This thesis explores the history of the Cheslatta Ten First Nation of Grassy Plains in British Columbia in the context of their forced relocation in 1952. The Cheslatta people were once self-reliant and prosperous. They farmed, trapped, hunted and fished in the same territory they had occupied for centuries. The Cheslatta people were a close-knit community who relied only on each other in times of need. All of that changed in April of 1952 when the Department of Indian Affairs informed the people they would have to leave immediately, as their land was about to flood. Shocked and heartbroken, the people packed up the few belongings they could carry and left for Grassy Plains where they lived in tents, shacks and abandoned buildings until they could find or build new homes. Since that time the close-knit community has fallen victim to bitterness and hostility, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and violence.

Through band members' oral accounts, newspapers, legal documents and secondary sources, the history of the Cheslatta people emerges as one of struggle since 1952. Because the people did not relocate on their own terms, and because they did not have time to adapt to the loss of their land, the Cheslatta people were unable to recreate or redefine their community in a way they could all accept. Oral accounts show an abrupt change in the ways in which band members related to one another and their surroundings. Legal testimony shows that the governments of the day treated band members unfairly and denied them recourse. Unemployment, substance abuse and a distinct lack of communication between elders and young people compounded their frustration and heartbreak, further contributing to the community's breakdown.
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Acknowledgements

I owe a great many thanks to the people who have helped see this thesis completed. First and foremost, I wish to thank the people of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation. They were patient with my questions, enthusiastic about my research and generous with their time. This work is theirs. The University of Northern British Columbia supported my research with financial aid in the form of teaching assistantships, for which I am grateful. My committee members, Antonia Mills of the First Nations Studies Program, David del Mar and Robin Fisher of the History Program, and my advisor, Mary-Ellen Kelm of the History Program, have been most patient and helpful and I thank them for their guidance and support.

My family and friends have been pillars of strength. My parents, John and Bonnie Buhler, have contributed both financially and emotionally to my work. Their love and their belief in me are the reasons I have persevered. My sister, Barbara, her husband Marc and their children have given me much needed guidance, strength and humour. They have also given me the invaluable gift of perspective, not to mention an open door and welcoming arms. Barb, your courage and love has taught me more than any degree could. My grandparents, Don and Lorna Telford, have provided unconditional love and belief in me even when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you all.

I owe a special thank you to Maria Walsh, my roommate, my friend and confidante. Your love and support has meant more to me than you will ever know. Thank you for always being there for me, for helping me to find my way when I never thought I would. It's been a tough one, honey, but we did it. And to Heather Smith, thank you for the never-ending supply of coffee, and for helping me to find my dreams and make them real. Thank you both for showing me what friendship is all about. I couldn't have done it without you. Here's to us and our six cats!

And finally, thank you to Sean Simmons. Thank you for reminding me to live every minute, and for patiently and lovingly letting me be the person I am. You are my One, my It, my Love.
Despite the tragedy of war, the past decade has been one of outstanding social and economic advance in Canada, and most particularly in this Province of ours. Economic developments coincident with an influx of capital for industrial and mercantile ventures, along with enlightened public investment in hydro-electric, highway, railway and related construction, have resulted in a very substantial increase in wealth and population, and in social welfare, health and educational advances that go to make life for the people of British Columbia more complete.

Economic and social growth of the magnitude seen in this Province can only occur in a political area enjoying the rights and privileges of stable government operating on sound economic principals. In British Columbia we find the favourable conditions for such progress which cannot continue without financial assistance, both of a capital and current nature. It can truthfully be said that aided by great natural resources and a secure faith in the future, sound governmental financial administration has made these improvements possible without placing any undue strain upon the economic system.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE
PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
ALUMINUM helps everybody...

In INDUSTRY: Canadian railways for example, are using more and more aluminum in freight cars and passenger coaches.

in the HOME: Iron, more and more articles are being made of aluminum -- washing machine tubs, for instance.

The reasons? There are many. Aluminum is light, strong, easy to keep clean. It is durable, cannot rust. It is economical because, through research and large-scale production, the price has been reduced 25% since 1939.

Today more than 1000 Canadian companies are fashioning aluminum into countless useful and beautiful shapes -- as varied as boxes and aircraft, garden tools and vacuum cleaners.

