contracts within the wider community. In 1902, the DIA altered their funding arrangements from pay-per-service to a low salary, leaving “little incentive to spend more time on reserve [when] paying non-Native patients beckoned” (Kelm, 1999, pp. 29-30). These funding arrangements contributed to increasingly poor access to health care for BC’s Aboriginal communities. Overtime, inequitable access to care became entrenched within Indigenous communities, a persistent problem that continues to impact the Aboriginal populations of British Columbia today.

In 1918, the Spanish Influenza epidemic spread internationally as soldiers were demobilized at the end of World War I. High morbidity and mortality rates across populations and the lack of a cure meant that resources for quarantine and supportive care for hydration were quickly overwhelmed. Municipalities closed social programs and services, and while the Prince George hospital treated some Carrier men, many communities were left with no support. Elder Mary John, from the Saik’uz Nation, remembers that during the flu epidemic the departmental physician in Vanderhoof (roughly 100 km West of Prince George), “hardly came to the reserve at all” (Moran, 2010 [1988], p. 33). By this time, the Indian Act, explained in more detail in proceeding sections, had outlawed practices that were central to Indigenous health and healing, resulting in concentrated mortality and morbidity within Aboriginal populations (Kelm, 1998).

Based on data from the National Health and Welfare records and interviews, Kelm (1999) describes Aboriginal “death rates [as] *over nine times higher than [those] for non-Natives* across the province” (p. 37, emphasis added). Mortality did differ between different Indigenous groups, and death rates for the Dakelh were by and large disproportionately high, particularly for children under the age of 17 and adults over the age of 65 (see blue highlighted cells in Table 1, below).

**Table 1: Spanish influenza crude mortality rates, October-November 1918**

| <b>Lytton</b>        |             | <b>Stoney Creek</b><br>(Carrier/ Dakelh people) |             | <b>Kitamaat</b><br>(Carrier/ Dakelh people) |             |
|----------------------|-------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|
| per 1,000 population | Age (years) | per 1,000 population                            | Age (years) | per 1,000 population                        | Age (years) |
| 1.2                  | < 6         | 133   | < 6         | 224   | < 6         |
| 0                    | 6-15        | 222   | 6-15        | 63  | 6-15        |
| 59                   | 16-20       | 294   | 16-20       | 39  | 16-20       |
| 34                   | 21-65       | 216   | 21-65       | 25  | 21-65       |
| 15                   | > 65        | 666   | > 65        | 125   | > 65        |

Adapted from: (Kelm, 1999, p. 38)

“[F]our out of six of the elders aged over sixty-five reported to be alive in 1917 died in October 1918. [...] Nearly one-third of the population at Stoney Creek was carried off by the disease; half were under the age of twenty. [...] Carrier Elder Margaret Gagnon remembers that when she was eventually able to get out of bed, her reserve at Shelley *was like a ghost town*” (Kelm, 1999, p. 37, emphasis added). Concurrent high morbidity meant that rituals essential to the proper care of the dead could not be observed, and dangerous transgressions at the boundary between the dead and living haunted the community (Kelm, 1999).

This morbidity was directly related to confinement in reserves, consequential issues with resources and nutrition, and the confinement of children within institutionalized residential schools (Furniss, 1995; Kelm, 1999; see following section for more information). High mortality rates in those 20 years of age or younger are unusual for influenza, and generally *signify chronic underlying illness*. In this context, mortality from influenza in this young population was directly and explicitly related to the endemic tuberculosis acquired and perpetuated in residential schools.

Epidemics occurring throughout Aboriginal populations, and especially in the Dakelh territories, are illustrative of the ways colonization compromised Aboriginal people’s health (Kelm, 1999). These epidemics act as a *material representation of colonial power and its effects*. Isolating infected individuals within their communities through the use of force, the inability of Western medicine to offer a cure and/or limit the contagions, and the outlawing of Indigenous health practices and ceremonies were strategic techniques of oppressive colonial power (Furniss, 1999; Kelm, 1998). The impacts of infectious diseases on the Indigenous communities of Northern British Columbia can be understood as resulting from the *complex intertwining of biological, geographical, social and political processes*.

### The Indian Act and the Lejac Residential School (1890 – 1976)

As populations of Aboriginal peoples continued to decline and colonial power increased, there was a discursive shift in the construction of the Aboriginal individual, from a “hostile savage ... [to] the noble savage to be pitied and protected” (Furniss, 1995, p. 19). This was underpinned by the assumption that European society was superior to Indigenous society, in terms of politics, technology, art, and both moral and intellectual pursuits. By imagining the Aboriginal individual as weak and infantile, colonialists effectively legitimized state surveillance, paternalistic

approaches to custody, and the so-called ‘civilization’ of Indigenous communities (Furniss, 1995).

Britain’s dominance resulted in a powerful collusion of state and church interests. Missionaries had long been working to ‘save’ Aboriginal souls, and religious education and practice soon became viable colonial techniques to indoctrinate Indigenous people to the values of white settler society. The state was interested in capitalizing on Evangelical enthusiasm for providing education at a low cost, and the missionaries were given “access to a population of children to proselytize without the coming influences of either Indigenous religion or rival denominations” (Kelm, 1998, p. 60). However, the establishment of schools on reserves was ineffective at persuading Aboriginal families to abandon their patterns of seasonal migration, and their own educational and governance practices. While many had an interest in developing English and trade skills and supported the early industrial schools, by the 1860s residential schools were regarded as hostile towards Aboriginal culture and divisive to communities (Furniss, 1995). Day schools were having issues with poor student attendance, and in 1884 the Department of Indian Affairs noted that “the progress of Indian children at day school [...] is very greatly hampered and *injuriously affected by the associations of their home life*, and by the frequency of their absence, and the indifference of their parents to the regular attendance of their children at such schools” (Furniss, 1995, emphasis added). The ineffectiveness of these schools to assimilate the Aboriginal people eventually culminated in *The Indian Act* of 1876, giving the government of Canada the power to: define Aboriginal identity; demarcate Aboriginal land; limit traditional sustenance practices; undermine Aboriginal community governance practices; and (forcefully) educate and care for Aboriginal children.

In 1879, Nicholas Flood Davin, a lawyer, journalist, and politician, published *The Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*, colloquially known as *The Davin Report*, in which he advised the federal government to create boarding schools for Indigenous youth. Davin based his recommendation on the assumption that assimilation would only be effective if Aboriginal children were immersed in settler culture at a young age (de Leeuw, 2009). These schools opened across Canada starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the last schools were closed in 1996, two in Saskatchewan and one in the Northwest Territories. The residential school system effectively isolated Aboriginal children and youth from their families and cultures; systematically and systemically oppressing through the enactment of symbolic, physical, and sexual violence upon Aboriginal children and youth. While often considered as well-intentioned policy gone awry, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, [including] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations, 1948). The impacts of this institutionalized cultural genocide on the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples of Canada are vast and intergenerational. Children were torn from their families and cultures, denied the opportunity to learn parenting skills, and in some cases used in eugenic and medical experiments. While experiences of residential schools were diverse, each and every school was meant to promote “the final solution to the Indian problem”, and today, survivors continue to experience post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and shame (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2002, p. 7, quoting Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott,)



