

“We Are Not Stones”: Land, Indigenous Agency, and Colonialism at Williams Lake, British
Columbia, 1821-1881

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Williams Lake is located on the traditional territory of the Secwépemc peoples in the Cariboo region of British Columbia's central interior. Although a definitively rural area, the Cariboo has nonetheless played a significant role in the province's history. Its rich historical record offers important insight into the processes of colonialism that took place across British Columbia. This thesis examines the relationships between Indigenous people and colonial structures and their agents at Williams Lake, and the transformation of the area from Indigenous to settler control. Engaging the broader question of how a relatively small number of Europeans entrenched themselves and dislodged the far more numerous T'exelcenc (the Indigenous people of Williams Lake), this thesis addresses three specific questions: why a reserve was not established at Williams Lake in the early 1860s when the need was acknowledged, what events transpired that delayed the establishment of a reserve, and what circumstances finally led to the creation of the Sugar Cane reserve in 1881.

The main arguments herein are twofold. Firstly, that the fur trade era at Williams Lake from 1821 to the beginning of the Cariboo Gold Rush in 1859, characterized by a mode of colonialism aimed at establishing an imperial and commercial trade network, was distinct from, yet lay the groundwork for, a subsequent era dominated by settler colonialism. Further to this point, the mutually beneficial relationships and seemingly positive conditions established during this earlier colonial period impacted the unfolding of events in the Williams Lake area during the latter and were very much a part of the process of transformation from Indigenous to settler space.

Secondly, that the colonial government and its agents, by enacting or failing to enact its own policies, ultimately and repeatedly failed Indigenous people at Williams Lake despite the actions of some non-Indigenous people working in good faith and the efforts of complex and evolving Indigenous resistance. The events at Williams Lake, spanning from the illegal pre-

emption of Indigenous land in 1860 to the establishment of the Sugar Cane reserve in 1881, are a microcosm of events and trends across what is now British Columbia. By treating them as such, focusing primarily on local events and paying close attention to the actions of key individuals in a variety of roles, this paper employs a microhistorical approach and seeks to illuminate the realities and complexities of colonialism in the British Columbia interior. Central to this analysis is the idea of Indigenous agency and a close attention to the variety of factors that influenced the T'exelcenc response to colonialism. The words and actions of the second Chief William, whose letters published in Victoria's *Daily British Colonist* in 1879 and 1880 gave voice to the plight of the T'exelcenc, served as the primary inspiration behind this project. William's remark that "We are not stones" spoke to the impending fallout of his desperate situation by impressing upon the settler population that he, too, was human.¹

The defining question underlying this thesis, connecting the analyses of the fur trade and settlement eras, is far more simply put than it is answered: how did Williams Lake change from an Indigenous-controlled to a settler-controlled space? Historians have come up with a variety of frameworks to help explain this process. British Columbia historian John Lutz puts forward the idea of peaceable subordination, built on a process of enframing, as a way of articulating the gradual imposition of European systems, practices, and ideas onto Indigenous populations. Lutz argues that the longer Indigenous peoples "spent within [the] foreign cultural framework" of wage work, missionization, bureaucratic structures, colonial law, and other systems, "the more their original frameworks had to adjust."² This resulted in the peaceable subordination that Lutz ties closely to both the requirements of capitalism and the tenets of British colonial ideology:

¹ Chief William, letter to editor of *Daily British Colonist*, "Pathetic Letter from an Indian Chief," *Daily British Colonist*, 7 November 1879, p. 3.

² John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 25.

“Christianity, civilization, and the rule of British law.”³ Historian Robin Fisher presents an alternative set of these three basic principles: Christianity, education, and agriculture.⁴ Of these, agriculture was especially influential at Williams Lake. Some of the systems embodying colonial ideology, such as wage labour and missionization, were present before the start of the settler-colonial project, while others like the forced adoption of agriculture were introduced by it. Colonization, Lutz explains, did not occur all at once, but piece by piece in a way that often made it difficult for Indigenous peoples to act before the erosion of their influence over their own territories became irreversible. It is important to note that the process of enfranchisement carried out over many decades was not planned all at once. For example, Indigenous land policy changed frequently and was implemented inconsistently depending largely on specific people occupying specific roles within the government. The long-term goal of transforming British Columbia into a settler society always held once settler colonialism eclipsed the commercially-oriented form of colonialism that dominated the fur trade, but the specific policies by which this would be accomplished were never preordained.

Others have added another layer of understanding to this process of transformation, drawing attention to its origins in the fur trade. Historical geographer Cole Harris states that fur traders used both violent and non-violent strategies to “consolidate a European position in the Cordillera,” a consolidation of power which should be understood as “a crucial proto-colonial phase of European influence.”⁵ He explains that Indigenous peoples exerted their own strategies of power during this period, though this competition of agency “was not...an equal encounter,”

³ Lutz, *Makúk*, 25.

⁴ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 68.

⁵ Cole Harris, “Strategies of Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade,” in *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*, edited by Cole Harris, 31-67 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 49.

with “the balance of power...tilted fairly inexorably towards [settlers].”⁶ Harris’ analysis generalizes across a large territory, encompassing many diverse Indigenous cultures whose responses to Europeans varied. Duane Thomson and Marianne Ignace have addressed this shortcoming by focusing on Indigenous responses to the fur trade among Salish-speaking Interior Plateau groups, which includes the T’exelcenc. They argue that the characteristic response of these groups was to “[treat] the European traders as guests in their homelands,” offering them security as long as the traders “conformed to the economic, legal, and social regimes of the respective host communities.”⁷ Despite early conflicts, including at Fort Alexandria, they argue that this ultimately succeeded, resulting in a relationship of “dependence and conformity...in every respect” to Indigenous requirements.⁸ Their most significant disagreement with Harris is that it was Indigenous people, not Europeans, “who exerted control and power” here.⁹ I seek to narrow this scope further through my analysis of fur trade relationships in the Williams Lake area, which tend to be better characterized by Thomson and Ignace’s analysis. However, regardless of how long Indigenous peoples in the interior held onto the balance of power, the ability of a tiny number of Europeans to embed themselves so effectively in an Indigenous world is an important precursor to the eventual colonial settlement of British Columbia.

The fur trade and settlement eras can easily be seen as either two entirely separate periods or as one uniform period of colonization. There are dangers inherent in both of these oversimplified views. Seeing them as entirely separate does not allow us to fully understand how the fur trade laid the groundwork for settler colonialism. It also risks perpetuating the myth that the fur trade brought

⁶ Harris, “Strategies of Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade,” 60.

⁷ Duane Thomson and Marianne Ignace, “‘They Made Themselves our Guests’: Power Relationships in the Interior Plateau Region of the Cordillera in the Fur Trade Era,” *BC Studies* 146, no. 1 (2005): 3.

⁸ Thomson and Ignace, 35.

⁹ Thomson and Ignace, 35.

only advantages to Indigenous people through the importation of European ideas, goods, culture, and technology, especially when compared with the damage done under settler colonialism. Interestingly, this very sentiment was expressed by the second Chief William, who wrote that the Hudson's Bay Company fur traders were nothing but "good friends to the Indians."¹⁰ Whether he believed this wholeheartedly or was exaggerating as a political tactic to elicit action by colonial officials is impossible to know for certain. While trade undeniably presented opportunities for Indigenous people to benefit from Europeans, it also functioned as a vehicle of imperial expansion and the disease and violence that accompanied it.¹¹ The view of the fur trade and settler-colonial periods as separate also prevents us from properly studying the evolution of ideas and individuals from one colonial context to the next. The transition between the fur trade and settler-colonial periods is crucial to understanding the progression of space from Indigenous to settler control, and it is ignored in a world where the fur trade era and the settler-colonial era are entirely separate from one another. No such world existed.

On the other hand, overlooking key distinctions between the two can minimize the significance of their respective underlying factors and motivations. Importantly, it fails to consider that the ideology and process of settler-colonialism had a beginning. North American colonial historian Allan Greer articulates this by suggesting that colonialism, being "the imposition of power from abroad on peoples and spaces," comes in many forms,¹² and that these forms have preceded, succeeded, and existed alongside one another.¹³ Settler colonialism followed a logic of

¹⁰ Chief William, letter to editor of *Daily British Colonist*, "The Indians and Their Lands," *Daily British Colonist*, 15 May 1880, p. 2.

¹¹ Alan Greer, "Settler Colonialism and Beyond," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 30, no. 1 (2019): 68.

¹² Greer, 63.

¹³ Greer, 79.

elimination and replacement,¹⁴ or as Cole Harris puts it, “the displacement of people from their land and its repossession by others.”¹⁵ Greer argues that this logic was not always present as colonialism shifted and evolved, and that there was a mode of colonialism before just as there is now one after (Greer terms the latter “extractivism”).¹⁶ During the fur trade, the European presence in Indigenous territory was certainly a type of colonialism, though it took on the form not of widespread settlement and acquisition of Indigenous land but of an imperial and commercial enterprise of network-building and penetration into what was for Europeans a largely unknown world full of commercial potential. One of the most important conclusions Greer draws from the historicization of settler colonialism is that “an order based on territorial dispossession is not, and never has been, normal, natural, [or] inevitable.”¹⁷ This was a system put into place by specific people at a specific time for specific reasons. When, how, why, and by whom was it done at Williams Lake?

Using the terms of Greer’s article, the fur trade period was defined by the imperial/commercial network-building and penetrative mode of colonialism, while the subsequent period was defined by the settler mode. One did not immediately give way to the next (fur traders did not all of a sudden vanish into thin air, replaced by gold miners and colonial officials). Rather, the settler-colonial period eclipsed the fur trade beginning with a transitional period, which at Williams Lake came in the form of the Cariboo Gold Rush. Unlike the fur traders who depended on Indigenous participation, gold miners viewed Indigenous people as obstacles. Fisher wrote that the influx of gold miners to mainland British Columbia beginning in the late 1850s meant that for

¹⁴ Greer, 63.

¹⁵ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), xxiv.

¹⁶ Greer, 63.

¹⁷ Greer, 79.

the first time, European and Indigenous people were “competing for the resources of the country.”¹⁸ At Williams Lake, the gold rush brought the first permanent settlement of non-Indigenous people to the immediate area. Its position at the outskirts of the Cariboo Gold Rush ultimately meant that Indigenous people there were directly impacted less by the miners themselves and more by the infrastructural and agricultural needs that they generated and the settlers who set out to profit from that demand. Williams Lake today is often referred to as “The Hub of the Cariboo,” a slogan developed in the 1930s by a local newspaper publisher. Throughout the Cariboo Gold Rush the area truly did serve as a transportation and supply nexus for the gold rush economy that quickly eclipsed the fur trade.

When fur traders established a presence among the northern Secwépemc in the early 1800s, they entered a geographically, socially, culturally, economically, and politically complex Indigenous world. For centuries before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous people in the Williams Lake area had formed deep relationships with the land and with each other. The T’excelcemc, a newer term meaning “Williams Lake First Nation People,” belong to the Secwépemc Nation of what is now BC’s central interior. According to Marianne Ignace and Ronald E. Ignace, Secwépemc peoples began over time to conceive of their territory as “a common homeland,” containing both external and internal borders that have shifted over time but have been recognized and understood by those living within them since at least as early as the 1840s.¹⁹ Called Secwepemcúl’ecw, it has been inhabited for at least 8,500 years.²⁰ In his 1909 work *The Shuswap*, ethnographer James Teit defined several regions within Secwepemcúl’ecw according to both his

¹⁸ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 96.

¹⁹ Marianne Ignace and Ronald E. Ignace, *Secwépemc People, Land, and Laws* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 262.

²⁰ Ordell Arlen Steen, *The Scout Island Story: From First People’s Home to Nature Centre* (Williams Lake, BC: Williams Lake Field Naturalists Society, 2019), 3.

own observations and Secwépemc tradition. The T'exelc (Williams Lake) band was part of the Fraser River division, which (after the smallpox epidemic of 1862-63 when eight of its fifteen bands were totally wiped out) also included the Xatsúll (Soda Creek), Esk'etemc (Alkali Lake), Xget'tem (Dog Creek), Stswecem'c (Canoe Creek), Llenlney'ten (High Bar), and Pelltiq'T (Clinton) bands.²¹ The first three and latter four bands listed were considered to be closely related amongst themselves and were thus categorized further as the North and South Fraser River divisions, respectively.²²

The Indigenous community at Williams Lake is called T'exelc in Secwepemctsin, the Secwépemc language, while the lake itself is called SkolatEn.²³ James Teit referred to T'exelc as the Williams Lake band, and today the community is most often called the Williams Lake First Nation. Historically, the T'exelcemic practiced a more sedentary lifestyle than southern Secwépemc groups, while still following a seasonal round which in their case was based largely on the Fraser River salmon run.²⁴ The summer months consisted primarily of hunting for deer and other game, fishing for salmon and lake fish, collecting materials, and gathering plants for both food and medicinal purposes. In the winter and occasionally at other times the T'exelcemic lived in pithouses, semi-underground homes whose roofs made of wood and dirt sit above ground level with a hole at the top for smoke to escape from an indoor firepit. According to T'exelcemic oral history, pithouses were primarily dug by women, and could house up to 30 members of one extended family unit (though they typically housed fewer).²⁵ Pithouses were important sites for

²¹ James Teit, *The Shuswap*, The Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Volume II, Part VII (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1909), 457-458.

²² Teit, 453.

²³ Steen, 3.

²⁴ Elizabeth Furniss, "Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization: The Shuswap Encounter with Roman Catholic Missionaries, 1860-1900," *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 2 (1995): 234.