Tomorrow its advantages will be adapted to make still other articles which are lighter and more attractive. Next time you go shopping, notice how many things are made of aluminum.

ALUMINUM COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD.
Producers and Processors of Aluminum for Canadian Industry and World Markets.
MONTEAL • QUEBEC • TORONTO • VANCOUVER
Twenty-four Power Districts Served by

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| The Alberni | Golden | Lake Windermere | Quesnel |
| Alert Bay   | Hazelton | Lillooet | Sechelt |
| Burns Lake  | Hope | Nakusp | Smithers |
| Campbell River | Houston | Nanaimo-Duncan | Terrace |
| Cowichan Valley | Kamloops | North Okanagan | Vanderhoof |
| Dawson Creek | Lake Cowichan | Peachland-Westbank | Williams Lake |

The British Columbia Power Commission in the first five years of its operation, ending April 30, 1950, has done far toward accomplishing the purpose of its creation under the terms of the Electric Power Act: "An Act to provide for improving the availability and supply of electrical power" to the people.

The Commission has acquired and amalgamated 25 operating electric utility systems, including distribution systems, with immense savings to consumers resulting.

The Commission has invested nearly $10,000,000 in generating plant, transmission and distribution services to supply power to industries and its more than 41,000 commercial and domestic customers.
Introduction

Many recent community histories have focused on groups of people who form unique communities with remarkable characteristics, such as groups of immigrants, or religious groups, and often these studies touch on the ways in which communities adapt to both internal and external pressures. Historians tend to focus on the facets of a community which have survived or successfully adapted to these pressures, and less often deal with the aspects of a community which have not successfully adapted. For example, recent work on residential schools has highlighted First Nations' resistance to colonization rather than the harsher realities of life during and after a person's time in the schools.\(^1\) This focus has created a gap in the historical literature, one not necessarily due to conscious neglect but instead to a search for instances of agency or cultural strength, particularly in the area of First Nations' history.\(^2\) The emphasis on the positive can be useful in that it helps us shake off our arrogant assumptions that Native peoples have always been victims, and therefore somehow culturally inferior. However, a conscious search for agency sometimes implicitly absolves historical injustice and undermines our ability to see that some First Nations communities have yet to cope successfully with past wrongs.

This thesis looks at the links between coercion, disempowerment and community, as exemplified by the Cheslatta Carrier First Nation of central British Columbia, who since their relocation in 1952 have experienced myriad difficulties not only in regaining a lost sense of community but also in redefining that community in a way they all can accept.


\(^2\) I use the term “agency” synonymously with empowerment. When an individual or a group feels, or demonstrates through action, that they are in control of their circumstances, they are demonstrating agency.
Scholars do not dispute a community's right to define itself. Jim McDonald asserts that people organize around modes of production, and a community forms when production leads to reproduction. In other words, a community is built around ideas that "are structured into an indigenous theory of practice." People who work together towards common goals do not always function under the same assumptions or theories of practice. However, McDonald argues that a community must begin with an overt discussion of the most basic assumptions until there is consensus, at which point those ideas become commonplace and the discussions move towards deeper and more complex levels. As the complex becomes commonplace, so a community begins to define itself. Among the Cheslatta people there has been a breakdown in that most basic discussion which has greatly hindered their ability to work towards community-building.

Although scholars note the importance of a community to people's well-being, few explicitly define the word, instead equating community with locality. A major exception is scholarship in the field of gender history. Gender historians such as E. Anthony Rotundo, Veronica Strong-Boag, and Ruth Roach Pierson see community in the form of common bonds among people, particularly in work cultures and women's shared domestic

\[3\] Jim McDonald, personal communication, June 17, 1996.


\[5\] Ibid.

\[6\] Paula Gunn Allen is one exception. She defines community as "those who are of a similar clan and Spirit; those who are encompassed by a particular Spirit-being are members of a community." See The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions. Boston: Beacon Books, 1992, 252. See also Ken and Victoria Zeilig. Ste. Madeleine, Community Without a Town: Metis Elders in Interview. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, Inc., 1987. Their idea of community is a remembrance of a place, which in turn is a spirit of closeness physically manifested in a geographical location.
experiences. These ideas of community can partly apply to First Nations communities, which are often a group of loosely linked reserves inhabited by people with a common sense of identity. However, we cannot apply non-Native models easily or accurately to describe Native communities. Native peoples do face many of the same pressures as non-Natives. As well, though, many First Nations have added pressures such as restricted movement and a greater degree of government intervention in their lives, not to mention the much higher rates of social ills such as alcoholism, unemployment and suicide.