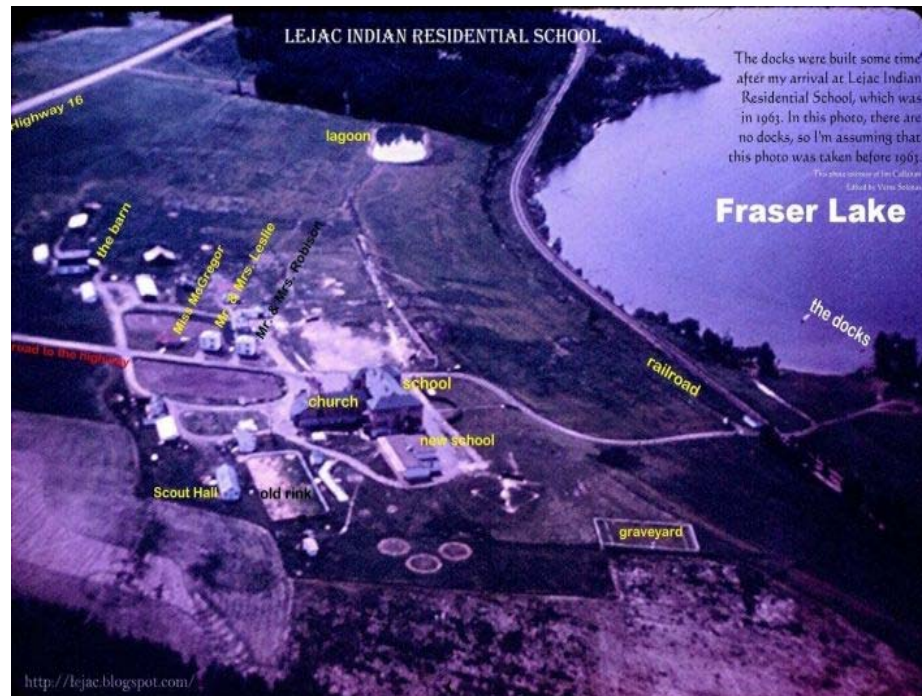
The Lejac Indian Residential School, located on Fraser Lake, was opened in 1890 under contract between the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and missionaries from the Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the Roman Catholic Church. Located in the heart of the Dakelh territories, the school had a wide catchment area, and children from many different Aboriginal communities attended. The school was named after Father Jean Marie Lejac, who had cofounded a mission at Fort St James in 1873 (Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, 2013). The contract between the Oblates and the DIA was similar to others nationally; daily operational management was the responsibility of the church, and major constructions and per student transfer payments were the responsibility of the DIA (Furniss, 1995). The Oblates continually pressed the federal government for larger facilities to be used as a boarding school, and in 1920 construction on a boarding school began (Indian Claims Commission, 2008).



Figure 7: Lejac Residential School at Fraser Lake (Fraser-Fort George Regional Museum, taken from Kelm 1998, p.65)

In 1920, spurred by continually low attendance rates, Bill 14 was introduced. This bill amended *The Indian Act* to criminalize any refusal to send Indigenous children aged seven through fifteen to residential schools; this resulted in many Indigenous parents enduring prison sentences in an attempt to keep their families together (Kelm, 1998; Salem-Wiseman, 1996; Titley, 1986). As Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1931, Duncan Campbell Scott administered an assimilation policy “based on the idea that it was the duty of the representatives of the British Empire to ‘civilize’ the Native people, who were thought of as essentially ‘savage’” (Salem-Wiseman, 1996, p. 121). In a 1920 presentation to the House of Commons Scott stated that “I want to *get rid of the Indian problem*. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are not able to stand alone [...] Our objective is to *continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada* that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (Titley, 1986, p. 50, emphasis added).

As increasing numbers of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families, a new building was constructed at Lejac in order to accommodate the increasing number of attendees. The new building opened in 1922 (see Figure 8), and the school continued to operate from this location until its eventual closing in 1976.



**Figure 8: Lejac Residential School, Central Interior BC 1922-1976 (Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, 2013)**

Despite the religious rhetoric of saving the Aboriginal child's body and soul, residential schools across Canada were rampant with illness, disease, and abuse. A 1907 report by the DIA's Chief Medical Officer found tuberculosis mortality rates among former students of residential prairie schools to be as high as 69% (Kelm, 1999). From archived school records, Kelm (1998) describes how Lejac students "provided a steady stream of admissions to local hospitals for tuberculosis treatment, [and] some kind of infection passed through the school almost every year" (Kelm, 1998, p. 66). There were several cases where children with known and active tuberculosis were forcefully kept at Lejac, sometimes for years. In one case, a boy was kept at Lejac despite "the doctor [...] readily [admitting] that [the boy] should not have been allowed to enter Lejac. Nevertheless, *the boy stayed at the school for two years until he died, all the while spreading his disease among the other students*" (Kelm, 1998, pp. 68-69, emphasis added). Contagion was accelerated by chronic overcrowding and the dwindling transfer payments from the DIA. However, grants were awarded on a per capita basis, therefore the school accepted as many students as possible; "in the 1930s and 1940s for instance, Lejac had between 4 and 11 percent more students than was deemed appropriate" (Kelm, 1998, p. 70). The missionaries were convinced that residential schools were the best option for child-rearing, however, the DIA ignored requests for more money, and when the churches eventually stopped allocating funds "widespread and institutionalized neglect" ensued (Kelm, 1998, p. 71).



Figure 9: Lejac Residential School (retrieved from: [lejac.blogspot.com](http://lejac.blogspot.com))

As funds dwindled, children began to go hungry, and any attempts to avoid hunger were understood as ‘problematic’ behaviours that were interpreted in racialized ways. This in turn legitimized the violent abuse of ‘wild’ Aboriginal children resistant to discipline, as well as the church’s support of corporal punishment (de Leeuw, 2009; Kelm, 2005). Elder Mary John remembers being compliant with the rules in an attempt to avoid abuse:

On my second day in Lejac, a boy was whipped in front of the whole school because he had wet his bed the night before. Soon after, the first girl was beaten for dropping a note near a boy’s desk. In the first week, three boys ran away. They were brought back by the Mounties and thrashed in front of the whole school. The Indian language was forbidden... and any student who broke this rule was punished. By the end of the first day I was hungry. ...I was homesick... Except for Sunday, our routine was always the same (Moran, 2010 [1988], p. 57).

Despite the higher costs associated with maintaining a larger building, the DIA’s transfer payments remained the same (\$125 annually per student). In response to this, the missionaries devised income generation schemes for the school; instead of focusing on academics, older children were required to work on agricultural and domestic projects. Elder Mary John recounts how “the boys often rebelled, and I didn’t blame them. They were supposed to be in Lejac to get educated, but instead they were unpaid labourers, living on poor food and *with no more freedom than if they were prisoners in a jail*” (Moran, 2010 [1988], p. 59, emphasis added).

Aboriginal parents openly complained about the conditions of the school and the treatment of their children, and some were even incarcerated because of attempts to protect their children (Furniss, 1995). When a severe beating resulted in the death of Melanie Quaw at Lejac on June 4, 1924, a police investigation was demanded by the family (Kelm, 1998). This investigation involved sending a telegram to the doctor, who replied that the sixteen year old had died of



pulmonary tuberculosis; no changes were made and the violence and abuse continued (Library and Archives of Canada, 2009). In the early 1940s, “four boys ran away from Lejac on New Year’s night and froze to death on the slush ice of Fraser Lake. All the boys were ill-clad; one of them had only one shoe” (Kelm, 1998, p. 74). An inquest implicated excessive corporal punishment, and recommendations were made to improve disciplinary measures; again, little to no changes were made (Kelm, 1998).

The Lejac Indian Residential School was closed in 1976. The land was transferred to the Nadleh Whut’ en First Nation and the buildings were destroyed (Nadleh Whut’ en First Nation, 2013). Today, all that remains is the cemetery and a memorial to Rose Prince, an Aboriginal woman who attended Lejac (Nadleh Whut’ en First Nation, 2013). The Oblates organize an annual pilgrimage to the site of Lejac to visit the Rose Prince memorial (The Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince George, 2013).

Media attention to the abuses committed against Aboriginal children in residential schools surged in the 1980s, and by 1991, the Oblates issued a formal apology to the First Nations people of Canada for the harm that these schools had inflicted on their children and their communities (Furniss, 1995). In 1998, the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jane Stewart, formally apologized for the abuse in Canada’s federally-run residential schools (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b):

The Government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools. Particularly to those individuals who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools, and who have carried this burden believing that in some way they must be responsible, we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry -The Honourable Jane Stewart (January 7, 1998).

In 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the church and the Government of Canada were jointly liable for the abuse suffered in BC’s residential schools (“Blackwater v Plint,” 2005). Then in 2007, a class action lawsuit was brought forward by tens of thousands of Aboriginal people subjected to abuses in residential school, resulting in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. This agreement committed to: a common experience payment; an independent assessment process for sexual and physical abuse; a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; an endowment to the Aboriginal health society; a Indian Residential Schools health support program; and, a commemoration initiative (Troniak, 2011). In 2008, Prime Minister Harper made a formal apology on behalf of the government, to Aboriginal peoples for the harms of the assimilation policies, and offered a commitment toward healing. On May 13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Prince George hosted the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where residents shared their experiences from both Lejac and in the wider residential school system.

Furniss (1999) describes the paradoxical outcomes of these assimilation policies that: perpetuated an Aboriginal identity separate from the Canadian whole; reinforced assumptions about Aboriginal incapability; legitimized paternalistic practices; and, enforced dependency. Residential schools were an effective weapon of colonization in Canada. Alfred (2009) identifies



three identifiable of Canadian colonization: “(1) Ongoing multigenerational processes of dispossession and oppression; (2) Violent and systematic marginalization and assimilation; and (3) Forced acculturation to Christianity and forced integration to market capitalism” (p.50). These features are prominent within the history of Lejac and other residential schools, and constitute historical unresolved traumas that continue to impact Aboriginal people today, both within Prince George and across Canada.