²⁵ Steen, 6.

sharing culture through song and storytelling. They were built throughout T'exelcenc territory, but most were located within two primary pithouse villages near Williams Lake. The larger village was called Pelikehiki, located in a partly wooded grassy area in the northwest end of the valley. In addition to a winter village, Pelikehiki served as a "campground, hunting area, berry picking location," and burial ground.²⁶ The smaller village was called Yucwt, which sat at the foot of Williams Lake and extended back from its western shore and the northern bank of the Williams Lake River. In addition to being a winter village site, Yucwt was also used for haying, fishing, and trapping, and was considered the central point of the valley.²⁷ The T'exelcenc had well-established trade relationships with neighbouring communities like Xats'ull at Soda Creek. The position of these two communities at the northern extreme of Secwepemcúl'ecw meant that they served as intermediaries between the neighbouring Dakelh and T'silhqot'in nations and the rest of the Secwépemc. Their relatively large populations (approximately 350 at Williams Lake and 300 at Soda Creek in 1850),²⁸ the rich resources of the area, and their role as trade intermediaries in an expansive inland Indigenous trade network positioned these groups to be valuable trading partners with Europeans from the outset of the fur trade in the area in the early 1800s, and more specifically following the construction of Fort Alexandria at Soda Creek in 1821.

Secwépemc political structure was organized around the role of chief, who presided over the localized Indigenous community, which James Teit termed the "band."²⁹ The role of head chief was typically occupied by the hereditary chief, one for each band, whose duties "were to look after the general welfare of the band," to give "advice on all-important matters," and to serve as

²⁶ Indian Claims Commission, *Williams Lake Indian Band: Village Site Inquiry* (Ottawa, March 2006), 15.

²⁷ Indian Claims Commission, 16.

²⁸ Teit, 464.

²⁹ Ignace and Ignace, 364.

representatives and agents “in dealing with strangers,” both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.³⁰ Lineage alone did not determine a hereditary chief’s successor; this decision by community leaders considered both the patrilineal line of succession and the “personal skills and merit” of possible heirs.³¹ Often there were numerous local chiefs who occupied different roles for different situations, likely on a temporary basis.³² According to Teit, these included “war chiefs, hunting chiefs, and chiefs of dances,” all of whom were “elected as the best qualified to fill these positions.”³³ I have pieced together the line of succession of head chiefs at Williams Lake beginning just before the fur trade, although the early dates are broad approximations and there is ambiguity around when Gwesemiyst, the first Chief William, became head chief. Consequently, some of the following information could be wrong, but it is based on the best information and reasoning I have so far been able to employ.

According to T’excelcenc oral tradition, Gwesemiyst’s father was named K’ulemnit’sse (Columneetza), which was also possibly the name of Gwesemiyst’s brother.³⁴ The elder K’ulemnit’sse likely led the T’excelcenc from the early 1800s until at least 1838. Gwesemiyst, likely born in the 1780s, was a prominent presence by the time Fort Alexandria began operating in 1821, perhaps acting as a local chief within his home village, Pelikehiki. By the early 1840s, Gwesemiyst appears to have taken on some of his father’s responsibilities. He became head chief sometime after 1838 but probably before 1850.³⁵ Gwesemiyst remained in that role until he died of smallpox

³⁰ Ignace and Ignace, 570.

³¹ Ignace and Ignace, 365.

³² Furniss, 235.

³³ Teit, 569.

³⁴ Barry Sale, “Haphazard History: The Origins of Columneetza,” *Williams Lake Tribune*, 28 February 2017, <https://www.wltribune.com/community/haphazard-history-the-origins-of-columneetza-5487750>.

³⁵ Sale.

in 1862, after which his son William, likely born around 1830, took over.³⁶ William first served until 1884, when backlash from an attempt to collectivize and create an external market for the community's resources led to his replacement by his councillor Tomahusket.³⁷ After Tomahusket's death in 1888, William served again until he died in 1896. His eldest son, Baptiste William, served from 1896 to 1917, and Baptiste's brother Adrian William served from 1917 to 1927. One conclusion that some historians and Secwépemc elders have drawn is that "Chief William" began to function not just as a name but also as a title, denoting the hereditary head chief descended from Gwesemiyst, the first "Chief William."³⁸ This practice seemingly ended with Adrian William, the fourth and last "Chief William," though there were two more hereditary chiefs of T'exelc until they began electing chiefs instead. The late Rick Gilbert, chief from 1974-1982 and 1988-1992, was a direct descendant of Gwesemiyst through his mother Clothilde.

The construction of the HBC's Fort Alexandria at Soda Creek in 1821 was a key development of the fur trade in the Williams Lake area, but it was not the first contact between the Fraser River Secwépemc and Europeans. The explorer Alexander Mackenzie met a small party of Secwépemc in 1793, and in 1808 Simon Fraser entered Xatsúll territory near Soda Creek, then a two-day journey from Williams Lake. As Indigenous communities throughout Secwepemcúl'ecw had long traded amongst each other, and given the relatively close proximity of T'exelc and Xatsúll and their regular exchanges of information, it is possible that at least some representatives of T'exelc made the trip north once word spread about these visits. Additionally, trade goods made their way inland from coastal First Nations on networks established centuries prior, passing from

³⁶ Marriage Register, St. Joseph's Mission, Williams Lake, BC, 1870-1872, St. Joseph's Mission vertical file, Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin Archives, Williams Lake, BC.

³⁷ James Murphy, "A Modern Indian Chief" (Unknown publisher, September 1894), Chief William vertical file, Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin Archives, Williams Lake, BC.

³⁸ Ignace and Ignace, 369.

the Nuxálk at Bella Coola to the T̄silhqot'in to the Secwépemc groups living on the lower Chilcotin River.³⁹ Naturally, information also travelled along those same trade networks, and Europeans had been trading with coastal First Nations since the eighteenth century. Thus, when the first fur traders arrived in the area in the early 1800s, they would not have been entirely foreign.

In the journals recorded at Fort Alexandria, Gwesemiyst is frequently mentioned alongside K'ulemnīt'se as a trusted trade partner and ally. The traders called Gwesemiyst "William the Atnah" or some variation of it, Atnah (or Athna) being a Dakelh word meaning foreigner, historically used by the Dakelh to describe the Secwépemc but later adopted into Chinook jargon.⁴⁰ Gwesemiyst was frequently accompanied by K'ulemnīt'se, though it is unclear whether this was his father or his brother, as it may have differed depending on the occasion. They likely shared the same name, and one was the chief of a village at Chimney Creek which the fur traders called "the Barge." In March 1848, Alexander Caulfield Anderson, then the chief trader at Fort Alexandria, planned to deliver two horses south to the HBC's Paul Fraser "in charge of William Atnah or some other trustworthy Indian."⁴¹ If there were "trustworthy Indians," like Gwesemiyst and K'ulemnīt'se, then there were "untrustworthy" ones as well. The former were given annual payments to ensure their continued cooperation. Gwesemiyst knew the system well, and whenever he felt that he was not getting a fair deal at Fort Alexandria, he travelled south to Fort Thompson to trade there instead, much to the annoyance of the traders at Fort Alexandria. Whatever resistance or anti-European sentiment may have existed among the general Indigenous population at

³⁹ Steen, 7.

⁴⁰ Ignace and Ignace, 264.

⁴¹ Entry in Fort Alexandria Post Journal, 18 March 1848, H2-6-4 (B.5/a/7), Microfilm no. 1M14, Fort Alexandria Post Journals, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, MB.

Williams Lake, its leaders were firmly in favour of continued commercial partnership with the whites, though not necessarily on European terms.

One impact of these close ties was that the T'exelcenc began to adopt European methods of agriculture, construction, and social organization at least as early as the 1840s. When the Oblate priest Modeste Demers, the first Catholic missionary to visit the area, arrived in Pelikehiki in January 1843 he noted that the village's inhabitants had been building log houses and planting small gardens there for several years.⁴² These existed alongside the traditional pithouses, cache pits, and burial sites.⁴³ Demers wrote that "the old chief" (probably K'ulemnit'se) and "the young chief William" (probably Gwesemiyst) each lived in their own log house, but that apparently the old chief had moved in with Gwesemiyst to make room for Demers.⁴⁴ Given the longstanding Secwépemc practice of family units living together, it seems unlikely that these two would have each lived in their own house, though perhaps this was another practice adopted from the fur traders. It was typical of HBC posts for the most important company officials to live in separate quarters from the other employees.⁴⁵ Fur traders were not interested in forcing Indigenous people to adopt European practices, which meant that Indigenous people were free to selectively take up whatever they deemed useful. Many, including Gwesemiyst, took up farming as another source of food production. The fur traders enabled this through trade. In April 1847, they recorded that "William Atnah & some others [including Columneetza] arrived yesterday with the views of asking for some seed for the fields, their crops having failed last year."⁴⁶ They were given potatoes,

⁴² Oregon Historical Society, *Notices and Voyages of the Famed Quebec Mission to the Pacific Northwest* (Portland: Champoeg Press, 1956), 162.

⁴³ Steen, 10.

⁴⁴ Oregon Historical Society, 162.

⁴⁵ Harris, "Strategies of Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade," 38.

⁴⁶ Entry in Fort Alexandria Post Journal, 24 April 1847, H2-6-4 (B.5/a/7), Microfilm no. 1M14, Fort Alexandria Post Journals, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, MB, <https://pam.minisisinc.com/DIGITALOBJECTS/Access/HBCA%20Microfilm/1M14/B5-A-7.pdf>.

turnip seed, and carrots in exchange for a few furs. Conversely, fur traders in BC adopted many Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices including traditional singing and dancing.⁴⁷ This likely would have served both as entertainment and as a means of sustaining ties with Indigenous hosts and trading partners. The selective adoption of certain European practices and the sharing of their own were forms of Indigenous agency and helped normalize the European presence in Indigenous space.

Less visible than the changes observed by Demers were the impacts, often negative, of the European presence on Secwépemc social order and stability. With furs now carrying additional value thanks to their worth to Europeans, access to resources became competitive within Indigenous communities. Formerly communal hunting grounds and fishing spots began to be claimed by major families within Secwépemc communities in an increasingly clan-oriented society. Anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss writes that the increase of clan ceremonialism among northern Secwépemc communities in this period “became a cultural means of representing the distinctions between, and marking the territories of, different families within the band.”⁴⁸ Fisher’s claim that European and Indigenous people were not in direct competition for resources until the gold rush may be somewhat true, but it ignores the fact that Indigenous peoples were in competition with each other because of the conditions created by the fur trade.

Gwesemiyst during the first arrival of gold miners to the Cariboo in 1859 and William twenty years later in his admonition of the colonial government both looked favourably upon the fur trade period. It is safe to say that these men, community leaders, benefitted both economically and socially from colonialism during the fur trade. They likely secured access to important trapping

⁴⁷ A.G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (Smithers, BC: Interior Stationary, 1970), 225.

⁴⁸ Furniss, 235.

grounds, being members of an extremely prominent family at Williams Lake, and enjoyed the various benefits that ensued. They are examples of that oft-cited form of Indigenous agency whereby Indigenous peoples enthusiastically embraced the fur trade. However, through this embrace they were complicit in the growing influence of the colonial presence in the years preceding the shift from imperial and commercial network-building to settler colonialism. This is not to say they were responsible for what was to come; they could not have predicted the discovery of gold on the Fraser River or the ensuing influx of non-fur traders (mostly white Americans) into the interior and the accompanying expansion of the colonial apparatus. Nevertheless, piece by piece, the transformation of the Williams Lake area from Indigenous to settler control was under way.

The first recorded interaction between gold miners and the Indigenous people of the Williams Lake area occurred in 1859. A party of five American miners led by 24-year-old Peter Curran Dunlevey from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania attended an Indigenous gathering at Lac La Hache south of Williams Lake. According to Dunlevey's account, several chiefs including Gwesemiyst were meeting to discuss a proposal by T̓silhqot'in chief ʔAnahim of Tl'etinqox (Anahim Lake) to go to war against the whites flooding into their territories. Apparently, Gwesemiyst (whom Dunlevey called Chief Willy'ams) cautioned that it was in the best interest of Indigenous peoples to remain friendly with the miners as he had been with the fur traders, and that the advantages the white man had brought outweighed "the evil he had introduced."⁴⁹ With most in agreement, this was apparently enough to dissuade the T̓silhqot'in from violence for the time being, earning Gwesemiyst favour among the miners present. Dunlevey's account appears as part of a narrativized retelling of his stories written years after his death, and although drawn directly from his notes the

⁴⁹ Edith Beeson, *Dunlevey: From the Diaries of Alex P. McInnes* (Lillooet, BC: Lillooet Publishers Ltd., 1971), 71.

account is heavily dramatized. It is thus not very trustworthy except for showing Gwesemiyst's reputation among gold miners, and possibly reflecting his feelings towards the miners despite Dunlevey's corruption of his words. The main conclusion to be drawn is that Gwesemiyst appeared inclined to continue the same kind of relationship with the gold miners that had benefitted him during the fur trade. One can also conclude that Gwesemiyst, in important contrast to the T̄silhqot'in, was consequently admired by early gold miners thanks to what Dunlevey perceived as his role in preventing violence towards settlers and enabling "the acquisition of the country by the whites [to come] about in such a peaceful way in those early days of the Cariboo."⁵⁰ Dunlevey's interpretation of settlement in the Cariboo was far from accurate.

Not everyone heading to the Cariboo during the gold rush did so in search of gold (at least not in creek beds or mines). Many entrepreneurial individuals were drawn instead by the potential to profit from the miners themselves, including by levying tolls on privately operated roads, bridges, and ferries, operating stopping houses and saloons, and producing agricultural products for goldfield markets. (Dunlevey himself would leave the goldfields to establish a ranch, stopping house, and saloon at Soda Creek). At Williams Lake, it was primarily agricultural opportunity that attracted several men in 1860 who began pre-empting what they saw as fertile land open for the taking. These agricultural settlers, some of whom also went on to operate roads, stopping houses, and saloons, quickly staked out claims that encompassed both of the primary T'exelcenc village sites, Yucwt and Pelikehiki, as well as the village at Chimney Creek. Because colonial officials lagged behind the influx of settlers, and due to the nature of the pre-emption process that formed the basis of the colony's land policy, claims were typically awarded after the land in question had

⁵⁰ Beeson, 67.

already been actively settled by whites, including in the case of an American named Thomas W. Davidson.