Ethnohistorians tend to define Native communities as distinct and basically homogeneous entities. While most would not assume that all the people of a particular nation think, feel or act the same, many ethnographers highlight the unity among the people with whom they work rather than the differences or apparent anomalies. For example, Elsie B. Redbird asserts that non-Native policies have victimized Native women around the world, and she suggests that empowerment and sovereignty begin by honouring women's wisdom and strength. She maintains that all Native women share a common bond, which is part of the source of their strength. Marcia Hoyle and Maggie Hodgson, in separate studies, argue that Native communities can heal when they regain control of healing programs. These studies feature the success of community-planned and 


implemented revitalization programs. They also accentuate the agreement within the communities on the goals and designs of these programs, and make little or no mention of possible disagreements in these communities.9

Such emphasis on unity is part of a broader trend towards seeing the positive aspects and therefore agency in First Nations communities. There is a vast body of literature in Native history that discusses the ways in which Native peoples preserve and strengthen their cultures. Scholars do not ignore the negative facets of reserve life, however by highlighting by the great strength of First Nations to survive the colonial experience, they often downplay negative aspects. Jo-Anne Fiske, Celia Haig-Brown, and David del Mar all argue for a significant degree of agency and autonomy in First Nations peoples' lives. This is a valuable exercise and represents a shift in ethnohistorical thinking from studies that characterize Native peoples as dependent upon and dominated by non-native colonizers. There is no doubt that instances of agency occurred in all areas of Native peoples' lives. However, one of the problems with this approach is that scholars may then gloss over cases where Native people did not adequately or successfully resist colonization, or worse, ignore those instances completely.

Elizabeth Furniss has attempted to strike a middle ground in her work with the Shuswap of British Columbia. She argues that both agency and coercion were factors in the Shuswap's conversion to Catholicism. While the Shuswap did exercise a certain measure of control over when and how they would convert, missionaries strictly controlled

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the practice of Catholicism. She follows the arguments of Jean and John Comaroff, who maintain that Africans converted to Christianity as a matter of political expediency, taking the symbols of Christianity and making them their own. However, in some cases, political expediency led to their subordination. Even when they managed to maintain some direct control over their own lives, the Native peoples were deeply affected by the methods and symbols of conversion. That the Comaroffs recognize both power and subordination is extremely useful, for while they see agency among the Tswana of Africa, they also examine and indict the colonizing ethos, something that many authors fail to do.

Many Aboriginal communities have been confined to a fraction of their traditional land, while others have been completely separated from their territory. It would be a mistake to claim that the Cheslatta people are unique among First Nation communities, or even among relocated communities. Other bands as well have suffered the onslaught of alcohol, drugs, family breakdown and unemployment. Many of these problems are due to a lack of agency, which results from scarce resources, continual government interference in daily life and the lack of freedom to live and work where they choose. Most Aboriginal peoples face similar circumstances as relocated bands, however relocated groups often shoulder the added burdens of an abrupt and drastic change in their way of life, sometimes

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losing their homes literally overnight. A great deal of literature exists on Native relocations, much of it dealing with Inuit settlements in the Canadian Arctic. The general consensus among scholars is that the Canadian government relocated Aboriginal groups to both alleviate sovereignty concerns in the north and to attempt to "Canadianize" First Nations by forcing them to live like non-Natives. This government agenda in part grew out of a colonialisat refusal to recognize existing communities as coherent and viable, despite (or because of) their differences from non-Native society.