### British Columbia’s land treaties<sup>3</sup>

In 1864, Joseph Trutch became Governor of British Columbia and Minister of Indian Affairs, and after taking the position he began severely whittling down the size of existing reserve lands. At the time, Canada operated on a treaty negotiation that allocated 80 acres per Aboriginal family. In contrast, white settlers received 160 acres per family across Canada (Fisher, 1971; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005). British Columbia joined Canada in 1871, however BC refused to implement the Canadian 80-acre standard, and instead allocated land *with absolutely no regard for the actual size of a family*, calculating 20 acres per (male) head of family (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

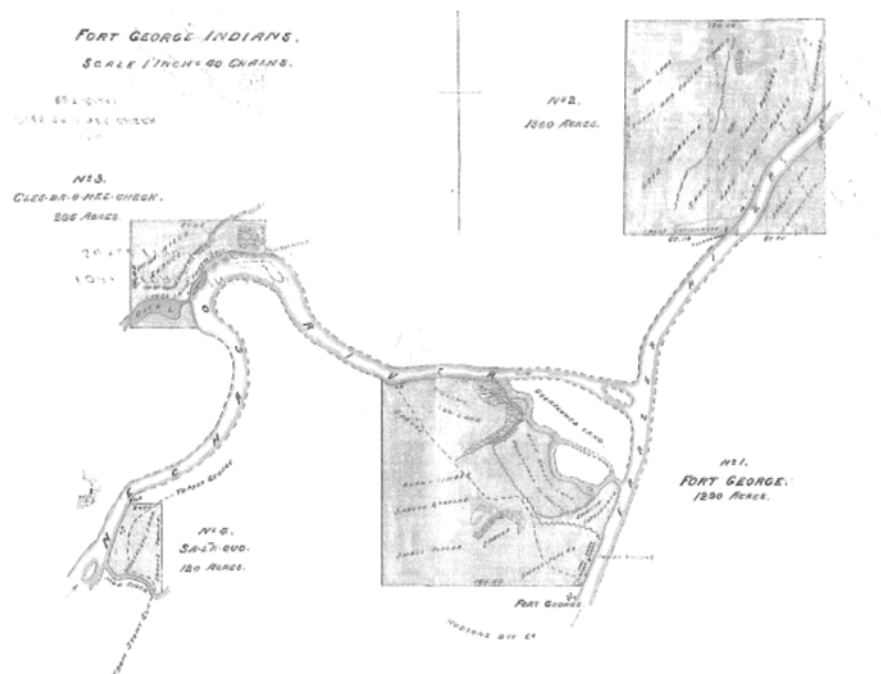
The *Indian Act* of 1876 legislated that land negotiations occur only at the federal level, and across British Columbia Aboriginal communities collaborated to resist these inequitable divisions of land and resources. As tension between Indigenous communities and the settler society of British Columbia grew, BC Premier McBride *visited London’s colonial office requesting absolute non-interference in British Columbia*; this was granted (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

Reserve allocations worked against the interests of the Lheidli T’enneh and other Aboriginal groups to begin with, and various development projects shifted these allocations, forcing communities to relocate at the whim of the government. For example, the Fort George Reserve was annexed in 1911 to facilitate the construction of a railway, and the Lheidli T’enneh people were forced into a new reserve as the City of Prince George began to take shape adjacent to these rail lines (Evans & Foster, 2010), and was officially incorporated as a town in 1915 (City of Prince George, 2012). Vogt and Gamble (2010) frame the appropriation of the Fort George Reserve from the Lheidli T’enneh as representative of *the myriad ways in which Aboriginal peoples were rendered defenceless against this ‘nation-building’*, facilitated by a sentiment among settlers that *large reserves were poorly utilized and merely existed as barriers to development*. Lawmakers and settler society often truly believed that Aboriginal people should be sequestered away from developing urban centres *for their own good*. The Lheidli T’enneh engaged in active resistance, however the community was eventually forced to surrender their lands for \$125,000, based largely on threats against the community; if they were to absolutely refuse *ways around their consent would be found* (Vogt & Gamble, 2010). Less than two years after the acquisition of the Fort George reserve, “subsequent development of the land into the city of Prince George made the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Company a profit that *exceeded \$1*

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<sup>3</sup> The history of land treaties in British Columbia and Canada are incredibly complex and multifaceted. For a more in-depth overview of land allocations and the historical, legal, and political environments that shaped Prince George, please see Appendix A of this document.

million from the first sale of lots in 1913 (a return of some 800%), and more in later years” (McDonald, 1990, p. 38, emphasis added). Throughout many years resistance from Indigenous communities continued, however they experienced ongoing racism, discrimination, and limited political success.



**Figure 10: Indian Reserves (1892): Original land allocations for the Lheidli T'enneh people**

Prime Minister Borden took office in 1911 and appointed J. McKenna as Special Commissioner, tasked with scrutinising the scope, effectiveness, and overall condition of BC's Department of Indian Affairs (McKenna, McBride, & Bodwell). The McKenna-McBride Commission recommended the establishment of larger reserves, and while sizes did increase, the majority of these expansions were made into “undesirable land”, harsh conditions seen as useless to colonial settlers (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 26). Soon after, Canada passed the *BC Indian Land Settlement Act* (1920), which enforced the recommendations of the Commission *without any semblance of consent from Indigenous communities*. The Allied Tribes of British Columbia (ATBC), an Indigenous human rights organization, was formed and organised to resist the enactment of the Commission's recommendations. However, in 1927 any such resistance was forced underground as amendments to the *Indian Act* made it “illegal to obtain funds or legal counsel for Aboriginal Title cases” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 27).

By 1951, another amendment to the *Indian Act* reversed the prohibition of land claim pursuits (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013), and in 1960, Canadian Aboriginal people were included as voters in federal elections (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b). In 1969, Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs under the Trudeau government, issued the *White Paper*, a policy framed within a civil rights and equality banner. This policy asserted that Aboriginal Title did not exist and espoused *aggressive* assimilation (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). Many Indigenous individuals and allies viewed the White Paper as incredibly problematic, since the concept of equality failed to address the historical context and ongoing

colonialism occurring to Aboriginal people across the country. Dr. Harold Cardinal, a First Nations leader, responded by writing *The Unjust Society: the Tragedy of Canada's Indians*, and in 1970 issued the *Red Paper* or the 'Citizens Plus' policy. Cardinal's works were instrumental: they increased non-Aboriginal Canadians' awareness of the on-going injustices committed by Canada against its Indigenous population, and *challenged Canada's image of itself as a just society*. Furthermore, Cardinal stated "clearly and persuasively why the historical, customary and legal rights of Canada's First peoples could not simply be folded into those of the immigrant society" (UBC Faculty of Law, 2009). In 1973, the issue of Aboriginal Title shifted with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Calder v. The Attorney General of British Columbia*. In this case, the Supreme Court defined 'Indian title' as:

*A legal right, independent of any form of enactment, and rooted in Aboriginal peoples' historic 'occupation, possession and use' of traditional territories. As such, title existed at the time of first contact with Europeans, whether or not it was recognized by them (Hurley, 2000).*

In 1981, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs organized and mobilized the Constitution Express; trainloads of Indigenous people and allies travelled to Ottawa from BC and lobbied for the right of self-determination. This resulted in the *Canada Constitution Act (1982)*, which recognized "existing Aboriginal and treaty rights (Section 35)" (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, pp. 31-32). In 1990, this Act was refined to recognize – among other things – "the prior occupation of North America by Aboriginal peoples, and to reconcile that prior presence with the assertion of Crown sovereignty ...[and that] Aboriginal title is a distinct species of Aboriginal right" (Hurley, 2000, p. 3).

Currently, there are 320 enumerated Lheidli T'enneh Band members, approximately 100 of whom live on four reserves (677 hectares or 1672.9 acres) on the Fraser and Nechako Rivers near Prince George, with the rest of the Band members living in or around Prince George (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013). The main reserve community is on Reserve No. 2 (Shelley), approximately 16 kilometers northeast of Prince George (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013). This allotment is 1412 acres, approximately *55% smaller than the land originally allocated in the 1892 agreement*. Today, original BC land agreements continue to be among the most limited agreements throughout Canada.