While Douglas had initially pursued the creation of treaties on Vancouver Island to secure access to Indigenous land, for reasons still debated amongst historians he apparently abandoned this approach in 1854 and thus never extended it to the mainland. Many historians have argued that Douglas changed his mind on treaties, citing a variety of reasons stemming from the colony's financial situation, the complications of the gold rush, and the changing relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler society.⁵¹ John Lutz argues that Douglas always remained a proponent of treaty making, and that its demise was instead the result of a lengthy impasse between the Governor's office, the Vancouver Island Assembly, the British Crown, and the HBC over control of Crown land and extinguishing HBC land title that made treaty making impossible.⁵² In the absence of treaties on the mainland, Douglas developed a new approach centred around the process of pre-emption, one that Sarah Pike calls "British Columbia's unsurveyed land system."⁵³ The policy was designed to maintain government authority over and facilitate the settlement of the mainland in response to the threat of American miners and the demands of agricultural settlers while protecting certain Indigenous land rights. In a letter sent to the then five Gold Commissioners and Magistrates of British Columbia in October 1859, Douglas outlined an important caveat of the system: although settlers would be permitted to pre-empt a claim of up to 160 acres for which they

⁵¹ John Sutton Lutz, "The Rutters' Impasse and the End of Treaty-Making on Vancouver Island," in *To Share, Not Surrender: Indigenous and Settler Visions of Treaty Making in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, edited by Peter Cook, Neil Vallance, John Lutz, Graham Brazier, and Hamar Foster, 220-243 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 220.

⁵² Lutz, "The Rutters' Impasse," 239.

⁵³ Sarah Pike, "The Colony of British Columbia's Unsurveyed Land System," in *To Share, Not Surrender: Indigenous and Settler Visions of Treaty Making in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, edited by Peter Cook, Neil Vallance, John Lutz, Graham Brazier, and Hamar Foster, 247-287 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 248.

could later purchase title as long as certain conditions of improvement had been met, the Commissioners were to reserve “the Sites of all Indian villages, and the land they have been accustomed to cultivate, to the extent of several hundred acres round each village, for their special use and benefit.”⁵⁴ In the official proclamation of January 4, 1860, this description was simplified to “Indian Reserves or settlements,” a vague term as Indian Reserve Commissioner Gilbert Malcom Sproat would point out in 1877,⁵⁵ the consequences of which are still being dealt with today.

Nevertheless, Douglas intended for Indigenous land to be protected ahead of the influx of settlers to the mainland. Because of the rapid pace of settlement and the limited capacity, inconsistency, and generally anti-Indigenous attitudes of local colonial administrators, in most cases this did not happen, notably at Williams Lake. According to Keith Carlson, the protections for Indigenous land in Douglas’ pre-emption policy represented the Governor’s belief in an alternative form of settler colonialism, one where:

self-governing Indigenous peoples would continue to hunt and fish on unclaimed forests, meadows, streams, lakes, and ocean beyond their reserves and, importantly, where Indigenous peoples would become self-sufficient, prosperous Christian farmers, labourers, property owners, and, eventually, business leaders, people who would participate meaningfully in the colony’s political and economic life.⁵⁶

Between April 1858 and May 1864, Douglas “constructed policies...from within the liminality of what was still a nascent settler colonialism” not yet understood as a settler colonial society.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ James Douglas, letter to Gold Commissioners and Magistrates of British Columbia, 1 October 1859, GR-1372.52.485, Douglas, James (Governor) 1859, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁵⁵ Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Letter to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1 December 1877, cited in Indian Claims Commission, *Williams Lake Indian Band: Village Site Claim* (Ottawa, March 2006), 22.

⁵⁶ Keith Thor Carlson, “‘The Last Potlatch’ and James Douglas’s Vision of an Alternative Settler Colonialism,” in *To Share, Not Surrender: Indigenous and Settler Visions of Treaty Making in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, edited by Peter Cook, Neil Vallance, John Lutz, Graham Brazier, and Hamar Foster, 288-328 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 297.

⁵⁷ Carlson, 323.

Unfortunately for the T'exelceme and First Nations across BC, most settlers and colonial officials did not support Douglas' approach to Indigenous peoples despite prevailing attitudes regarding the potential for their "improvement." Therefore, colonial land policy was often vastly different from realities on the ground.

Despite being awarded a pre-emption claim at Williams Lake in December 1860, Thomas Davidson had been present in the area since early in the year alongside several others, some of whom became business partners with Davidson or each other. Davidson's official pre-emption was for a 160-acre lot at the foot of Williams Lake near or on the village of Yucwt.⁵⁸ However, Davidson is also recorded as having secured land at Pelikehiki through rather dubious means. In a letter to Sir John A. MacDonald, then Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, in January 1880, Catholic bishop Father Charles Grandidier wrote that in 1860, Gwesemiyst had granted Davidson permission to build a house and small garden next to the chief's own cabin and near the chapel built during Father Demers' mission in 1843.⁵⁹ When Gwesemiyst later returned from fishing on the Fraser River, he found that Davidson had staked out a claim encompassing the entire village.⁶⁰ In addition to Davidson's own pre-emption at Yucwt, he was acting in this situation as the agent for one John Telfer, whose pre-emption awarded in April 1860 encompassed the grounds of Pelikehiki.⁶¹ Perhaps seeking to avoid conflict with the local Indigenous population or avoid violating colonial law, Davidson offered Gwesemiyst twenty dollars in exchange for his land,

⁵⁸ Indian Claims Commission, 6.

⁵⁹ Father Charles J. Grandidier, letter to John A. MacDonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 20 January 1880, RG 10, vol. 3638, microfilm C-10112, file 7251, item 2060966, New Westminster – Correspondence and Memoranda Stemming from Suggestions by Father C.J. Grandidier, O.M.I., Regarding the Government of Tribes in British Columbia, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

⁶⁰ Sage Birchwater, *Chilcotin Chronicles: Stories of Adventure and Intrigue from British Columbia's Central Interior* (Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2017), 42.

⁶¹ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 23 June 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

which the chief refused. Although Davidson reportedly allowed Gwesemiyst to remain in his cabin, most of the other T'exelceme were driven off the land. It was Telfer's pre-emption rather than his own upon which Davidson would construct his stopping house. Grandidier wrote that "shortly after the other part of the valley was pre-empted by other parties and the Indians were driven away to the top of the hills where cultivation is out of the question... Not only [are they] without an inch of land in their own Country but there is no good land left to give them."⁶² Many T'exelceme continued to live in their pithouses on Davidson's and other properties for as long as they could.

In late 1860 the colonial government finally expanded its administrative presence in the Cariboo to deal with the waves of gold miners and agricultural settlers heading to the region. Davidson, conveniently for his sake and especially inconveniently for Gwesemiyst's, had arrived before any government officials were dispatched to the Cariboo, meaning there was no one present to ensure the legality of his pre-emptions. The handful of pre-emptions awarded before the arrival of the Gold Commissioner and Magistrate at Williams Lake in the fall of 1860 had been recorded by the Assistant Land Commissioner at Lillooet. According to Douglas' pre-emption policy, Davidson's claim to Pelikehiki was illegal, along with numerous others in the valley, including one belonging to Moses Dancerault at Yucwt. When officials were assigned to Williams Lake, they did not challenge the illegal pre-emptions there but instead continued to approve more while ignoring their responsibility to protect Indigenous land and resources.

Initially in response to the Fraser River Gold Rush, Douglas had created the position of Gold Commissioner to carry out the unique duties necessitated by the situation. According to historian Isabel Bescoby, the Gold Commissioner was the only position in the colonial

⁶² Grandidier to MacDonald, January 20, 1880.

administration whose duties were not established by British colonial tradition, though Douglas may have taken precedent from similar positions in Australia and New Zealand.⁶³ Being the officials of highest authority in each District but with relatively few people working beneath them, these men took on a broad range of portfolios, including Magistrate, Justice of the Peace, County Court Judges, Indian Agent, Revenue Collector, and Assistant Commissioner of Lands and Works. Their position, as their title suggests, was devoted to the demands of the goldfields, issuing mining certificates, approving licenses for infrastructure projects, and attempting to enforce civility. If, as Carlson writes, “it was in the gold fields of the Fraser River [where] Douglas had seen, and acknowledged, Indigenous peoples’ interest in, and rights to, the resources of their territory,”⁶⁴ then Douglas likely intended for these Commissioners to prioritize the protection of Indigenous land as a central duty of their office. The first Gold Commissioner and Magistrate assigned to the newly defined Alexandria District was Philip Henry Nind. He was about 25 years old, the son of an English clergyman in Oxfordshire, and had been recommended to Douglas by Lord Carnarvon of the Colonial Office in London.⁶⁵ Nind left Fort Hope in late July 1860 with his constable William Pinchbeck, an Englishman recommended for the job by one Peter O’Reilly,⁶⁶ and the party arrived at Davidson’s farm on August 25th.⁶⁷ They continued north the following day, visiting Fort Alexandria to determine the HBC’s land claims in the area and encountering a number of miners and Indigenous people who, upon learning of Nind’s job representing the government, unloaded

⁶³ Isabel Bescoby, “A Colonial Administration: An Analysis of Administration in British Columbia, 1869-1871,” in *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, edited by J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston, 122-151 (Gage Publishing, 1980), 132.

⁶⁴ Carlson, 311.

⁶⁵ Philip Henry Nind, MS-2879.913, Box 38, Folder 31, Reel A01828, Frame 0271, Nind, Philip Henry, Crease Family fonds, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁶⁶ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 23 July 1860, GR-1372.101.1254, Nind, P.H., 1860, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁶⁷ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 17 October 1860, GR-1372.101.1254, Nind, P.H., 1860, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

upon him various complaints and concerns they hoped he might address. Thus, from the very beginning of his arrival until his departure less than two years later, Nind worked constantly to meet the demands created by the gold rush.

After returning to Davidson's farm after a few days resolving conflicts at Ferguson's Bar (later called Richbar) north of Fort Alexandria, Nind decided to make Williams Lake his headquarters. He wrote to Douglas that "the vicinity of Williams Lake appeared...to be most central and to combine the greatest number of advantages."⁶⁸ Firstly, six trails, three to the south and three to the north, all converged there, allowing for travel in multiple directions. These trails included Indigenous-built routes, the HBC Brigade Trail (which itself was originally an Indigenous trading path), and trails constructed by settlers including one built by Davidson from Williams Lake to Soda Creek. Secondly, it was close to the Fraser River and only a four-day journey to Cayoosh (Lillooet), "consequently in cases of emergency not too far for speedy communication."⁶⁹ Thirdly, it was surrounded by favourable geography, and Nind believed it would be possible for a wagon to reach the area in one piece. Finally, Nind felt that at least as many men would settle there during the winter as at Alexandria, which he described as "totally devoid of either life or excitement."⁷⁰ The gold rush economy had already taken its toll of the fur trade.

⁶⁸ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁶⁹ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷⁰ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

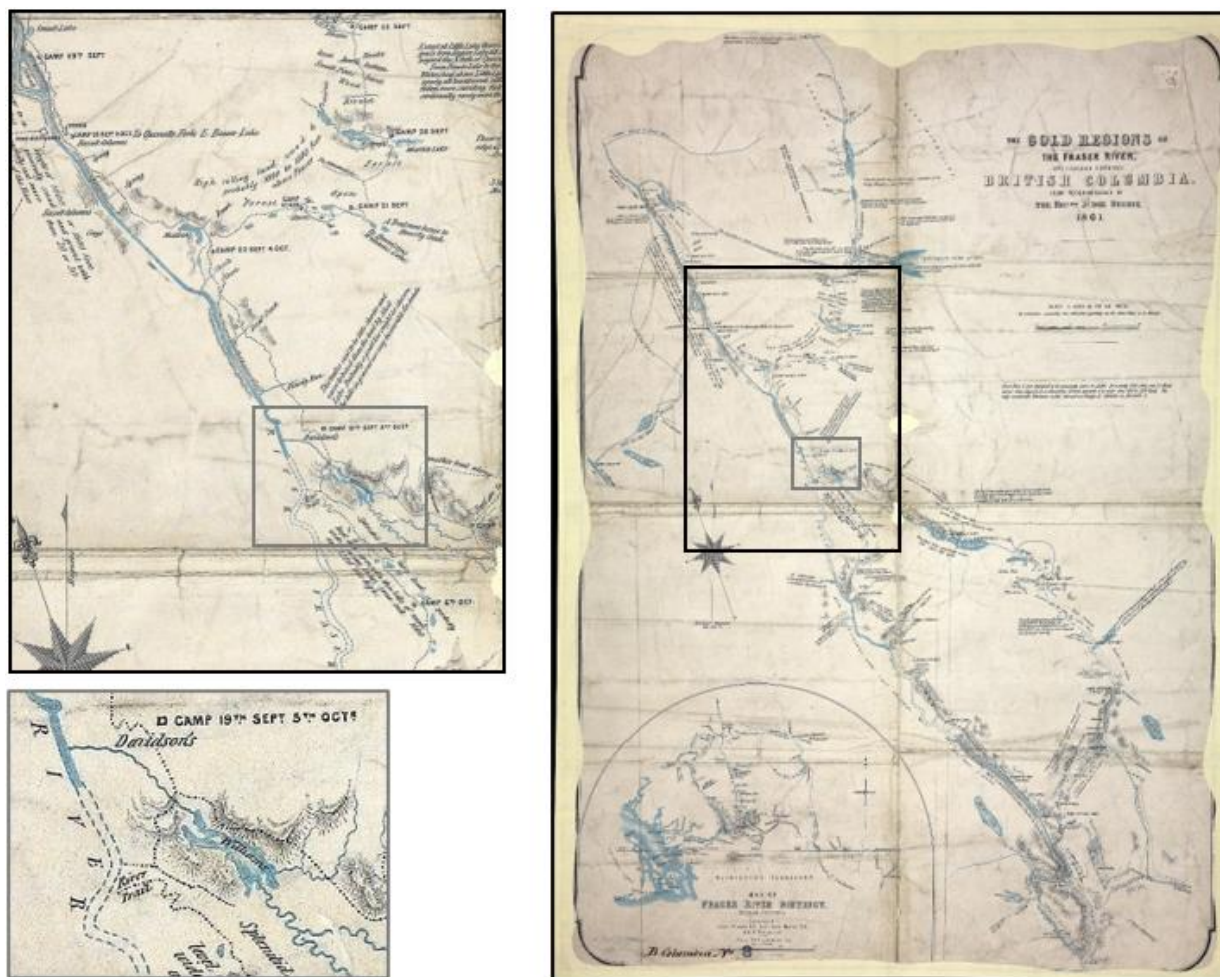


Figure 1: Judge Begbie's 1861 map of the Fraser River and Cariboo goldfields.⁷¹ The larger rectangular inlay shows Williams Lake relative to Fort Alexandria in the upper-left corner, while the smaller inlay shows the Williams Lake area with Davidson's farm labelled just northwest of the lake. Trails are marked with dotted lines. The upper-left quadrant of the original map roughly corresponds to the Alexandria District.