Authors who deal with relocation generally denounce the Canadian government and the attitudes that drove relocation schemes between the 1930s and the 1960s. *Relocating Eden* is Alan Marcus's exploration of the High Arctic relocations of two Inuit groups. His contention that the Arctic relocations were misguided at best, and devastating at worst, is disputed by Gerard Kenney who insists that there is no evidence to support Aboriginal claims of injustice and hardship as a result of the moves. Kenney is nearly alone in his views, however, and he comes close to agreeing with the racist and outdated view that Aboriginal peoples could not be assimilated. He accepts government documents at face value, and dismisses the idea that, as Marcus notes, government officials really had no idea how their relocation experiments were working.13 Marcus, on the other hand, is supported by several other authors who argue that Inuit and Northern Native relocations are a blotch on an already dark colonialisat record. Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski note that the Canadian government attempted to organize Native lives according to non-

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Native values.\textsuperscript{14}

Farther to the south, the Sayisi Dene are another example of relocation and government intervention that left them without control over their own lives and destroyed their community.\textsuperscript{15} The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples also deals with several cases of relocated communities and concludes that “relocations must be seen as part of a broader process of dispossession and displacement, a process with lingering effects on [all aspects of] people’s lives. We are troubled by the way relocations may have contributed to the general malaise gripping so many Aboriginal communities and to the incidence of violence, directed outward and inward.”\textsuperscript{16} Relocated communities faced the trauma of dealing with the consequences imposed on them by a distant government’s plans.

The Cheslatta people are yet another group forced to leave their land because of circumstances they could not control. Their relocation differs from those above, however, in that they are part of the majority of relocated groups forced to move to make way for resource development. While some communities can prosper in their new lands, many, such as the Cheslatta, struggle to adapt.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Ken and Victoria Zeilig found that “harsh memories from the past did not leave scars of bitterness or feelings of revenge; rather time seemed to have mellowed the people, and in an unlikely way, to have enriched them spiritually.” Community Without a Town, viii. On the other hand, the northern Sayisi Dene people, relocated to Churchill in 1956, lived in dire poverty and vicious cycles of abuse and neglect. See Nu Ho Ni Yeh: Our Story. Watertown, Ma: Documentary Educational Resources, 1982.
\end{itemize}
effects of resource development in the north, and most of the authors handle the subject with skill and sensitivity.\textsuperscript{18} James B. Waldram, for instance, discovered that where hydro development affects Native communities, governments consistently deny First Nations full involvement in planning and implementing projects.\textsuperscript{19} Further, not only do Native communities derive little or no benefit from the projects, governments usually deny them access to the lands and waters on which the projects are built. These communities also suffer tremendous social strife, as they are unable to access either traditional resources or the potential financial benefits of resource development. The Cheslatta people were one such group unable to voice their opinions about development on their land, and equally unable to benefit from such development.

Peter Elias observes that resource communities are similar in many ways and that often First Nations can indeed take advantage of resource opportunities.\textsuperscript{20} Northern Native

\textsuperscript{18} One of the best is Hugh Brody.\textit{Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier.} Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981.


\textsuperscript{20} Peter Douglas Elias. \textit{Northern Aboriginal Communities: Economies and Development}. For a study of a Native community relocated by mercury poisoning see Anastasia M. Shklinyk. A \textit{Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community}. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. She argues that relocation served the purpose of forcing Native peoples to live more like non-Natives by planning the layout of the reserves to conform more closely to non-Native communities. One of the results was that people were forced together with no concern for clan affiliations, creating much tension and anger. Similarly, James B. Waldram argues that a community relocated because of resource development saw its political structure change drastically when the people no longer had access to the person who had served as an intermediary between themselves and the government. See Waldram, "Relocation and Political Change in a Manitoba Native Community." \textit{Canadian Journal of Anthropology}. 1, 2 (Winter 1980): pp. 173-178.
communities are generally small and growing fast. They are young, and most often structured by kinship. He argues that resource development and cash economies can coexist with traditional subsistence techniques, even allowing greater flexibility for First Nations communities. However, resource development can sometimes erode traditional core elements of a community by ensuring that access to resources is granted mainly to those closest to the people who control the resources. This differentiated access makes people bitter and hostile, dividing communities rather than uniting them.\footnote{Elias, \textit{Northern Aboriginal Communities}.}

Elias does generalize, however, and his observations do not characterize all Aboriginal communities whose lands offer opportunities for First Nations or non-Natives to manage or extract natural resources.