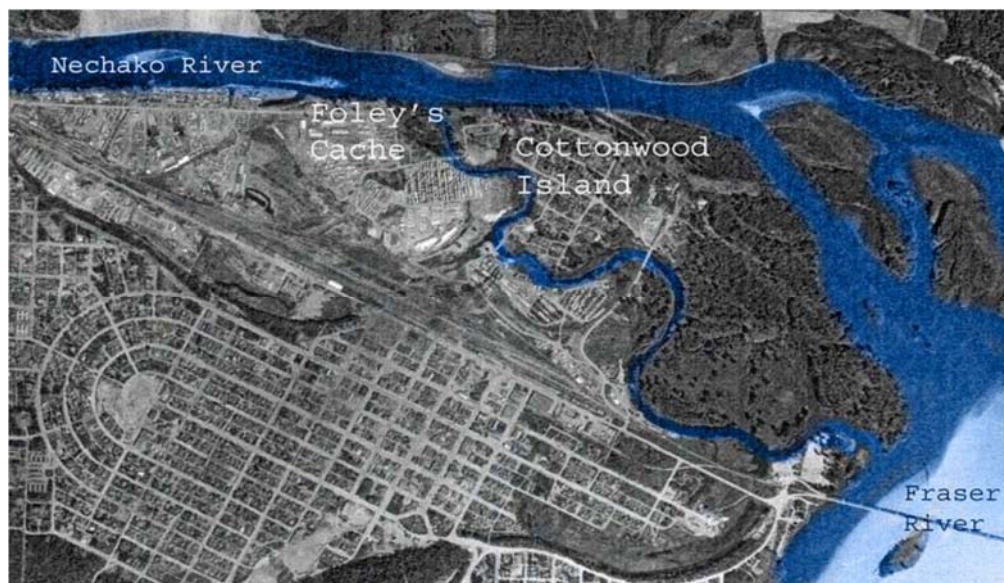
When the BC Treaty Commission began accepting submissions in 1993, the Lheidli T'enneh people were among the first to initiate negotiations under the BC Treaty process. In 2003, Lheidli T'enneh, British Columbia, and Canada signed the first agreement in principle, which allowed negotiations for a Final Agreement to commence. While the Lheidli T'enneh community has gotten very close to a settlement, it was rejected in the final stages by a narrow margin, and a land treaty has not yet been reached (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

Today a "Community Engagement Process is underway [...] supported by the BC Treaty Commission" (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013c). Despite these challenges the Lheidli T'enneh have had the autonomy to manage their own land and resources under the *First Nations Land Management Act*. They have been governed by this Act, instead of the *Indian Act*, because of a successfully

negotiated Land Code in 1999, and Individual Transfer Agreement in 2000 (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b). Along with thirteen other First Nations in Canada the Lheidli T'enneh have taken over the administration and management of their reserve lands from the Department of Indian Affairs (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b).

### Displacement and the Island Cache: A case study

The city of Prince George developed adjacent to the Grand Pacific Trunk Railway, and the land closest to the river was used as an equipment depot. Across from the depot was a small island cache under the jurisdiction of the Province of BC, which is now known as Cottonwood Island. Settlement on the island was initiated by a mixed group of squatters, and “by the 1960’s, the [...] Island Cache was populated mostly by Aboriginal and immigrant families, most of whom were members of the working poor underclass of the region” (Evans & Foster, 2010, p. 91). Poverty gave the community a rough appearance, and the community was deeply affected by colonialism, racialization, and socio-economic marginalization, as well as histories of displacement and dispossession, being forced from traditional lands, either onto reserve lands or as diasporic migrant labourers (Kobayashi & de Leeuw, 2010).



**Figure 11: Nechako Fraser Junction, note the well-defined flood channel separating the Island from the mainland (Evans & Foster 2010, p.90)**

In 1970, the province decided to expand the boundaries of the city to encompass the island. In the face of homelessness and displacement, community members forged strong alliances, fighting against yet another forced relocation. However, in the spring of 1972, a flood acted as “the fulcrum the city needed to lever the Cache residents out of their homes” (Evans & Foster, 2010, p. 94). The city condemned buildings, bulldozed and burned homes, effectively eliminating the community.





**Figure 12: Restricted Tenure Notice 1970 & House Demolition October 1972 (photos courtesy of the PGC, Evans & Foster 2010, p.92, 94)**

Today, the island houses industrial storage and a park. Evans & Foster (2010) describe a sign on the island cache that highlights the work of corporate and community partners in restoring the flood channels, with no mention of the marginalized community that once lived there; “erased at one end by industry and at the other by nature, the marginalised and mostly Aboriginal community is thrice disappeared. The bulldozers were only the first instance of erasure, and this bears thinking about both in this case, and when we consider the character and processes of ethnocide generally” (Evans & Foster, 2010, p. 96).



**Figure 13: Cottonwood Island and Side Channel Restoration Plaque 2006 (Evans & Foster 2010, p.96)**

This vignette, taken from the history of one Aboriginal community in Northern British Columbia, highlights the dehumanization of Aboriginal, marginalized, impoverished, and vulnerable individuals that persists in Prince George today. Cottonwood Island highlights how Aboriginal people and those experiencing poverty are seen as disposable, replaceable, and easily relocated by wider society. The geographic violence enacted on the island cache community is a form of structural violence and part of the endemic racism that affects the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Prince George and across Canada. Colonialism started a narrative, a myth of Indigenous inferiority that continues today. Structures of violence such as those experienced by the island cache community remain rampant. Paired with explicit acts of physical and sexual

violence against Aboriginal people in general, and Aboriginal women in particular, these violences, both symbolic and non, poignantly highlight that colonialism, racism, and an ongoing cultural genocide are alive and well in Canada today.

### The Highway of Tears and Canada's missing & murdered women

Geographic isolation is a continual issue for those living in northern British Columbia, and this isolation disproportionately affects Aboriginal people as isolation inherent in the remote locations of reserves is compounded by poverty. Limited access to public services, health care, and basic supplies is an on-going issue, and transportation is both expensive and dangerous. "Motor vehicle accidents account for 3.4 deaths per 10,000 in Status Indian populations in [the] Northern Interior ... more than triple the number (0.9) for non-Indigenous populations across the rest of the province" (De Leeuw, Maurice, Holyk, Greenwood, & Adam, 2012, p. 907).

The number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada is disproportionately high when compared to rates of violence against non-Aboriginal women and men, and police and media responses have and continue to be underwhelming at best. In total, there have been 1,181 police-recorded cases of Indigenous women going missing or being murdered in Canada (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2014), however many Aboriginal communities and organizations argue that the numbers are far higher than that in reality. Highway 16, known as the Highway of Tears to Aboriginal communities and allies across Canada, is a harrowing example of this epidemic of violence against women. This stretch of road provides access for many reserve communities to and from Prince George, eventually connecting to Prince Rupert (see Figure 14, below). Since 1969, *at least* 18 young women and girls, all but one of them Aboriginal, have been murdered or gone missing while hitchhiking along this highway (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Prince George Native Friendship Center, & Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment & Training Association, 2006). Many people who live in the North believe that the number is far higher, most likely exceeding thirty (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al., 2006). No new cases have been added by the RCMP since 2006, however women, and Aboriginal women in particular, continue to experience violence along route 16.

Aboriginal communities, allies, and political oppositional parties have made continual calls for a national inquiry and a recognition of the socio-cultural and historical causes and implications of this violence over the years. Unfortunately in contrast, Harper's conservative government, and a distressingly large portion of general society, firmly argue that these cases of violence are merely violence, and that colonialism and racism are non-existent in present day Canadian society. On August 21, 2014, following the murder of Tina Fontaine, a 15 year old Aboriginal girl in Winnipeg, and renewed public calls for a national inquiry into the continued violence against Aboriginal women in Canada, Harper obstinantly argued that "we should not view this as a sociological phenomenon. We should view this as a crime [...] the vast majority of these cases are addressed, and they're solved through police investigations. We'll leave it in their hands" (CBC News, 2014). In spite of comments such as these Aboriginal communities have banded together and media attention has ever so slowly begun to shine a light on systemic and structural mistreatment and violence against Aboriginal communities. These violences stem from first contact and the forms of social and cultural marginalization enacted on Aboriginal bodies and communities that were discussed in this section. This violence and marginalization is diverse and

multidimensional, and while physical and sexual violence against Indigenous women is abhorrent, it cannot be understood without an acknowledgement of the more structural forms of violence and marginalization that both historically and contemporarily impact Aboriginal communities.