⁷¹ Begbie, Matthew Baillie, *Gold Regions of the Fraser River and Cariboo Country, British Columbia, from reconnaissance by the Honourable Judge Begbie, 1861*, 1861, National Archives of the UK, CO 700/BRITISH COLUMBIA8/6, *The Colonial Despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1846-1871*, Edition 2.4, ed. James Hendrickson and the Colonial Despatches project (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria), https://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/co_700-bc_8_6_bc_1861.html.

Nind saw enormous agricultural potential at Williams Lake, and others like Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie felt the same. Davidson had found success experimenting with various crops including wheat, turnips, cabbages, and onions, and was also raising cattle and oxen. He employed several men, both white and Indigenous, and by October 1860 had built “a substantial and commodious” two-storey log house on the Telfer pre-emption with several farm buildings under construction.⁷² Nind wrote that many of the surrounding hills were “covered with pastures of the finest description, and in the valley and on the slopes are hundreds of acres of prairie that would well repay the labour of the agriculturalist.”⁷³ So far, he felt Williams Lake had served him well, its central position having allowed him “to transact a good deal of business with miners and traders returning from the upper country.”⁷⁴ These observations, along with more of Nind’s report on the Alexandria District, were relayed by Governor Douglas to the Colonial Office in London. The potential for agricultural development represented the settler-colonial view of the value of land at Williams Lake. With both the short-term demands of the gold rush and the long-term success of the colony in mind, the ability to sustain an increasingly large settler population was of the utmost importance. Thus, facilitating the pre-emption and development of the Williams Lake valley would take precedent over the concerns of Indigenous people about the loss of their land and resources.

Nind’s correspondence often mentioned his interactions with and opinions of Indigenous people, whom he consulted for information from time to time and who were regularly employed as guides, packers, and labourers. His first impression of the Secwépemc at Williams Lake was that in general they seemed:

well disposed and peaceable. Some work well and readily, are very intelligent and would be I think susceptible of the influences of civilization: others on the contrary are extremely

⁷² Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷³ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷⁴ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

indolent and neglect providing against the wants of tomorrow if supplied with the food for today. As there has been a dearth of salmon this summer I very much fear they will suffer severely this winter. The greater number talk of wintering on the Thompson River and at Cayoosh.⁷⁵

Nind's fears about the winter were a sign of things to come.

The imposition of colonial law in the Williams Lake area with the arrival of Nind and his constables signalled another step in the enframing and subordination of Indigenous peoples there. During his first week in the Cariboo, Nind was welcomed at Ferguson's Bar by settlers who "had hitherto felt beyond the pale of law and protection and completely at the mercy of a few drunken desperadoes."⁷⁶ One of these desperadoes, Moses Anderson, had shot an Indigenous boy with a pistol the night before Nind's arrival, but the boy was now recovering after being brought to a doctor by a group of miners who discovered him lying in a bush. Nind promised the Dakelh community there, the Lhtako Dene, that he "would see that justice was done between Indians and white men," but that they must leave justice in the hands of the Government and "not resort to their own barbarous system of retaliation."⁷⁷ Clearly Nind felt a duty to apply the law equally to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, though equally clear was his disdain for Indigenous methods of justice. The imposition of a foreign legal system onto Indigenous peoples was one of the most significant methods of enframing that gradually reduced Indigenous control over their societies, even if at first many seemed to welcome the security Nind promised it would bring. Judge Begbie made regular stops in Williams Lake on his tours throughout the mainland, the first in September 1860. In the summer of 1861, Nind selected Williams Lake as the site for a jail which was built by Pinchbeck using logs supplied by Davidson.⁷⁸ Nind soon had Pinchbeck construct a

⁷⁵ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷⁶ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷⁷ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 17 October 1860.

⁷⁸ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 25 June 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

courthouse, where in 1863 Begbie sentenced three Indigenous men to death. They were hanged and buried on the grounds of Pelikehiki that December.⁷⁹ Nind never did find Moses Anderson.

Indigenous people were already working as farm labourers before Nind's arrival, but this increased during the gold rush. Wage labour was another system behind the Europeanization of British Columbia. Indigenous people had fewer options to provide for themselves as a result of the loss of access to their territory and traditional methods of subsistence, but more opportunities for wage work due to the demand for supplies in the goldfields. In a letter to Douglas in March 1861, Nind observed that Indigenous men and women were earning \$7-\$9 per day carrying supplies from Beaver Lake to the Forks of Quesnelle.⁸⁰ This was well above the \$5-\$6 per day he had reported as the going rate six months prior, as the recent discovery of gold at Antler Creek had generated increased demand. This also resulted in Indigenous goods becoming more expensive: a pair of moccasins now cost \$3-\$10, and snowshoes between \$10 and \$25, or 2-3 days worth of wages. Both these types of footwear were primarily made by Indigenous women, who had become accustomed to supplying them to fur traders.⁸¹ Through labour and the supply of goods, Indigenous peoples proved their indispensability to "the capitalist development of British Columbia" as "the main labour force of the early settlement era."⁸² Nind's remarks on wages and prices were not necessarily complaints; those were usually about either insufficient allowances or Chinese miners, whom Nind said had no interest in obtaining mining certificates and when pressed claimed that

⁷⁹ Governor James Douglas, letter to Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham-Clinton, 5th Duke of Newcastle, 9 February 1864, CO 60:18, no. 2921, *The Colonial Despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1846-1871*, Edition 2.4, ed. James Hendrickson and the Colonial Despatches project (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria), <https://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/B64007.html>.

⁸⁰ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 27 March 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁸¹ Sylvia Van Kirk, "The Role of Native Women in the Fur Trade Society of Western Canada, 1670-1830," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 7, no. 3 (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1984): 10.

⁸² John Sutton Lutz, "After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia 1849-1890," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3, no. 1 (1992): 70.

they “had only come up to prospect and have no money.”⁸³ Despite Nind’s apparent respect for Indigenous resourcefulness, the prejudice towards Indigenous culture apparent in his comments about their methods of justice and supposed extreme indolence reflects the prevailing attitude of the time that Indigenous peoples were inherently inferior to Europeans. Like James Douglas, however, Nind thought that they had the potential to be improved through a program of European civilization, and Nind would act on this belief throughout his career as Gold Commissioner for the Alexandria District. However, several years later Nind would express his frustration to Joseph Trutch at the lack of progress towards this improvement and advocate for the repossession of reserve land that he felt was being wasted.

Nind’s agenda quickly became overwhelmed with the demands of the gold rush. Within his first several months in the Alexandria District, Nind had issued 13 pre-emptions (5 of which were at Williams Lake), intervened in numerous disputes between miners, sought justice for several violent crimes with limited success (the perpetrators often fled the area upon learning of their wanted status), and travelled regularly from his headquarters at Williams Lake to the neighbouring goldfields, whether to survey routes for new roads or to document mining activities. He sometimes paid local miners to act as auxiliary constables. Pack trains were arriving daily, and numerous settlers were undertaking infrastructure projects that required Government approval. In October 1860 alone, Nind received five applications for ferry licenses.⁸⁴ In April 1861, eight months after his arrival, Nind wrote to Douglas requesting a new booklet of mining certificates. He had used 320 of his initial 800 and had lent 100 to the Gold Commissioner at Lytton, but Nind anticipated that the remaining certificates would not last more than two months, especially given that Chinese

⁸³ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 27 March 1861.

⁸⁴ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 24 October 1860, GR-1372.101.1254, Nind, P.H., 1860, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

miners were now finally applying for certificates as well.⁸⁵ In May he asked Douglas to send him a few more pairs of handcuffs, as Nind only had one.⁸⁶ In June he established the Gold Escort to protect shipments of gold heading towards Victoria from the Forks of Quesnelle from robbery, the same month Pinchbeck had constructed the jail at Williams Lake.⁸⁷ In a letter to Douglas in December complaining of inadequate remuneration for travel expenses, Nind wrote that throughout 1861 he had spent 137 days away from home.⁸⁸ Nind was assisted by relatively few officials, though more were gradually hired to support him, including a third constable. Local administrators were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the demands of settlers and miners, and the attention and resources of the colony were increasingly diverted away from Indigenous people. Thus, despite being aware of Indigenous concerns and the need to establish a reserve at Williams Lake, little was done to address the worsening situation.

The impact of the gold rush on the Indigenous population at Williams Lake was not going unnoticed, and the particularly dire situation of 1861 led to Nind calling on Douglas to establish a reserve there. In May 1861, Nind wrote to Douglas that over the previous winter the T'exelceme had suffered from severe hunger, which Nind attributed partly to the "dearth of salmon in the Fraser River on which they are greatly dependent for their winter supply of provisions."⁸⁹ His prediction of the previous October had come true, and thus he "took it upon [him]self on behalf of the Government" to provide those close to starvation with flour and potatoes (the cheapest Nind

⁸⁵ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 15 April 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁸⁶ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 22 May 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁸⁷ Nind to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 25 June 1861.

⁸⁸ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 11 December 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁸⁹ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 4 May 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

could find) as well as two picks and a shovel which several individuals used, as Nind intended, to plant some of the potatoes.⁹⁰ He hoped Douglas would approve of these actions. Even in aiding a starving Indigenous population, Nind had found a way to advance the settler-colonial project by essentially forcing the practice of European agriculture as the alternative to starvation, displaying the paternalistic attitude of colonial officials towards Indigenous people. What Nind did not explicitly note in his letter but which he likely understood was that the loss of hunting and fishing resources to settler pre-emption had exacerbated the impacts of the lack of salmon, and it was increasingly difficult for the T'excelcenc to procure resources. Nevertheless, Nind asked Douglas to send a surveyor and provide instructions on how to establish a reserve. He predicted that if it was not done by the end of summer, the rest of the land in the valley would be pre-empted. As the person in charge of processing pre-emptions Nind could theoretically have prevented this from happening, but he like so many others was not willing to protect Indigenous interests if it meant standing in the way of settler-colonial progress. Instead, he felt that others in the Government should solve this issue, suggesting that surveyors be sent to lay out the entire Williams Lake valley and others in the Alexandria District, as “it would be beneficial in promoting permanent settlement.”⁹¹

Governor Douglas replied to Nind’s request a month later. There was no need for a surveyor: Nind was to “mark out a Reserve of 400 or 500 acres for the use of the Natives in whatever place they may wish to hold a section of land.”⁹² The Colonial Secretary also told Nind that the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works would advise him further. Perhaps this last point caused confusion as to when Nind was to act, because he never did. He did, however, continue

⁹⁰ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 4 May 1861.

⁹¹ Nind to Acting Colonial Secretary, 4 May 1861.

⁹² William A.G. Young, Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, letter to Philip Henry Nind, 10 June 1861, cited in Indian Claims Commission, *Williams Lake Indian Band: Village Site Inquiry* (Ottawa, March 2006), 75-76.

approving pre-emptions and land purchases at Williams Lake. Thomas Davidson added an additional 40 acres to his ever-growing property on July 1, 1861, bringing his total holdings in the valley to over 700 acres.⁹³ By 1863, he would own nearly 2,000.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Governor Douglas was under the impression that his policy of protecting Indigenous villages, gravesites, fishing and hunting spots, gardens, and other places of active use was being successfully implemented. Like at Williams Lake, this was in reality not the case throughout most of the colony.

By October 1861, Nind had developed a nervous disorder that had paralyzed the right side of his face and was granted a 6-month leave of absence at the recommendation of his doctor. In April, he had rejected Douglas' offer to appoint him as Judge of the County Court for the Alexandria District, stating that "the population in this district is fond of litigation," the duties relating to which he was not qualified to undertake.⁹⁵ Then, in July, Douglas had ordered Nind to relocate his headquarters from Williams Lake to the Forks of Quesnelle and had hired a Mr. Gompertz to act as Nind's personal clerk.⁹⁶ Nind had previously complained of expensive provisions throughout the district and insufficient Government allowances for travel. By October he had become increasingly overwhelmed and physically unwell, and Douglas hoped that a "change of scene and relief from harassing duties" would prove beneficial.⁹⁷ Nind arrived in England in March 1862 and would remain there until 1863. He was replaced by Thomas Elwyn,

⁹³ William Pinchbeck, affidavit, 29 June 1885, GR-3097, vol. 0016, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, cited in Indian Claims Commission, *Williams Lake Indian Band: Village Site Inquiry* (Ottawa, March 2006), 76.

⁹⁴ Branwen Patenaude, *Trails to Gold Volume Two: Roadhouses of the Cariboo* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 1996), 85.

⁹⁵ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 27 April 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁹⁶ Philip Henry Nind, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 7 October 1861, GR-1372.101.1255, Nind, P.H., 1861, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

⁹⁷ James Douglas, letter to Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham-Clinton, 5th Duke of Newcastle, 29 December 1861, CO 60:11, no. 2189, 227, *The Colonial Despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1846-1871*, Edition 2.4, ed. James Hendrickson and the Colonial Despatches project (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria), <https://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/B61080.html>.

who had been in charge of Nind's Gold Escort. Elwyn soon realized that the goldfields required more attention, and requested the appointment of another Gold Commissioner. The colony sent Peter O'Reilly and eventually the Alexandria District became the Cariboo District, with Elwyn stationed at Richfield and O'Reilly at the Forks of Quesnelle.⁹⁸ The name of the district had finally caught up with economic and colonial reality. Gone were the days of Fort Alexandria; here were the days of the Cariboo Gold Rush. Elwyn resigned his post in early 1863 after controversy over his ownership of a mine claim in the district, and he was replaced by William Cox. All the constables of the district tendered their resignations that fall.⁹⁹ With Nind's position filled by two people with little knowledge of the history of the Indigenous land issue in the area and mining activity steadily increasing, the colony's attention was further pulled away from Williams Lake, effectively burying the chances of a reserve being established any time soon. By this point, Nind's forecast that the remaining land at Williams Lake would be pre-empted was also being realized, and no one was prepared to do anything about it, including Pinchbeck who had left the government service to devote himself to agriculture and the operation of a stopping house. Douglas' departure from office in 1864 and the appointment of Joseph Trutch as Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works (ironically selected by Douglas himself) would prove the fatal blow to any hope of a reserve at Williams Lake for another decade and a half.

The smallpox epidemic that swept through British Columbia in 1862 and 1863 had an enormous impact on the Indigenous population at Williams Lake. James Teit estimated that before 1850, the population of the Williams Lake band was about 350 people, which included all those living at Williams Lake, Chimney Creek, and the small number of families who wintered along

⁹⁸ Robin Skelton, *They Call it the Cariboo* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1980), 145.

⁹⁹ Thomas Elwyn, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 27 January 1863, GR-1372.56.526, Elwyn, Thomas, 1863-1866, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

the shores of Lac La Hache. By 1881, that number had plummeted over 60% to 147.¹⁰⁰ Entries in the Fort Alexandria Journal reported the presence of smallpox there at least as early as 1855. On January 1st of that year, the fur traders wrote that “it appears that the infection has been brought from below in clothing which William the Atnah and others procured at Thompsons River.”¹⁰¹ On the 17th, the journal noted that three Secwépemc had died of what was assumed to be smallpox at Williams Lake, and that Gwesemiyst’s eldest son (possibly William) was “at point of death.”¹⁰² In comparison to the outbreak that began in 1862, it seems this earlier wave of illness was relatively mild, as it is not mentioned in primary sources outside of the journal.

Curiously, Thomas Elwyn reported in December 1862 that “small-pox has been raging amongst the Indians throughout the District (with the exception of Williams Lake).”¹⁰³ Things were far worse a month later. On January 27, 1863, Elwyn wrote that:

the small pox is raging fearfully amongst the Indians at this place. Over sixty men, women & children of this tribe have already fallen victims to the terrible disease. The propriety or otherwise of extending to these poor creatures some slight Government relief has been the cause of great anxiety, but I felt that in the face of disallowances which already reach a very heavy sum, I could not take the responsibility of such a slip.¹⁰⁴

The situation was dire, but apparently not dire enough to warrant any expenditure by the government. Elwyn did not seem to employ the same “act now, ask later” technique as Nind had done on more than one occasion. The T’excelcemc were left to fend for themselves against a disease which they could do little about. When Pinchbeck bought property at Pelikehiki, those T’excelcemc

¹⁰⁰ Peter O’Reilly, letter to John A. MacDonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1881, Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31 December 1881, item 2294, p. 359-362, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹⁰¹ Entry in Fort Alexandria Post Journal, 1 January 1855, B.5/a/9, microfilm no. 1M14, Fort Alexandria Post Journals, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, MB.

¹⁰² Entry in Fort Alexandria Post Journal, 17 January 1855, B.5/a/9, microfilm no. 1M14, Fort Alexandria Post Journals, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, MB.

¹⁰³ Thomas Elwyn, letter to Acting Colonial Secretary of British Columbia, 17 December 1862, GR-1372.56.525, Elwyn, Thomas, 1862, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

¹⁰⁴ Elwyn to Colonial Secretary, 27 January 1863.

who still held onto their land there were “dying in the snow... Sometimes a whole family would be found dead in their kickwillie [pithouse].”¹⁰⁵ By the end of the outbreak, nearly two thirds of the Indigenous population at Williams Lake had died; the mortality rate across the broader Secwépemc population was as high as three quarters, and at nearby Beaver Lake all but one Indigenous person had died.¹⁰⁶

Among the dead at Williams Lake was Gwesemiyst, who succumbed to smallpox at Pelikehiki in 1862. In a cruel stroke of irony, Gwesemiyst, who had treated fur traders and gold miners alike as guests in his territory, seeking to benefit from friendly relations and encouraging other Indigenous leaders to do the same, had been killed by a disease introduced by Europeans. That winter, the *Colonist* reported that about 45 settlers were living at Williams Lake.¹⁰⁷ Still a minority, they now represented a much larger percentage of the population, and they controlled virtually all the land in the valley. It was a desperate situation, and the responsibilities of leadership fell squarely onto the shoulders of a young Chief William. An economic boon for men like Dunlevey, Davidson, and Pinchbeck, for the T'exelcemc the Cariboo Gold Rush was a tragedy, marking a transitional period significant for the scope of its repercussions and the speed at which settlers imposed change on the Indigenous population.

¹⁰⁵ “Notes on William Pinchbeck’s Onward Ranch, Williams Lake” (c. 1930), EE P65, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, cited in Indian Claims Commission, *Williams Lake Indian Band: Village Site Inquiry* (Ottawa, March 2006), 17.

¹⁰⁶Steen, 16.

¹⁰⁷ “British Columbia – Latest News,” *British Colonist*, 17 January 1863, p. 3.



Figure 2: (From left to right) Peter O'Reilly, Henry Maynard Ball, and Thomas Elwyn, Gold Commissioners, c. 1860s.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ "Judge Peter O'Reilly, Gold Commissioner Captain H.M. Ball and Thomas Elwyn," photograph, 186-, HP002329, 193501-001, item A-01103, Archives Visual Records Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

The event which unexpectedly and officially relegated Williams Lake to the margins of the Cariboo from the settler perspective was the construction of the Cariboo Wagon Road in 1863. The lack of sufficient infrastructure in the district had been an issue for gold miners and the colonial government since the beginning of the Cariboo Gold Rush, as despite numerous trails suitable for packtrains and a number of bridges and ferries created by enterprising settlers, there remained no easy option for wagons to travel to the goldfields. The creation of infrastructure to address this problem, enabling further settler-colonial expansion, became a major factor in the sidelining of Indigenous interests at Williams Lake. Rather than pass through the white settlement there, the road contractors accepted a loan from the proprietors of the 150 Mile House following a fallout with Thomas Davidson's neighbour Thomas Menefee, one of the miners who had accompanied Dunlevey in 1859. The wagon road suspiciously passed through 150 Mile House instead.¹⁰⁹ It was in this context that William Pinchbeck, Nind's former constable, secured a monopoly over virtually all the land in the valley. By 1865 he and his business partner William Lyne Sr. had begun purchasing several lots that had previously been pre-empted by other settlers. This included Davidson's farm, the owner having already begun purchasing and developing land at 150 Mile House in 1861 in anticipation of the eventual sale of his properties in the Williams Lake valley.¹¹⁰

The purchases by Pinchbeck and Lyne eventually created an agricultural monopoly which further consolidated settler control in the valley. By 1878, they owned every one of the original pre-emptions at both Yucwt and Pelikehiki.¹¹¹ Pinchbeck and Lyne were perhaps only rivaled by two parties: Asahel Sumner Bates, a wealthy American rancher with extensive holdings throughout

¹⁰⁹ Mark S. Wade and Eleanor Eastick, *The Cariboo Road* (Victoria, BC: Haunted Bookshop, 1979), 162.

¹¹⁰ Patenaude, 85.

¹¹¹ Indian Claims Commission, 8.

BC and California, including land at the foot of Williams Lake and at 150 Mile House;¹¹² and the Roman Catholic Church, whose Oblates of Mary Immaculate started the St. Joseph's Mission just southeast of Williams Lake in the San Jose Valley in 1867. With the wagon road bypass Williams Lake had slipped from prominence, and the colony was now only too happy to enjoy the goods produced by Pinchbeck's farm while paying the area little other attention for the next 16 years. The white settlement at Williams Lake saw virtually no growth until after the First World War. Perhaps if the government had been more attentive to Indigenous concerns, the colony could have purchased property from one of the many settlers who sold to Pinchbeck. Given the hesitancy to spend any money on Indigenous people even during the smallpox epidemic, it is no surprise the option to purchase private property for a reserve was not pursued until much later, under quite different circumstances.

¹¹² Linda Peterat, *From Denmark to the Cariboo: The Epic Journey of the Lindhard Sisters* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2022), 115-124.



Figure 3: *Williams Lake Indians*, watercolour by Edward Mallcott Richardson (1839-1874), c. 1864.¹¹³

Since Douglas' departure from office in 1864, Joseph Trutch, as Chief Commissioner of Land and Works, had secured control over Indigenous land policy and begun to reshape it so as to better reflect the interests of settler society. His conviction that Indigenous people were lawless, violent savages incapable of "improvement" would govern his attitude towards land policy.¹¹⁴ In July 1865 Philip Nind, now back from medical leave and serving as Gold Commissioner at Lytton, wrote to Trutch expressing his opinion that reserve land was being wasted on Indigenous people who were standing in the way of settler-colonial progress.¹¹⁵ Trutch agreed, and soon set about

¹¹³ Edward Mallcott Richardson, *Williams Lake Indians*, watercolour, Box A170-01, item 2837356, Edward Mallcott Richardson fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹¹⁴ Robin Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy," in *Historical Essays on BC*, edited by J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1980), 258.

¹¹⁵ Fisher, "Joseph Trutch and Indian Land Policy," 260.

looking into ways existing reserves might be redrawn. Since his time at Williams Lake, Nind's views toward Indigenous people seem to have hardened. Upon Nind's return to the colony, Douglas appointed him to the new Legislative Council and gave him the role of Superintendent of the Gold Escort. However, by November 1864 he had apparently fallen out of the Governor's favour. Douglas' successor, Frederick Seymour, wrote that "Mr. Nind so little satisfied my predecessor that he was ordered to remain at his post during the last Session [of the Legislative Council]."¹¹⁶ The situation may have led Nind to resent Douglas and his policies, both of which were under the scrutiny of the entire colony. The reserves established under Douglas were seen by most of settler society other than Douglas himself as too generous (Indigenous people also certainly did not feel they were too generous), and Trutch adopted a policy aimed at reducing existing reserves and ensuring future ones were allotted much more conservatively. When BC became part of the Dominion of Canada in 1871, the Dominion government sought authority in determining land policy in BC. Trutch secured the position of Lieutenant Governor, making him the official representative of the Crown in the province. He had drastically reduced the size of reserves across BC in the late 1860s, and from 1871-1876 his obstructionist tactics resulted in the establishment of no new reserves.¹¹⁷

In 1876, a joint federal-provincial Indian Reserve Commission was established that represented a compromise which in reality favoured the provincial position. However, it did establish the general rule that local circumstances should take precedent over any general theories of reserve allotment.¹¹⁸ It was comprised of three officials: Alexander Caulfield Anderson, a former

¹¹⁶ Governor Frederick Seymour, letter to Edward Cardwell, 24 November 1864, CO 60:19, no. 1375, *The Colonial Despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1846-1871*, Edition 2.4, ed. James Hendrickson and the Colonial Despatches project (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria), <https://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/B64270.html>.

¹¹⁷ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 76.

¹¹⁸ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 101.

HBC trader, represented the Dominion government; Archibald McKinlay, another former HBC man now based at Lac La Hache, represented the Province; the third member, appointed jointly by the two governments, was Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, a colonial administrator with history in British Columbia who had taken an interest in ethnography.¹¹⁹ Both Anderson and McKinlay had spent time at Fort Alexandria. The commission made two circuits throughout the province from 1876-1878 before it was disbanded, with Sproat taking on its responsibilities alone for a further year. Cole Harris writes that over his career as a Reserve Commissioner, Sproat became increasingly critical of Provincial Indigenous land policy and became an outlying voice in support of Indigenous land rights.¹²⁰ In the case of Williams Lake, Sproat's approach to reserve allocation mattered little in the end. He had cancelled one illegal pre-emption at Comox in 1876 because it was situated on a village site;¹²¹ he would not get the chance to consider the same at Williams Lake, as he was forced to resign in the spring of 1880 after backlash among both the public and his colleagues and superiors over his increasingly vocal criticism of the Provincial Government and a perceived involvement with Indigenous resistance movements.

The Cariboo Gold Rush and the 1862-63 smallpox epidemic had turned Secwépemc social order at Williams Lake on its head. Social networks had been shattered, lands had been taken, and hundreds had been killed.¹²² This state of turmoil meant that the T'exelceme had only one system to turn to that offered any hope of assistance in regaining something resembling stability, and that system was the Catholic Church. The relationship between Catholic missionaries and Secwépemc peoples was an incredibly important factor determining Indigenous-settler relations at Williams Lake throughout the late 1860s and 1870s. Catholic missionaries had only visited the area twice

¹¹⁹ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 98.

¹²⁰ Harris, *Making Native Space*, xxxi.

¹²¹ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 111.