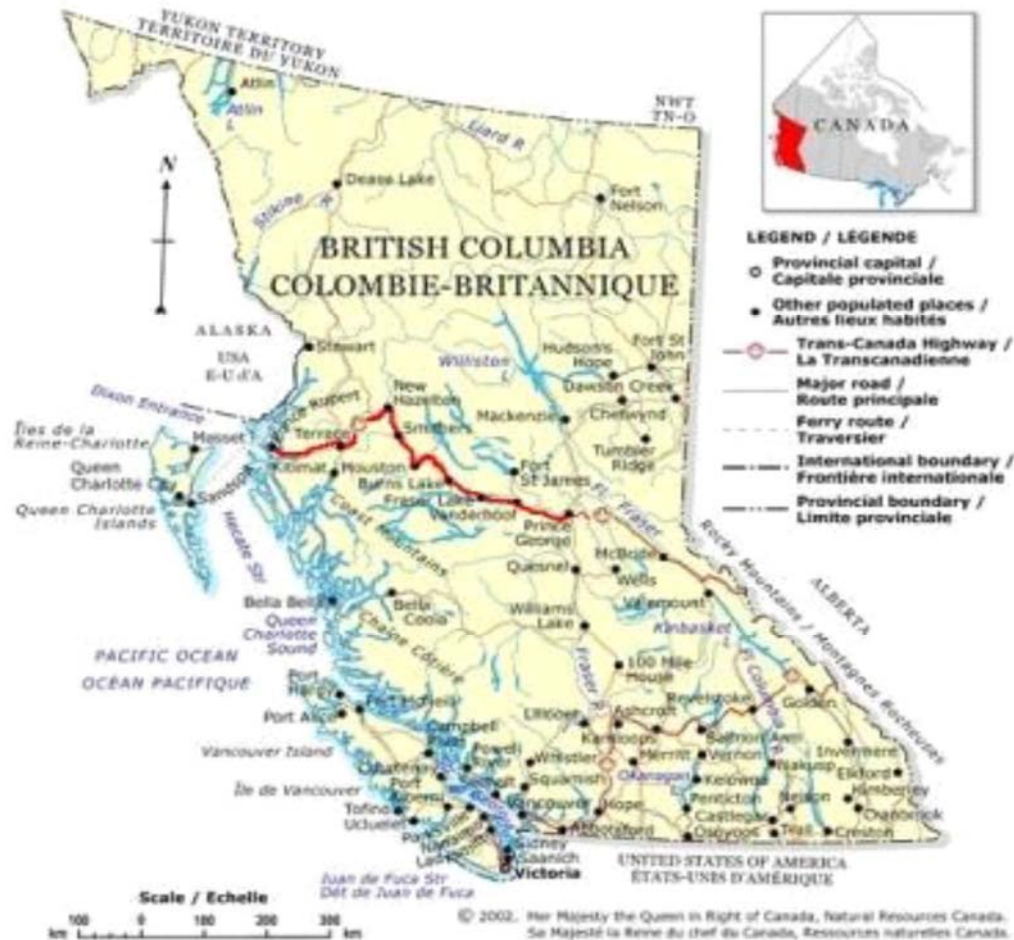


Figure 14: Highway of Tears (Highway 16 from Prince George to Prince Rupert), BC Canada (retrieved from: Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Prince George Native Friendship Center, et al, 2006, p.9)

## The colonial exploitation of land and resources

### Fishing and hunting

Traditional Lheidli T'enneh territory includes the watersheds of the entire upper Fraser River, as well as parts of the Nechako and Peace Rivers. These watersheds are the natural habitat of many aquatic species, including salmon. The Lheidli T'enneh “have a long and important relationship as stewards of those aquatic resources. Extensive use of the Territory's aquatic resources, including fish, continues today,” with salmon fishing and canning being essential parts of Lheidli T'enneh livelihood and industry (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b). The federal government disturbed this stewardship, and concurrently the livelihoods of the Lheidli T'enneh in 1878, by strictly regulating Aboriginal commercial fishing and prohibiting the use of freshwater nets (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b). In 1888, the *Indian Food Fishery* policy was instituted, which required permits for fishing the Fraser River and prohibited any commercial fishing by Aboriginal people (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). In 1908, fourteen BC Chiefs sent a petition to the DIA concerning these regulations, denouncing inadequate reserves, the “imposition of hunting, fishing, and grazing restrictions, and over-fishing by settlers” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013, p. 22). In response to their concerns federal officials destroyed Indigenous fishing devices while subsequently increasing BC Fish & Wildlife Branch requirements for all trappers to register trap lines, making it more and more difficult for Aboriginal communities to access aquatic resources and correlated income (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013).

Regulatory strategies were designed “to assure cheap indigenous labour for canneries, and to prevent indigenous competition with the white-owned and export-oriented industry” (Alfred, 2009, p. 47). Regulatory policies on hunting and fishing directly affected Aboriginal people's economic power and freedom, resulting in increased state dependency, poverty, and hunger within Indigenous communities. It was not until 1990 that the Supreme Court affirmed Aboriginal fishing rights, and in 1992, an Aboriginal Fishing Strategy was implemented with support from both the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and the BC First Nations. In 1993, Aboriginal hunting rights were upheld in the BC Court of Appeals (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b). Despite these rights, competing economic and political interests, paired with complex land ownership and authority arrangements, continue to frustrate the efforts of Aboriginal people to *exercise their rights to sustenance practices and stewardship of the watersheds* in BC. In some areas, and with increasing frequency, the land and water systems have been significantly degraded by industrial and mining initiatives. For example, railway construction along the rivers has caused waterway destruction; in 1913, a major landslide at Hell's Gate, a popular fishing ground for Aboriginal communities on the Fraser River in southwestern BC, altered the riverbed, and the increased velocity of the water running through the debris resulted in heightened mortality and decreased salmon fry the following year. At the same time, more federal fishing restrictions were levied, continually “undermining Indigenous livelihoods and economies” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 25). Starting in the mid-1900s, a series of dams for hydroelectric generation were developed throughout the province, flooding reserves and destroying many fish habitats. The largest of these projects, conducted by Alcan, a Canadian aluminium company, took place in Dakelh territories.



## The Kitimat Modernization Project

In 1949, the provincial government signed away the rights to the land, forest, water and fish of the Nechako River basin region to Alcan for the development of a hydroelectric plant and smelter. Alcan acquired these rights despite the fact that the area had been, until then, under the jurisdiction of the federal government and the DIA (CBC News, 2013 [1952]).

Alcan's Nechako project currently includes the smelter at Kitimat, the hydroelectric transmission lines from Kemano to Kitimat, the Kenney Dam, and the Nechako reservoir (900 square kilometres) (see Figure 15). The reservoir re-routes 115 cubic metres per second of water from the Nechako watershed and other glacier river systems, westward through a 16 kilometre granite tunnel in Mount Dubose, down a waterfall "16 times higher than Niagara Falls", into the ocean-bound Kemano river basin, instead of its natural route southeast down the Fraser river towards Vancouver (Quinn et al., 2004, p. 4). This construction required thousands of workers, and "Alcan recruited from all over the world [which] resulted in thirty-six different nationalities comprising their labour force" (Warren, 2012, p. 4). When the Kenney Dam opened in 1954, it turned the Nechako River into an enormous reservoir, flooding a significant part of the Dakelh territories. The Cheslatta people were displaced "with little or no warning, [they were] *forced to flee the rising waters* and watch[ed] as their community's hunting grounds, trap lines, and burial sites disappear[ed]" (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 29, emphasis added).