¹²² Furniss, 238.

prior to the intense missionizing efforts that began in 1867. The first was the visit of Father Demers in 1843, where Gwesemiyst had built a chapel at Pelikehiki and Demers had baptized 43 children and delivered a mass to throngs of people.¹²³ He wrote that he “could not suffice to satisfy their eagerness for spiritual nourishment.”¹²⁴ Gwesemiyst, he said, had “received an ample recompense through the enlightenment with which God illuminated his understanding, and the docility with which he yielded to the observance of the faith.”¹²⁵ The creek running through Pelikehiki subsequently became known as Missioner Creek. Since Demers, only one other missionary had visited the T'exelcenc, a Jesuit priest named John Nobili who travelled throughout Secwepemcúl'ecw from 1845-47.¹²⁶ He visited Fort Alexandria in July 1846 and returned again in the fall before continuing south, writing that he had supposedly eliminated polygamy among the Secwépemc.¹²⁷ These sporadic visits left their mark, and the missionaries of the 1860s were welcomed at Williams Lake.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an order of the Catholic Church, established the St. Joseph's Mission in 1867 in the fertile San Jose Valley southeast of Williams Lake, the site chosen specifically for its agricultural potential.¹²⁸ According to anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss, the Secwépemc at Williams Lake supported the building of the mission, next to which they had been wintering as squatters on their former land, which the missionaries allowed them to continue doing.¹²⁹ For the first four years, only four Oblates were stationed there. Jean-Marie LeJacq was the Mission Superior, who performed the mass and oversaw the mission's farming and ranching

¹²³ Oregon Historical Society, 163.

¹²⁴ Oregon Historical Society, 163.

¹²⁵ Oregon Historical Society, 163.

¹²⁶ A.G. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada from Lake Superior to the Pacific*, Volume II (Toronto: Musson Book Company 1910), 293.

¹²⁷ Ignace and Ignace, 405.

¹²⁸ Furniss, 237.

¹²⁹ Furniss, 240.

operations. James McGuckin, an Irishman, was the missionary responsible for visiting the neighbouring communities, both Indigenous and white. Two other men served as labourers.¹³⁰ On account of his duties as a travelling missionary, McGuckin naturally had the greatest involvement with the T'exelcemc. Secwépemc people initially found that their traditional beliefs and practices could be supplemented by Christianity; missionaries thus adopted a method of syncretism in an effort to Christianize Indigenous populations they believed were inherently inferior. Secwépemc chiefs saw in the mission system an opportunity to reassert their control over their communities, which had been severely challenged in the aftermath of the gold rush and the smallpox epidemic. Thus, “both missionaries and chiefs sought to establish strategic political relationships with each other and to test their control over these relationships.”¹³¹

Similarly to Gwesemiyst's embrace of the fur trade, Furniss writes that “by their incorporation of colonial symbols of power, the Shuswap chiefs implicitly had legitimated the very colonial regime that they were now trying to oppose through their land claims.”¹³² Chief William embraced the imposed village structure that conferred on him additional authority and responsibility. He was married in the Catholic Church at the Mission on April 17, 1870, at the age of 40 to a 35-year-old Indigenous woman named Rosalie Yetlemtetkoa.¹³³ William Pinchbeck had already married the chief's sister, Seroulmenek [anglicized spelling]. During the fur trade, intermarriage between white men and Indigenous women created a merging of cultures and a “unique society...which derived from both [Indigenous] and European customs and technology.”¹³⁴ Intermarriage under the circumstances at Williams Lake in the 1870s may have

¹³⁰ Furniss, 240.

¹³¹ Furniss, 240.

¹³² Furniss, 246.

¹³³ Marriage Registry, St. Joseph's Mission, 20.

¹³⁴ Sylvia Van Kirk, “*Many Tender Ties*”: *Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980), 3.

had slightly different connotations; marrying the chief's sister implies significant political importance. Other local settlers including William Lyne Sr. and A.S. Bates also married Indigenous wives, a practice which not only provided companionship but also inserted settlers into Indigenous kinship networks and possibly helped legitimize claims to Indigenous land. Pinchbeck would eventually leave Seroulmenek and marry an English woman.

In the early and mid-1870s, many Secwépemc were becoming dissatisfied with the Church and began to lose interest in the missionaries' opinions, feeling that they were no longer effective advocates for their concerns over land rights.¹³⁵ Although the general attitude among the T'exelcenc appeared to be changing in line with the broader Secwépemc population, Chief William ultimately remained close with the missionaries. In April 1873, Father LeJacq was transferred to Stuart Lake and McGuckin was promoted to Mission Superior. His replacement, Father Marchal, was thoroughly disliked (including by McGuckin), apparently due to his lack of charisma.¹³⁶ In 1875, Marchal gave William permission for the young T'exelcenc men living at the mission to sing a traditional song, a practice which had since the Mission's establishment been prohibited. From that point on, the T'exelcenc defied any future orders prohibiting singing and dancing, and something of a cultural revival ensued. However, when William fell seriously ill in 1876 and nearly died, in McGuckin's words he "gave up his singing mania" and again fully embraced the church; many in his community followed, with nearly all the T'exelcenc apparently attending confession that Easter.¹³⁷ By contrast, the Xatsúll chief Kramousalist increasingly antagonized the missionaries. Rifts formed not only between communities but within them, separating those who promoted conciliation with whites and those who felt that violence was the

¹³⁵ Furniss, 246.

¹³⁶ Margaret Whitehead, *The Cariboo Mission: A History of the Oblates* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1981), 81.

¹³⁷ Whitehead, 82.

only option.¹³⁸ Bishop Charles Grandidier of Kamloops, one of the top Catholic Church officials in BC, blamed the Provincial government for the increased violence that resulted; they had ignored the growing unrest throughout the interior and failed to address the Indigenous land question for years. Something had to change.

As one of the primary goals of the Oblates, the missionaries sought to establish themselves as intermediaries between Indigenous people and colonial society.¹³⁹ Indigenous leaders attempted to use this to their advantage, but while missionaries generally validated Indigenous concerns and relayed them to the government, they dissuaded Indigenous people from taking actions that they feared would have violent consequences. In April 1878, McGuckin wrote to Canada's Minister of the Interior James Lenihan that:

The Indians in this sector are becoming very discontented and using threatening language on account of the delay in settling their reserves.

I have used all my endeavours to keep them quiet up to the present, but it is evident that they will not heed me much longer in this matter. If something is not done for them immediately it is thought that they will even take possession of the land of some of the settlers together with the crops thereon this season.

An attempt of this kind would be disastrous to all concerned, but on account of the small number of settlers, these would be the first and greatest sufferers.

Sproat replied to McGuckin's letter which had been forwarded by Lenihan, expressing regret that he would not be able to visit Williams Lake until the following year. He sympathized with the T'exelcenc, but agreed with McGuckin that "they will gain their end more satisfactorily by still exercising patience, however painful the effort may be."¹⁴⁰ As Sproat was forced to step down in 1880, he never made it to Williams Lake, despite promises otherwise by Archibald McKinlay.

¹³⁸ Furniss, 246.

¹³⁹ Furniss, 241.

¹⁴⁰ Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, letter to Rev. James McGuckin, 6 May 1878, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

William's sustained alignment with the Oblates caused his fellow Secwépemc chiefs and their communities to increasingly disregard his views and dismiss his authority. In 1879, he wrote that "all the Indians from Canoe Creek to the headwaters of the Fraser say 'William is an old woman, he sleeps and starves in silence.' I am old and feeble and my authority diminishes every day."¹⁴¹ It appears that the northern Secwépemc were looking to William for leadership, but were increasingly dissatisfied with his non-violent approach. By comparison, the southern Secwépemc groups had united around Petit Louis, the chief of the Tk'emlúps (Kamloops), and in 1876 they had begun forming a confederacy that eventually resulted in the Indian Reserve Commission visiting their territory to address the shortage of reserve land.¹⁴² After escalating the situation with threats of violence, Louis backed off once the government promised action. He was supported by his fellow chiefs in this change of tone, but was likely heavily influenced by Father Grandidier.¹⁴³ Many young T̓silhqot'in men at Alkali Lake, meanwhile, were urging their chief to allow them to go to war against the whites in a similar situation to the 1859 gathering at Lac La Hache. Many others, wrote McGuckin, "will be only too glad to join [these men] in order to have the opportunity of avenging old wrongs."¹⁴⁴ William faced pressure from within the T'exelcenc and from neighbouring communities to be more radical in his resistance, and eventually he was.

In November 1879, William submitted a letter to the *Victoria Daily Colonist* explaining the dire situation at Williams Lake. William and fellow Indigenous leaders sought to use the newspaper as a platform to draw the public's attention to the situation at Williams Lake and elicit sympathy,

¹⁴¹ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁴² Harris, *Making Native Space*, 133.

¹⁴³ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Whitehead, 90.

forcing the government's hand in allocating a reserve. The concerns and demands expressed in the letter were the result of a meeting held earlier in the fall between the northern Secwépemc chiefs, some from further south, and even a number of Tsilhqot'in leaders. The letter, signed by William, had the desired effect including on the editor, who remarked that "the savage cruelty of the white man to the Indian is one of the darkest spots on his character."¹⁴⁵ William blamed the whites for taking "all the land and all the fish," stating that his people were dying of hunger as a consequence:

We have nothing now and here comes the cold and the snow. Maybe the white man thinks we can live on snow. We can make fires to make people warm – that is what we can do. Wood will burn. We are not stones.¹⁴⁶

He appealed to the settler-colonial mindset, saying that the T'exelcenc were "willing to work because they know they must work like the white man or die."¹⁴⁷ Crucially, William warned that his people would "not starve in peace,"¹⁴⁸ marking a significant step away from the pacifism the missionaries encouraged and toward the preferred approach of his colleagues and critics. Cole Harris writes that the acknowledgement of futility, that "war with the white man will end in our destruction,"¹⁴⁹ is "perhaps the clearest gauge of the imbalance in power between colonizers and colonized in British Columbia late in the nineteenth century."¹⁵⁰

The letter elicited a number of responses, including from Sproat and from McKinlay, the former fur trader once stationed at Fort Alexandria who had served on the Joint Indian Reserve Commission. McKinlay expressed his regret that "I have...unwittingly allowed myself to make promises to you and other Indians in this part of the country which have not been kept in any

¹⁴⁵ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁴⁶ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁴⁷ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁴⁸ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁴⁹ Chief William, 7 November 1879.

¹⁵⁰ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 206.

degree with good faith.”¹⁵¹ Though he ultimately blamed Sproat for failing to visit Williams Lake as William had been promised in July 1879, McKinlay nonetheless had gotten other “friends to the Indian and to justice” to join him in writing the Provincial and Federal Governments imploring them to address the situation. Harkening back to the fur trade, McKinlay wrote William that:

your father put confidence in my word in days gone by, and I think you still do the same. Believe me once more when I say that I feel sure ample justice will be done to you all next spring. Should my word, however, on this occasion fail I will never ask you again to have confidence in it; at the same time I know you would not think that I would wilfully mislead you.

McKinlay was putting his feelings of guilt into action.

¹⁵¹ Archibald McKinlay, letter to the editor, “To William, Chief of Williams Lake Indians,” *Daily British Colonist*, 20 November 1879.

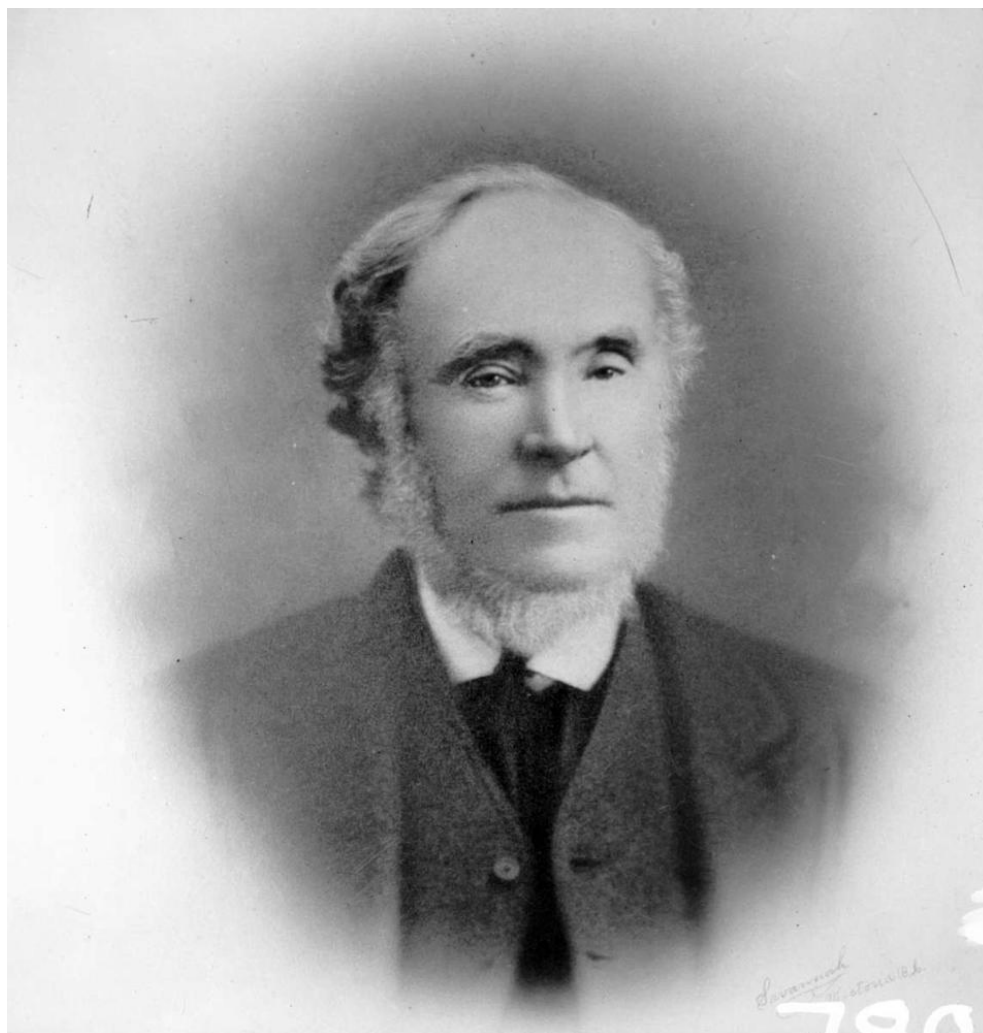


Figure 4: Archibald McKinlay, unknown date and photographer.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Archibald McKinlay, photograph, unknown date, item E-00563, Archibald McKinlay, Hudson's Bay Company, Oregon, Archives Visual Records Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

After six months and no progress by the government, William submitted another letter in May 1880 with far more explicit threats of violence:

The Indians are now reduced to this condition: THEY MUST ROB OR STARVE. Which will they do? I need not answer. An Indian is a man; and he has eyes. If you stab him he will bleed; if you poison him he will die. If you wrong him shall he not seek revenge? If an Indian wrongs a white man what is his humility? Revenge. If want compels us to execute the villainy they teach they may discover when it is TOO LATE that an Indian can imitate the lightning and strike in a thousand places at the same time.¹⁵³

This second letter displayed a familiarity with colonial history. It referenced the royal charter that awarded Rupert's Land to the HBC and Lord Dufferin's speech at Winnipeg in 1877 (William called the Governor General a "great thief").¹⁵⁴ Whereas the first letter made no mention of religion, this time William introduced himself as both an Indian Chief and a Christian, calling any white men claiming the latter yet supporting the current treatment of Indigenous people in the province hypocrites. Finally, he wrote that if it came down to it, a court of justice would confirm that his people had title to their land, and that if the Queen was powerless to help them and it was indeed up to parliament, then "may the Lord have mercy on the Indians – AND ON THE WHITEMEN."¹⁵⁵ He had given up on the government, the Church, and now the Queen; this was his final warning.

The Chief William letters, the second of which had seemingly been overlooked for the better part of 150 years until I came across it in my research, are remarkable sources that raise many compelling questions in addition to the insight they give into Indigenous resistance and agency in late-nineteenth-century British Columbia. The biggest unknown regarding these sources is who assisted William and the other chiefs in their creation, as although William appears to have

¹⁵³ Chief William, 15 May 1880.

¹⁵⁴ Chief William, 15 May 1880.

¹⁵⁵ Chief William, 15 May 1880.

spoken at least some English, his level of fluency is difficult to ascertain. The long quote given from the 1880 letter seems to take inspiration from a passage in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*:

If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? ... If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.¹⁵⁶

Also of note is the *Colonist* editor's remark in each instance that the published letter was a translation. Two possibilities are that either an educated settler, well-versed in history, religion, politics, and Victorian culture, assisted William in writing these letters, or the translator for the *Colonist* took significant liberties. Although some spoke Secwepemctsin,¹⁵⁷ it is unlikely that any missionary at St. Joseph's would have agreed to help publish such explicit threats of violence, especially as Father Grandidier noted that he was not involved in the writing of the 1879 letter despite being asked by the Tk'emlúps chief to relay to Ottawa the concerns expressed at the meeting. It is also unlikely that, given the style of the writing, it was written by another English-speaking chief. In my opinion, the most likely answer is that a local settler helped William write the letters, and the *Colonist* editor assumed that what was being published was a translation of whatever William may have said. Nevertheless, I still consider these documents to represent an Indigenous perspective, even if passed through a colonial filter. I believe whoever assisted William was acting in good faith as a true ally of his cause.

With the perceived threat of an Indigenous uprising in the Cariboo reaching a boiling point, in 1880 the government finally capitulated and began the process of establishing a reserve at

¹⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, edited by M. Lindsay Kaplan (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 2.8.47-54.

¹⁵⁷ Whitehead, 83.

Williams Lake. Israel Wood Powell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, had been following the situation in the interior for some time. As a Dominion representative, he was becoming increasingly frustrated with provincial officials, but especially Trutch. Most of them on the other hand, along with most settlers, blamed Powell for the current situation.¹⁵⁸ Powell believed the only reason there had not been a war in the interior by now was not because there had been no injustice done by the government but “because the Indians themselves have not been sufficiently united”;¹⁵⁹ he now feared that they were. The settlers of the Cariboo agreed, and were becoming uneasy in the face of “the threatening attitude of the Indians in the neighbourhood of William’s Lake.”¹⁶⁰ They had learned of the southern Secwépemc chiefs coming to Williams Lake to meet with local Indigenous leaders, and reported that violence was already being committed against whites. One settler writing from Clinton partly blamed a priest named George Kelly for urging the Indians to “acts unfriendly to the whites.”¹⁶¹ It was ultimately the concerns of settlers, not of Indigenous people, that the government acted on in the end.

¹⁵⁸ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 76.

¹⁵⁹ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Israel Wood Powell, letter to Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 8 July 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹⁶¹ F.W. Foster, letter to I.W. Powell, 28 June 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.



Figure 5: First Nations chiefs at New Westminster, Victoria Day 1867, photographed by Frederick Dally.¹⁶² Standing, left to right, are the chief of Canoe Creek and Chief William of Williams Lake. Sitting, left to right, are the chiefs of Dog Creek, Alkali Lake, Shuswap, Babine Lake, Lillooet, Soda Creek, and Bridge Lake.¹⁶³ This is the only confirmed photograph of Chief William.

¹⁶² Frederick Dally, "Nine of the greatest Indian Chiefs of British Columbia dressed in their fur caps, buckskin coats & moccasins," photograph, May 1867, C-09263, Frederick Dally fonds, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

¹⁶³ Ignace and Ignace, 448.

The task of finding suitable reserve land was a major issue, as if land was not already owned by Pinchbeck and Lyne or the Mission then it was owned by somebody else, or was not conducive to agriculture. McKinlay had informed Powell that the estate of the recently deceased A.S. Bates, who had owned extensive property in the valley (and whom Chief William had considered a good friend), was up for sale and might be the only solution. Powell enlisted Judge Begbie to visit the Cariboo and ensure the estate would be suitable for a reserve. After a flurry of telegraphs between Victoria and Ottawa in the summer of 1880, the transaction was approved. It appears to have been the first time the government purchased private property to create an Indian Reserve in British Columbia. In July, Powell secured the estate for \$5,000, remarking that if any of the lands were not needed to satisfy the T'exelcenc "that they could be disposed of at a handsome profit."¹⁶⁴

Peter O'Reilly, one of Nind's replacements as Gold Commissioner in the Cariboo in the early 1860s, had been selected as Sproat's replacement as Indian Reserve Commissioner and was to travel to Williams Lake as soon as possible to mark out the reserve. McKinlay traveled from Lac La Hache to Williams Lake to inform William.¹⁶⁵ It had been decided that the government would only allot part of the Bates estate to the T'exelcenc, as anything more seemed an unnecessary dispensation of valuable "pastoral land."¹⁶⁶ The reserve was thus created out of three former pre-emptions including the Sugar Cane Ranch, from which the reserve takes its name, and

¹⁶⁴ Israel Wood Powell, letter to John A. MacDonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 28 July 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹⁶⁵ Archibald McKinlay, letter to I.W. Powell, 6 December 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹⁶⁶ Israel Wood Powell, telegram to Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

some neighbouring Crown land, totalling about 4,100 acres. O'Reilly's mission was delayed because John A. MacDonald was in England dealing with business related to the Canadian Pacific Railway and thus could not approve the decision. This caused Powell more anxiety, and he repeatedly urged his superiors in Ottawa to send O'Reilly anyway, as he felt the T'exelceme had been without land for long enough and likely feared further attacks on settlers.¹⁶⁷

Despite Powell's insistence (at one point remarking that if only he could travel to Williams Lake and do things himself), O'Reilly did not arrive until June 1881, though the T'exelceme had been allowed to begin occupying the proposed reserve lands and had already dug an irrigation ditch and planted crops. O'Reilly laid out the 4,100-acre Sugar Cane reserve (500 acres of which he deemed worthless), along with two hay reserves totalling 280 acres, one of which included a lake where the T'exelceme had constructed a series of dams.¹⁶⁸ He also reserved a fishing site at the mouth of the San Jose River, one at the foot of the lake, and one at Chimney Creek. Finally, on Pinchbeck's farm at Pelikehiki, O'Reilly had marked off seven burial sites at Chief William's request, undoubtedly including where Gwesemiyst had been laid to rest. O'Reilly was pessimistic, feeling that although "collectively and individually these Indians have expressed themselves satisfied with the arrangements made for them...I must state that I am by no means sure that the cultivable portions will eventually prove sufficient for their requirements."¹⁶⁹ For O'Reilly, this was a simple fulfillment of his duties as Reserve Commissioner. He typically allotted whatever land was available, ideally including any village and fishing sites that had not been pre-empted by settlers, and in the end concluded that "the band was not well served but that he could do no

¹⁶⁷ I.W. Powell, letter to Archibald McKinlay, 15 November 1880, RG10, vol. 3681, microfilm no. C-10119, file 12395-2, item 2058293, Williams Lake Agency – Establishment of the Williams Lake Reserve (Sketch), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON.

¹⁶⁸ Peter O'Reilly, letter to John A. MacDonald, 22 September 1881.

¹⁶⁹ Peter O'Reilly, letter to John A. MacDonald, 22 September 1881.

more.”¹⁷⁰ This last phrase, an evaluation of O’Reilly by Cole Harris, articulates remarkably well the philosophy of the officials of the Cariboo Gold Rush towards Indigenous people. Philip Nind had given the T’excelcenc a few potatoes, some flour, and a handful of tools with which to break up the frozen ground as a cure for their starvation. Funds prevented him from acting further. Thomas Elwyn had done nothing at all during the smallpox epidemic besides express his pity and sympathy, wishing that something more could have been done. Having long since petered out, in a way the Cariboo Gold Rush had come back to play one more cruel joke on Chief William, who had been driven to exhaustion by a 21-year campaign to regain land for his people only to be repaid inadequately. Colonial officials and other settlers mostly felt relieved that all-out war had been avoided, while some like McKinlay, Sproat, and Grandidier would have been happy to see at least some justice done.

The process charted throughout the course of this paper is one of the Europeanization of Indigenous space. Entering into a complex Indigenous world, the fur traders of Fort Alexandria from 1821 to the late 1850s built and retained close ties with Secwépenc people at Williams Lake who for the most part saw advantages in the arrival of Europeans, despite the negative repercussions resulting from competition for furs. The long uninterrupted presence of the fur trade, punctuated by the occasional visiting missionary, normalized the European presence at Williams Lake. Informed by decades of mutually beneficial partnership, Gwesemiyst and other T’excelcenc had little reason to mistrust the first gold miners who arrived in their territory in 1859. This illusion did not last long, as soon the T’excelcenc were forced from their land and were suffering the disastrous impacts of a loss of food and the devastation of smallpox, all of which upended T’excelcenc social order and irreversibly altered the nature of relations between them and colonial

¹⁷⁰ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 173.

society. From the gold rush onwards, everything came down to a struggle over land, and the nature of colonialism had shifted from exchange to imposition. After this transition period, the only loose end for the colony to tie up was the fact that although they secured control over Indigenous territory at Williams Lake the T'xelceme had not yet been relegated to a reserve. It seems counterintuitive to the aim of settler-colonialism that this process was drawn out over more than two decades, yet it is precisely this failure of settler-colonial administration that was the cause of so much suffering. Despite the intentions of people like Governor Douglas and Commissioner Sproat, colonial policy was enforced in a way that bent or ignored the rules in favour of whites across the entire province at the expense of Indigenous people. As this process took place, those who sympathized with Indigenous concerns like Father Grandier and Archibald McKinlay became small parts of a complex landscape of Indigenous resistance and agency. While they and others showed the limits of non-Indigenous advocacy, Indigenous leaders like Gwesemiyst and William showed the complexities of Indigenous responses to colonialism.

The transformation of the Williams Lake area from an Indigenous controlled territory to a fully settler-colonial space had begun with the fur trade, and in one lifetime it had ended (at least on paper) with the establishment of the Sugar Cane Reserve. Many important developments followed, including the appointment of William Laing Meason as the Cariboo's first Indian Agent in 1881, Chief William's temporary ouster from the role of chief in 1884, and the opening of St. Joseph's Indian Residential School in 1891. This paper, however, has to end somewhere. The process of enfranchisement and peaceable subordination, from cooperation to coercion and exchange to imposition, hit a point of no return at Williams Lake during the Cariboo Gold Rush as the settler mode of colonialism eclipsed the commercial network building of the fur trade and the T'xelceme

were forcefully displaced to make way for the new settler-colonial regime. The allotment of reserve land more than two decades later hardly seems fair compensation.



Figure 6: Map of Indian Reserves at Williams Lake, 1884.¹⁷¹ Approximate locations of Pelikehiki (1) and Yucwt (2) marked with circles.

¹⁷¹ Surveyor General of British Columbia, *Plan of Indian Reserves, Williams Lake, Cariboo District, 1883-1884*, Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia: Indian Reserve Maps, Cariboo 3, Z0366257, microfilm no. 106289, LTSA6166. <https://doi.org/10.58066/sc7t-y205>.

Appendix I – Letters and Correspondence

Chief William to the Editor

Daily British Colonist

7 November 1879

I am an Indian chief and my people are threatened by starvation. The white men have taken all the land and all the fish. A vast country was ours. It is all gone. The noise of the threshing machine and the wagon has frightened the deer and the beaver. We have nothing to eat. We cannot live on the air, and we must die. My people are sick. My young men are angry. All the Indians from Canoe Creek to the headwaters of the Fraser say ‘William is an old woman, he sleeps and starves in silence.’ I am old and feeble and my authority diminishes every day. I am sorely puzzled. I do not know what to say next week when the chiefs are assembled in council. A war with the white man will end in our destruction, but death in war is not so bad as death by starvation.