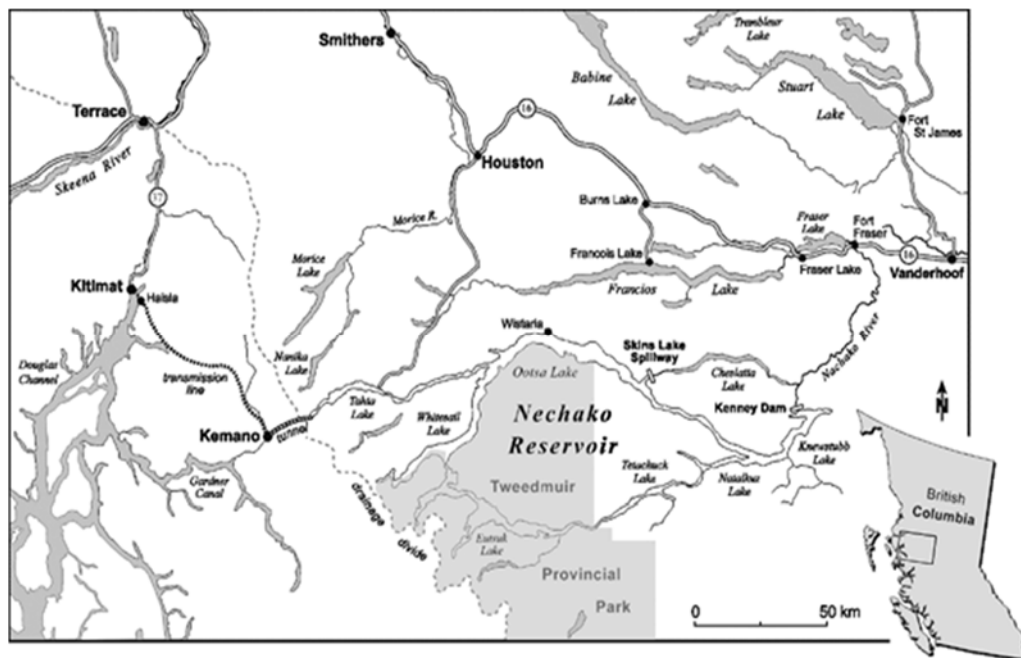


Figure 15: The Nechako Kemano Diversion (Quinn et al., 2004, p.5)

Alcan's hydroelectric generation project is an internationally renowned feat of engineering, and in the 1950s it generated more energy than any other hydroelectric plant in the world (Boyer, 1956). However working conditions were deplorable; instead of addressing "blistering hot and hazardous" conditions, they "forc[ed] their employees to ingest 'disgusting' salt tablets that they kept in little bins outside the lunch rooms[,] so that they could retain fluid" (Warren, 2012, p. 8). An electrician recalls working on the lines, "they warned me that it was going to be bad but, of

course, nothing can really prepare you for that kind of heat and dust and everything. I remember one time when a pot started arching ... it was like World War II going off ... there was a lot of smoke in the area, sparks flying into the ceiling” (Warren, 2012, p. 8). Attrition was a problem for Alcan, another worker remembers: “our first introduction into the pot rooms there were twelve of us. When we entered [the pot room] two of the new hires turned around and walked away and quit[,] right away on the spot because of the smoke and fumes” (Dunlop, Coyte, & McIsaac, 2000; Warren, 2012, p. 6). This led to on-going international recruitment efforts, and “most of Alcan’s workforce consisted of new immigrants” (Warren, 2012, p. 16). The vulnerability of this population meant that wages stayed low, conditions remained dangerous, and attempts to unionize were challenging (Warren, 2012).

In 1992, BC Premier Harcourt (of the New Democratic Party) commissioned a report on the project that recommended a public review by the British Columbia Utilities Commission. This public review led to the project’s cancellation in 1995, with support from environmentalists, the fishing industry, wildlife conservationists, and First Nations communities. Alcan sued the government for losses, and the 1997 settlement compensated Alcan and, against the interests of the Dakelh and Sekani communities, reinstated their water licence, giving Alcan control of 87% of the Nechako River (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b).

Alcan was bought by Rio Tinto, a mining company, in 2007, and that same year the newly formed Rio Tinto Alcan renegotiated an electric power sale with BC Hydro. The Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, finding this contentious, brought the matter to the Supreme Court of Canada. In 2010 the court ruled that *because there were no physical environmental changes*, Rio Tinto did not need to consult First Nations communities regarding the 2007 sale, but that the failure to consult on the initial project was an underlying infringement (Supreme Court of Canada). The lawyer representing the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council asserted that this ruling leaves the door open for the Carrier Sekani to seek compensation for Alcan’s failure to consult prior to beginning the original Kemano Power Project (Stueck, 2010).

Today Rio Tinto Alcan is modernizing the Kitimat smelter (euphemistically named the Kitimat Modernization Project), meaning more energy-efficient processes will be used for aluminum production. According to the July 2013 issue of the Rio Tinto Alcan magazine, the process “has passed the 50% complete milestone” (Magee et al., 2013). The company has also pushed forward with a controversial initiative to construct a second tunnel through Mount Dubose, in spite of legal and environmental challenges. Construction of the tunnel will be completed within 2014 (Voigt, Thomson, & Zornow, 2012).

The creation of the Nechako reservoir represents one of the most significant environmental changes in the province and has had long-term detrimental effects on the Dakelh people and their traditional waterways, ecosystems, and resource supplies. Annually, as the reservoir reaches its capacity and backs up into Cheslatta Lake, all of the Cheslatta village sites are flooded, *disturbing burial sites and destroying spawning grounds* (see Figure 16); “the remains of about sixty Cheslatta have been washed away and recovered since the surplus water was first released from the Nechako Reservoir in 1956” (Hager, 2013). In a formal step towards reclaiming the Nechako, on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation submitted a water license application to the Provincial government, formally requesting rights to construct the Nechako River Legacy Project. This project would “cease the destructive flooding that occurs annually on

Cheslatta Lake” through construction of a water release facility at Kenney Dam (First Nations Summit, 2013, p. 1). The Cheslatta First Nation has proposed funding this \$280 million dollar project, developing the spillway and installing a hydroelectric turbine, in return for a contract to sell electricity to BC Hydro. The diverted water would restore water to the Upper Nechako, which has been dry since 1952 (Hager, 2013).



Figure 16: A Traditional Cheslatta Burial Ground after flooding (Hager, 2013)

The Nechako hydroelectric plant has led to the disruption and displacement of Aboriginal people in the Dakelh territories, and environmental damage that extends far beyond the Dakelh territories. According to the Carrier Sekani, “the Nee Incha Koh (Nechako River) is the largest tributary of the most important salmon-producing river in the world-the Ltha Koh (Fraser River). Approximately 23% of the Ltha Koh sockeye production originates in the Nee Incha Koh watershed” (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011c). While it is impossible to accurately assess the full impact of Alcan’s Nechako project, it is reasonable to assume that the diversion of water may have positively contributed to fish resources in the Kemano River. However, within the Nechako and Fraser basins, chinook and sockeye salmon, as well as Nechako white sturgeon, are now considered endangered (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011c; Quinn et al., 2004). Further environmental concerns include fluoride emissions from the smelter, as these have been linked to “forest decimation, aquatic habitat damage and local workers’ health problems” (Quinn et al., 2004, p. 4).

## Forestry

The Prince George Forest Region contains 42% of British Columbia’s forests, and has been the site of some of the most significant deforestation in Canada. By 1910, provincial regulation was requested by the Fulton Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry in response to forest misuse by timber operators (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b). The *BC Forest Act* was passed in 1912, and the province began selling timber by auction (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). By 1913, a Forest Service office opened, and eighteen such timber mills were operational in the region by 1927 (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b).

Lumber has been the backbone of industry for Prince George, with expansion into pulp and paper mills beginning in the 1960s. Shifts in employment into the service sector continue to be gradual, with forestry remaining the predominate sector (BC Stats, 2011). Declining employment in forestry in the 1980s was offset by “gains in harvesting and silviculture activity. [...] There



are 12 major sawmills, 1 plywood mill, 3 large pulp and paper mills and 9 value-added manufacturing operations. The forestry sector accounts for an estimated 5,600 direct jobs in harvesting, processing, value-added, pulp and paper and silviculture” (Prince George Land and Resource Management Plan Monitoring Committee, 2004).



**Figure 17: The Pine Beetle Infestation** (retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2012/04/18/bc-timber-supply-mpb.html>)

Since the mid-1990s, forests in central interior regions in BC have suffered from the largest insect infestation in the history of Canada, the mountain pine beetle. Although these beetles are native to the Northwest coast, the complex impacts of climate change have exacerbated the infestation, winters have been milder and summers warmer, allowing the beetle to spread unimpeded, thereby causing significant deforestation. Forests of infested, dead trees have continued to aggravate wildfires and flooding across the province. Figure 17 shows extensive damage to pine trees in Mount Fraser, near the BC and Alberta border; the red trees are either dead or dying from the infestation. While managed logging of these forests caused an initial boom, the ever-decreasing lumber supply, both from human activity and pine beetle infestations, may lead to an economic downturn within the next decade (City of Prince George, 2005). While the root causes of the pine beetle infestation are intricate and multidimensional, colonial relationships to land, that neglected the balance inherent in Indigenous worldviews and resource utilization, are widely acknowledged as inextricably linked to the climatic change that the world is experiencing today. Additionally, the widespread and still widely unknown economic (and social) impacts of this damage will invariably impact vulnerable and marginalized Canadians more; not only are Aboriginal Canadians disproportionately impacted by poverty and vulnerable housing, not to mention higher rates of certain chronic illnesses, in the Prince George region the Lheidli T'enneh's economy is based in the forestry industry, specifically timber harvesting and natural resource management (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013a). Aboriginal communities impacted by the infestation have responded promptly to these threats to their land, resources, and economic stability, such as the BC First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Action plan, which represents over 75 Bands and organizations and sets out a sustainable action plan. This plan addresses, among other things: the rights to resource utilization and management; environmental and socio-cultural sustainability; economic opportunities; trade and international negotiations affecting forest



policy; and, funding structures (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, & First Nations Summit, 2005). In 2006, a parallel initiative by the First Nations Forestry Council commissioned an impact assessment on the beetle infestation, resulting in various community-based response initiatives, the development of a best-practice response framework, and the allocation of \$30,000 to each involved First Nation to fund planning and implementation of these responses (BC First Nations Forestry Council, 2010).

The “Lheidli T'enneh First Nation is *actively pursuing opportunities that will contribute to our community becoming a significant player to the economy within our traditional territory, all the while maintaining the ecological balance needed in moving forward*” (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b, emphasis added). An example of this is Chunzoolh Forest Products Limited, an initiative of the Lheidli T'enneh based around silviculture initiation and management, as well as pursuing pipeline surveying and construction opportunities (Frederick, Nome, Pighin, & John, 2013; Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b).

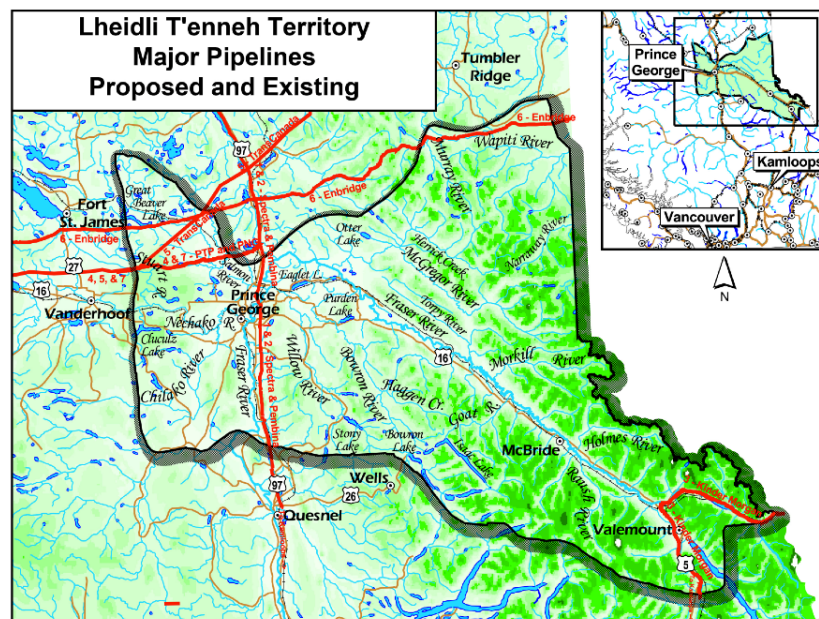


Figure 18: Pipeline Projects (Frederick, Nome, John & Pighin, 2013, p.21)

## Conclusion

This document offers an historic account of the development of the city of Prince George and the surrounding Dakelh territory. Specific processes, policies, and ideologies marginalized the Dakelh people during the colonial settlement of their territories, a progression of disenfranchisement, dispossession, and racialization that continues today. From the time of settlement, particularly since the establishment of British Columbia as a colony, land claims, nation building, and economic projects have had *devastating impacts on the health and wellbeing of the Dakelh people*. The projects described here include (but are unfortunately not limited to): the infectious diseases that came with increased contact after the building of roadways; the introduction of Western medicine and exclusion of Indigenous health practices and ceremonies; residential educational institutions with specific aims of cultural genocide; the harvesting and sale of enormous quantities of lumber; the development of mining, hydroelectric, and aluminium smelting projects; the establishment of isolated reserves outside of urban areas and on land unsuitable for agriculture projects; and, the relocation and sale of the Fort George reserve for private railway construction and resale of the subdivided land.

Many, including current Prime Minister Stephen Harper, perceive these projects as having held, and continuing to hold, the promise of economic growth and prosperity for the province. Yet the cost of these developments is vast and socio-economic, cultural, political, and moral in nature. Private industrialization projects have forever changed the landscape, and continue to threaten the natural and unrenewable resources of BC. Understanding the effects of colonisation within the specific geographic, social, economic and cultural context of the Prince George area offers a deeper appreciation of *how these projects can be implicated in the health inequities seen in the Aboriginal populations in Prince George today*. The health of populations cannot be considered without attention to their connection (both spiritual and physical) to lands and spaces that ensure survival, and sustain and preserve health. *These projects of capitalism and development have contributed to a quiet and continual ethnocide of the Dakelh people*, a project of violent assimilation and neglect that began at first contact and which continues to threaten the health of Indigenous communities across Canada.

Despite this history, the Dakelh people continue to hold a significant presence in Prince George and the surrounding area. Strong leadership amongst a diverse Aboriginal community has ensured that the voice of the Dakelh is present within community decision-making networks, and sustained resistance has ensured that Indigenous worldviews, governance-structures, and healing practices have remained engrained within the community. One such initiative, springing from Aboriginal leadership and advocacy at the community level, is the founding and continued growth of a unique primary health care clinic, the Central Interior Native Health Society. This society has maintained independent provincial funding, offering specialty services as a non-governmental health agency, and complemented mainstream health services in the area that do not have the expertise nor ability to meet the unique health needs of the Aboriginal population of Prince George. Moving forward, the Central Interior Native Health Society continues to build community, re-introduce Indigenous peoples to cultural knowledge that the colonial project worked so hard to erase, and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives of health and healing into their Indigenous-focused and community-based initiative.

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## Appendix A: British Columbian land treaties

In 1864, Joseph Trutch became Governor of British Columbia while also serving in the role of Minister of Indian Affairs. Trutch was responsible for land allotment to European settlers, and shortly after taking the position he had begun severely whittling down the size of existing reserve lands. Canada operated on a treaty negotiation that allocated 80 acres per Aboriginal family. In comparison, newly drafted British Columbian treaties were limiting allotment to only ten or twenty acres per family. In contrast, white settlers received 160 acres per family across Canada (Fisher, 1971; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005). The colony of British Columbia joined Canada in 1871, however *BC's Land Act* (1874) consolidated previous land legislations and refused outright to implement the Canadian standard of 80 acres per family. Instead, British Columbian lawmakers allocated land and decided on the size of reserves *with absolutely no regard for the actual size of a family*, calculating 20 acres per (male) head of family (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 19).

The *Indian Act* of 1876 had legislated that land negotiations occur only at the federal level, and across British Columbia Aboriginal communities collaborated to develop petitions and resist these inequitable divisions of land and resources. By 1885, British Columbian Indian Chiefs were travelling to the capital, Ottawa, to appeal in person to the federal government, even going so far as requesting that their petitions be forwarded directly to King Edward VII. As tension between Indigenous communities and the settler society of British Columbia grew, Prime Minister Laurier travelled to BC “to settle the provincial-federal conflict over reserve size and Aboriginal Title” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 23). The BC Premier, McBride, *refused Laurier's suggestion to take the issue to court, and visited London's colonial office requesting absolute non-interference in British Columbia*, which was granted (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

Reserve allocations did not serve the interests of the Lheidli T'enneh or other Aboriginal communities to begin with, nor were they consistently honoured. Various development projects shifted these land allocations, as the government saw fit and without any regard for the communities affected by these changes. This was the case for the Fort George Reserve, which, in 1911 was annexed to facilitate the construction of a railway. The Lheidli T'enneh people were sequestered into a new reserve, and the City of Prince George began to take shape adjacent to these rail lines (Evans & Foster, 2010). Prince George was officially incorporated as a town in 1915 (City of Prince George, 2012). The process of acquisition of the Fort George Reserve by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was strongly resisted by the Lheidli T'enneh (Vogt & Gamble, 2010). Vogt and Gamble (2010) frame the appropriation of the Fort George Reserve from the Lheidli T'enneh as representative of *the myriad ways in which Aboriginal peoples were rendered defenceless against these so-called nation-building projects*, facilitated by a sentiment among settlers that *large reserves were poorly utilized and merely existed as barriers to development*. A common assumption is that Aboriginal people should be sequestered away from developing urban centres *for their own good*. The Lheidli T'enneh engaged in a two year struggle, with the community actively resisting displacement from their land, land that they were (understandably) deeply connected to, and “attempted (albeit with limited success) to protect [their] interests by exploiting the different, if not incompatible, positions of [their] religious contacts, the DIA, and the Grand Trunk Pacific” (Vogt & Gamble, 2010, p. 58). The community eventually agreed to



surrender the reserve for \$125,000, based largely on the threats that had begun against the community; if they were to absolutely refuse *ways around their consent would be found* (Vogt & Gamble, 2010). Not even two years after the acquisition of the Fort George reserve, “subsequent development of the land into the city of Prince George made the Company a profit that *exceeded \$1 million from the first sale of lots* in 1913 (a return of some 800%), and more in later years” (McDonald, 1990, p. 38, emphasis added). Resistance from Indigenous communities continued, again, with limited success:

[In 1911] over sixty delegates of the Interior Tribes, the Indian Rights Association and the Nisga’a Land Committee met with Premier McBride to protest BC land policies and demand[ed] to be heard by Canadian courts. McBride decline[d], asserting that they [did] not have a legal case and that Indigenous people, in general, [were] satisfied with BC policies. In response, the Interior Tribes issue[d] a Memorial and Declaration (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013).