The land on which my people lived for five hundred years was taken by a white man; he has piles of wheat and herds of cattle. We have nothing – not an acre. Another white man has enclosed the graves in which the ashes of our fathers rest, and we may live to see their bones turned over by his plough!

Any white man can take three hundred and twenty acres of our land and the Indian dare not touch an acre. Her Majesty sent me a coat, two ploughs, and some turnip seed. The coat will not keep away the hunger; the ploughs are idle and the seed is useless because we have no land.

All my people are willing to work because they know they must work like the white man or die. They work for the white men. Mr. Bates was a good friend. He would not have a white man if he could get an Indian. My young men can plow and mow and cut corn with a cradle.

Now, what I want to say is this – THERE WILL BE TROUBLE, SURE. The whites have taken all the salmon and all the land and my people will not starve in peace. Good friends to the Indian say that ‘her Majesty loves her Indian subjects and will do justice.’ Justice is no use for a dead Indian. They say ‘Mr. Sproat is coming to give you land.’ We hear he is a very good man, but he has no horse. He was at Hope last June and he has not yet arrived here. Her Majesty ought to give him a horse and let justice come fast to the starving Indians.

Land, land, a little of our own land, that is all we ask from her Majesty. If we had the deer and the salmon we could live by hunting and fishing. We have nothing now and here comes the cold and the snow. Maybe the white man thinks we can live on snow. We can make fires to make people warm – that is what we can do. Wood will burn. We are not stones.

WILLIAM,

Chief of the Williams Lake Indians

Archibald McKinlay to the Editor

Daily British Colonist

20 November 1879

Lac La Hache, Nov. 20

To William, Chief of Williams Lake Indians:

SIR: - I noticed your letter in *The Weekly Colonist* issue of the 12th inst., and I purpose for my own justification making a few remarks thereon on the columns of *The Colonist*.

In the first place I know you will believe my words notwithstanding I have, through overconfidence in the word of others, unwittingly allowed myself to make promises to you and other Indians in this part of the country which have not been kept in any degree with good faith. When the joint Indian commission was in the Kamloops country I received letters from the Rev. Father McGuckin, and many other white men in this vicinity, stating that the Indians were anxious to be informed when they might expect us. I submitted such letters to my brother commissioners and they authorized me to state that the attention of the commission would be directed to this district as soon as the Shuswaps, Okanagan and Nicola Indians could be settled with.

When I met you last July at the 150-Mile-House I felt sure Mr. Sproat would soon be among you and I expressed myself accordingly; you believed me and went home satisfied. My surprise and mortification may be easily conjectured when I learned that after the promises made by myself and the other commissioners, through me, he only came as far as Lytton, and from thence retraced his steps and proceeded to the northwest coast, for what object no one can surmise.

As soon as I heard of this wonderful move I proceeded to Victoria where I met a number of old wise men, friends to the Indian and to justice, and who were equally as indignant as myself at Mr. Sproat's proceedings. We addressed letters to the Provincial Government and the Government at Ottawa expressing our opinion and deprecating the miserable manner in which your tribe as well as others have been treated. In my report to the Provincial Government I endeavoured to show as clearly as possible the fact that few of the tribes from Cache Creek had anything like enough land to support them, and I mentioned your tribe in particular, who, to my certain knowledge, have not one inch they can call their own. Following is extracted from my report of 8th March, 1878, addressed to Hon. A.C. Elliott:

“As I remarked in my former report the Indians from Yale to Spence's Bridge possess no land at all with the exception of a few acres at Spuzzum. Those on the Bonaparte, Canoe Creek, Dog Creek, Alkali Lake and Soda Creek have only very small reserves at present of any extremely sterile soil, and those of Williams Lake none whatsoever, and for my own part I really do not see where lands in these neighborhoods are to be found to give them without purchasing from white settlers. I have called your attention again to this subject, as I think it a grave one. No doubt there is plenty of land to be found, but the difficulty is to find it in such situations as would be capable of being irrigated without great expense and labor.”

I hope either Mr. Lenihan or Col. Powell will consider your wants as expressed in your letter and take means to furnish you with such food as will keep you from starvation. Your father put confidence in my word in days gone by, and I think you still do the same. Believe me once more when I say that I feel sure ample justice will be done to you all next spring. Should my word, however, on this occasion fail I will never ask you again to have confidence in it; at the same time I know you would not think that I would wilfully mislead you. With deep sympathy,

I remain,

Your friend,

Arch. McKinlay

Father Charles Grandidier to Sir John A. MacDonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs

20 January 1880

Sir,

At a meeting held last Autumn at Williams Lake B.C. by all the Shuswap Indian Chiefs of the Upper Country and at which meeting were present some of the Shuswap Chiefs of this District with some others of the Chilcotin Tribes the land affairs of these different tribes were considered and it was resolved that an appeal for an early settlement of their Reserves should be sent to H.M.'s Government in Canada. They requested me through the Chief of Kamloops who was present at the meeting to lay their concerns and grievances before Her Majesty's Government. That is the reason why in the absence of all [sic] recognized Indian Agent I take the liberty of addressing you this letter.

In the month of November after the meeting above mentioned there appeared in the 'British Colonist' an urgent and impressive letter signed by William the Chief of the William's Lake Indians asking for justice. As the arguments contained in this letter embody the resolutions and the grievances passed in the meeting I cannot do any thing better than to send it to you for your review and impartial consideration, together with another letter written by Arch. McKinlay Provincial Member of the first Indian Commission and supporting the demands of the Chief of Williams Lake. For my part I cannot but beg of you to listen to the pleadings of these letters as I have known the position of these Indians for many years and as the facts contained in the appeal of Chief William are nothing but the truth.

Those poor Indians of Williams Lake have been most shamefully despoiled of all their lands in direct opposition to the clauses of Her Majesty's proclamation in 1858 where She took formal possession of British Columbia and erected it into a British Colony. In that proclamation were reserved to the Natives the land where they laid their houses, cemeteries, gardens, fisheries, etc. And yet the Provincial Government has sanctioned the alienation of these reserves at William's Lake and elsewhere.

A man named Davidson came early after 1859 to the father of the present Chief William and asked to be permitted to build a cabin and to cultivate a little garden on his land. The Chief offered no objection. Then this man Davidson had all the land occupied by the Indians recorded as a pre-emption claim. On that land was a little Chapel built by the first Catholic Missionary the late Bishop M. Demers of Victoria and also the cabin of the Chief. The Chief was permitted to live in his cabin near the Chapel but the Indians were driven away. The Chief was offered twenty dollars by Davidson but he refused to part with his father's land and rejected the money as I have been told by the man who acted as interpreter on this occasion.

Shortly after the other part of the valley was pre-empted by other parties and the Indians were driven away to the top of the hills where cultivation is out of the question. They had also a Summer resort in a little valley some eight or ten miles from Williams Lake at Chimney Creek where they went to fish Salmon. All the cultivated land was taken up by the Whites in that valley so that not only they are without an inch of land in their own Country but there is no good land left to give them. Their only repose from starvation has been the R.C. Mission where the Missionaries gave the Indians a part of the Mission lands to enable them to live. But it is a very small parcel of land for each family. By the provisions of Her Majesty's proclamation those Indians have a right to their lands and they ought to have justice done to them.

Chief William to the Editor

Daily British Colonist

15 May 1880

Editor Colonist – I am an Indian chief and a Christian. “Do unto others as you wish others should do unto you” is Christian doctrine. Is the white man a Christian? This is a part of his creed – “take all you want if it belongs to an Indian.” He has taken all our land and all the salmon and we have – nothing. He believes an Indian has a right to live if he can on nothing at all. The King of England, who came here a long time ago and said “all this land is mine,” had a tough conscience. He gave all the land to the Hudson Bay Co. and they were good friends to the Indians. They gave us guns, powder, tobacco and many other things. We gave them furs. They did not frighten the deer; they did not take the land, they were Christians. A good white man told me the Queen took the land from them and gave it to Parliament. I asked him who is Parliament? and he said “the white men elect some of themselves to sit in a big house at Ottawa and they are called “the Parliament.” And then I said, may the Lord have mercy on the Indian.

Lord Dufferin was a great thief. He came from Ottawa to Winnipeg in September 1877, and made a great speech there to the white men. He reminded them of the miseries that might come to the Indians. He said “unless great care is taken we shall find as we move westward that the exigences of civilization may clash injuriously with the prejudices and traditional habits of our fellow Indian subjects. Against this contingency it will be our most urgent and imperative duty to take timely precaution, be enabling the red men, not by any undue pressure or hasty, ill-considered interferences, but by precept, example and suasion, by gift of cattle and *other encouragements*, to

exchange the precarious life of a hunter for that of a pastoral, and eventually that of a agricultural people.”

Lord Dufferin was a Christian. But sure he might as well talk to the winds as to the white men. The Black Robes tell us that we are the Queen’s children; that she is good and great and that she will say to the parliament, you must give land to my Indians. They say to us, “be patient, you will get land when the snow goes away. You will, sure.” The Indians are now reduced to this condition: - THEY MUST ROB OR STARVE. Which will they do? I need not answer. An Indian is a man; and he has eyes. If you stab him he will bleed; if you poison him he will die. If you wrong him shall he not seek revenge? If an Indian wrongs a white man what is his humility? Revenge. If want compels us to execute the villainy they teach they may discover when it is TOO LATE that an Indian can imitate the lightning and strike in a thousand places at the same time.

We are not beggars. In the middle of the magnificent country that was once our own we only ask for land enough to enable us to live like white men by working in the fields. If the Indians get no land this spring YOU MAY BE SURE the white man will have a very bad harvest this year, and the Indians will eat beef next winter. Fine talk won’t feed an Indian. “Her Majesty’s Indian subjects,” whose rights are limited to living on nothing at all if they can, are prepared to face the worst – anything but death by starvation. In a court of justice we could prove that we are the only persons who have any right or title to this land. If the Queen has no power to aid us; if all the power belongs to the parliament, then I say again may the Lord have mercy on the Indians – AND ON THE WHITEMEN.

WILLIAM, Chief of the Williams Lake Indians.

Peter O'Reilly to Sir John A. MacDonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs

22 September 1881

SIR, - I have the honor to state for your information, that having completed the adjustment of the Indian reserves at Yale, I proceeded to Williams Lake, where I arrived on the 6th June, and was well received by the Chief William and a number of his people.

The chief in a long speech expressed his gratification at the late action of the Dominion Government, but complained bitterly of the delay that has taken place in the adjustment of their land, during the whole of which the whites have been permitted to possess themselves of what should properly belong to his people.

I explained to him, in the presence of his tribe, the desire of the Dominion Government to see them possessed of all the land necessary for agricultural and pastoral purposes, as instanced by the purchase of the farms now about to be handed over to them.

Having spent several days in examining the lands in the neighborhood, I subsequently handed over to them that portion of the Bates' Estate, namely, the "sugar cane," the "Meason" and the "Young pre-emption," embracing 1,464 acres as purchased by the Dominion Government, together with adjoining public lands to the extent of 2,636 acres, making in the aggregate about 4,100 acres.

Of this, however, some 500 acres are worthless, being a rough mountain top partly covered with scrub fir fit only for firewood.

As shown on the sketch, this reserve includes the exclusive right of two streams, which, in dry seasons, I am told, will barely suffice for the purpose of irrigation.

I also laid out two additional plots of land, about 280 acres as hay reserves, situated on the mountain, where the Indians have for many years past been in the habit of obtaining winter feed for their animals.

The former of those marked No. 2 on the plan enclosed herewith, is of further and especial value, inasmuch as the centre of it contains a lake from which they draw their supply of water, which they have retained on the mountain side by a succession of dams.

These several plots were selected in the presence of the chief, and most of the tribe, since when he has again ridden over it with me, and has expressed himself satisfied, and thankful that their land question is now settled, and that he may be under no further apprehension of being interfered with.

Since last spring when these people were informally put in possession, they have manifested every desire to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them, and have already about 100 acres under crop, consisting of barley, wheat, potatoes and turnips; they have also, unaided, constructed a ditch of about three-quarters of a mile in length for the purpose of irrigation, which is very creditably engineered.

Collectively and individually, these Indians have expressed themselves satisfied with the arrangements made for them, but I must state that I am by no means sure that the cultivable portions will eventually prove sufficient for their requirements.

The soil is for the most part light, and will not stand constant tilling without rest, which it is not likely to receive at the hands of the present occupants.

As shewn on the annexed plan, their fisheries at the foot of Williams Lake, at mouth of San Jose River, (sometimes known as Williams Lake Creek), and at Chimney Creek, have been reserved, with a sufficient acreage in each case to supply all their requirements, such as horse feed, drying

grounds, & c. West of their present reserve, at a distance of ten miles, is the farm purchased by Mr. Pinchbeck, from the Provincial Government, and which at one time was occupied by the Indians, as is evident by the remains of a number of old winter houses.

On this farm, and within its enclosures, I have at the request of the Chief marked off no less than seven burial grounds.

Though not a matter of Indian reserves I think it advisable to state that a member of this tribe named "Jim Soulest" is, by special permission of the Governor (dated 20th July, 1868, under clause 1, Land Ordinance, 1866) in possession of 160 acres of land, situated on the north bank of Williams Lake, about six miles from the Reserve, a record of which was made at Clinton on the 30th July, 1868.

This Indian claims the land for his individual use; he has been in permanent occupation, and has fenced and otherwise improved it.

I enclose herewith rough plans of the reserves, with copies of the Minutes of Decision in each case.

The chief of this tribe is named William, the total population number 147, and they possess 211 horses and 39 cattle.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

P. O'REILLY,

Indian Reserve Commissioner

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