This Memorial and Declaration reiterated Aboriginal title and rights advanced the previous year collectively by the Chiefs. At the same time, “the Stl’Atl’Imx released the Declaration of the Lillooet Tribe, assert[ing] ownership of their territories and remind[ing] Canada that though BC lays claim to their lands, they have defended their land ‘at the cost of their blood’ and [had] never surrendered or deserted it” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). In response Laurier proposed “that the federal government take Indian claims to the Exchequer Court of Canada” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 24). Laurier was no longer Prime Minister by the time the claim actually reached the court, after a long series of delays, and while the disputes continued, formal investigations into these claims were effectively ignored by the government (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

After Prime Minister Borden took office in 1911, J. McKenna was appointed the role of Special Commissioner by the dominion government. In this role McKenna was tasked with scrutinizing the scope, effectiveness, and overall condition of the Indian Affairs department in British Columbia (McKenna et al.). The McKenna-McBride Commission began community hearings in 1913, and published their final report in 1916. The Commission found that reserve sizes were inappropriately small, and new, larger boundaries were established. While reserve sizes did increase, the majority of these expansions were made into “undesirable land”, harsh conditions seen as useless to colonial settlers and therefore ideal for Indigenous marginalization (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 26).

Soon after, Canada passed the *BC Indian Land Settlement Act* (1920), which enforced the recommendations of the Commission *without any semblance of consent from Indigenous communities*. The Allied Tribes of British Columbia (ATBC), an Indigenous human rights organization, was formed, and despite escalated Royal Canadian Mounted Police presence and increased Aboriginal arrests, ATBC organized to resist the enactment of the Commission’s recommendations. In 1926, ATBC petitioned the Canadian parliament for a court inquiry into the on-going land disputes from British Columbia’s entrance into the confederation; a Neskonlith Chief, William Perish, traveled to England to petition King George V directly (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005).

In 1927, further amendments to the *Indian Act* forced Aboriginal resistance underground as it became “illegal to obtain funds or legal counsel for Aboriginal Title cases” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 27). A few years later, in 1931, the *Native Brotherhood of British Columbia* (NBBC) was developed by the Haida and Tsimshian peoples. Together they organized “protests on fishing, lands, taxation and social issues” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). This coalition extended the work of the ATBC, and while the official mandate of the NBBC was to improve the socio-economic conditions of Indian people in BC, unofficially they sought federal and provincial recognition of Aboriginal Title (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013).

In 1951, another amendment to the *Indian Act* reversed the prohibition of land claim pursuits (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013), and in 1960, Canadian Aboriginal people were included as voters in federal elections (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, 2011b). In 1969, Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs under the Trudeau government, issued the *White Paper*, a policy framed within a civil rights and equality banner. This policy asserted that Aboriginal Title did not exist and espoused *aggressive* assimilation (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2013). Many Indigenous individuals viewed the White Paper as incredibly problematic, since the concept of equality failed to address the historical context and ongoing colonialism occurring to Aboriginal people across the country. Dr. Harold Cardinal, a First Nations leader, responded by writing *The Unjust Society: the Tragedy of Canada's Indians*, and in 1970, issued the *Red Paper* or the ‘Citizens Plus’ policy. Cardinal’s works were instrumental: they increased non-Aboriginal Canadians’ awareness of the on-going injustice committed by Canada against its Indigenous population, and *challenged Canada’s image of itself as a just society*. Furthermore, Cardinal stated “clearly and persuasively why the historical, customary and legal rights of Canada's First peoples could not simply be folded into those of the immigrant society” (UBC Faculty of Law, 2009).

In 1973, the issue of Aboriginal Title shifted with the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in *Calder v. The Attorney General of British Columbia*. In this case, the Supreme Court defined ‘Indian title’ as:

*A legal right, independent of any form of enactment, and rooted in Aboriginal peoples’ historic ‘occupation, possession and use’ of traditional territories. As such, title existed at the time of first contact with Europeans, whether or not it was recognized by them* (Hurley, 2000, emphasis added).

In 1981, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs organized and mobilized the Constitution Express. Trainloads of Indigenous people and allies travelled to Ottawa from BC and lobbied for the right of self-determination. The result was the *Canada Constitution Act (1982)*, which recognized “existing Aboriginal and treaty rights (Section 35)” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, pp. 31-32).

Less than a decade later, the *Constitution Act* was revisited in the Supreme Court. In a ground-breaking decision, *Her Majesty the Queen v Sparrow (1990,)* Section 35 was refined to recognize – among other things – “the prior occupation of North America by Aboriginal peoples, and to

reconcile that prior presence with the assertion of Crown sovereignty ...[and that] Aboriginal title is a distinct species of Aboriginal right” (Hurley, 2000, p. 3). The final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was released in 1996. It recommended a reform of the relationships between Canada and its Indigenous populations, including “redistribution of political authority and economic resources [...] recogniz[ing] Aboriginal rights, [...] shared ownership, and jurisdiction over land” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, p. 33).

In 1997, there was an appeal of the *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada.

[The court] rejected that Aboriginal rights had been extinguished before 1871. The Court does not decide whether the Gitksan and Wet’suwe’en still hold title to their land and instead clarifies that Aboriginal Title is not a right of absolute ownership, but a proprietary right to ‘exclusive use and occupation of land’ that ‘is a burden on the Crown’s underlying title’. *Once Aboriginal Title is proven, federal and provincial governments may infringe upon it for valid reasons, including resource extraction, economic and infrastructure development, settlement of foreign populations and environmental protection. Aboriginal people must be consulted and compensated for any infringement or extinguishment of Aboriginal Title* (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005, pp. 33-34, emphasis added).

Currently, there are 320 enumerated Lheidli T’enneh Band members, approximately 100 of whom live on four reserves (677 hectares or 1672.9 acres) on the Fraser and Nechako Rivers near Prince George, with the rest of the Band members living in or around Prince George (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013). The main reserve community is on Reserve No. 2 (Shelley), approximately 16 kilometers northeast of Prince George. This reserve is split by the Fraser River and referred to as North Shelley and South Shelley (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013). This allotment is 1412 acres, approximately 55% smaller than the land originally allocated in the 1892 agreement. Today, original BC land agreements continue to be among the most limited agreements throughout Canada.

When the BC Treaty Commission began accepting submissions in 1993, the Lheidli T’enneh people were among the first to initiate negotiations under the BC Treaty process. In 2003, Lheidli T’enneh, British Columbia, and Canada signed the first agreement in principle, which allowed negotiations for a Final Agreement to commence (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 2005). While the Lheidli T’enneh community has gotten very close to a settlement, it was rejected in the final stages by a narrow margin, and a land treaty has not yet been reached.

[The rejected] agreement included a land package that consists of approximately 4,330 hectares, including 3,653 hectares of provincial and federal Crown land and 677 hectares of existing Indian reserves. On March 30, 2007, the Lheidli T’enneh Band held a community ratification vote on the Final Agreement. With a final count of 123 against and 111 in favour, the Lheidli T’enneh community did not

ratify the Final Agreement. Of the 273 people on the voters list, 234 voted (86% voter turn-out) (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2013).

Today a “Community Engagement Process is underway [...] supported by the BC Treaty Commission” (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013c). Despite these challenges the Lheidli T'enneh have had the autonomy to manage their own land and resources under the *First Nations Land Management Act*. They have been governed by this Act, instead of the *Indian Act*, because of a successfully negotiated Land Code and Individual Transfer Agreement in 2000 (Lheidli T'enneh, 2013b).