One thing that all of the above works have in common is that they attempt to give us a greater understanding of the dynamics of communities and the forces working upon them, First Nations communities in particular. This study will do the same, and the history of the Cheslatta Carrier people is a prime example of the devastation wrought by relocation. First of all, the Cheslatta do not consider themselves to be a 'community' as they define it, though this was not always the case.\footnote{Chief Marvin Charlie, June 10, 1996.} Most commonly they define community as a group of people who work together and help each other in times of need, similar to a family.\footnote{Cheslatta band members interviewed September and October 1996.} Now, however, they are not united\footnote{With the exception of the fight against the Kemano Completion project, which helped to mobilize the people, the Cheslatta see themselves as divided with little in common. Mike Robertson, Cheslatta Band, June 3, 1996.} Nor do they currently share common bonds or ideas which can translate into shared actions as Jim McDonald
suggests.

Secondly, as this study is also an examination of a lack of agency, while there are limited instances of community revitalization, the Cheslatta almost completely depend on government welfare and are almost totally subjected to the will of a non-Native government. Third, while many northern Aboriginal communities are able to take advantage of resource development and incorporate a cash economy into their traditional subsistence, the Cheslatta have been consistently denied such opportunities or cannot take advantage of them when they arise. Nor do they have adequate access to traditional subsistence activities such as trapping or farming. These losses have also not resulted in a new resource base that can fill the void.

Cheslatta history is an example of disempowerment, coercion, and a shattered community. This study will contribute much to historical understanding, first by adding another dimension to the debate on agency and coercion, and second by showing that such a drastic change in the community since the move is not only a result of the loss of land, but also a result of disempowerment, beginning with their removal from their traditional territory.

The research is guided by certain questions. First, how does a community define itself, and why? Second, what accounts for the perceptions of a sharp division between ‘before’ and ‘after’ relocation? Once the Cheslatta perceived themselves to have been a strong community.25 I argue that because the move disrupted their lives to such a degree, and because they did not relocate on their own terms, they had no opportunity to redefine the ‘community’ for themselves. To date, they have been unable to replace their old

25 Along with the Cheslatta definition of community I am following Jim McDonald’s example as a point of reference.
definitions with anything new, nor have they re-attained their old ideals. The relocation not only destroyed their community physically, it also drastically altered the way the people perceive themselves. Where the Cheslatta were once independent and mutually cooperative, they are now dependent on the government and hostile towards one another.

Before 1952, the Cheslatta Carrier occupied an extensive territory in the vicinity of Ootsa and Cheslatta Lakes in central British Columbia. They were relatively isolated compared to some other First Nations communities. They had very little contact with non-Native people and even less contact with the Department of Indian Affairs. They used an extensive and elaborate trail network that connected them with their hunting and trapping grounds, and with other First Nations. The people hunted, fished, trapped, farmed and gathered berries and managed a comfortable standard of living by their own accounts. They built their own houses with materials they produced themselves, and relied only on each other for help in times of need.

In 1952 the provincial government forced the Cheslatta off their land with little warning and even less compensation. Department of Indian Affairs agents gave them two weeks notice that Alcan would build a dam and that their land would soon be flooded. In fact, construction had already begun. What followed was a tragedy of the highest magnitude. Once a tightly-knit community, the Cheslatta had their traplines, homes, livestock, tools and agriculture either burned, stolen or destroyed. The community was nearly devastated. Where there was once closeness, distance prevailed, as the new settlement scattered the Cheslatta across an area of 175 miles. Where there was once the

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27 Chief Marvin Charlie, June 10, 1996.
means for an adequate subsistence, unemployment and welfare became the norm. Where there was little contact with the Department of Indian Affairs, the DIA became a daily presence in the lives of the Cheslatta people. Ironically, the DIA is now the major source of employment for the Cheslatta community, which has an unemployment rate of 95%. These were the most tangible results of the forced relocation. Less tangible but equally devastating was the loss of a sense of community among the Cheslatta, now located south of Burns Lake, British Columbia.

The Cheslatta people now find that they neither work together nor help each other as they used to. These things are very difficult to maintain while the people are spread so very far apart from one another. They no longer occupy common reserve lands, as each family's parcel has been designated a reserve unto itself. To reach all the parcels would require a round trip of over one hundred and fifty miles. This helps to explain why it has been so difficult to recover from the despondency they felt at losing their land and livelihoods, which they previously held in common. This is the result of the government's sale of Cheslatta land to Alcan for the Kemano project.

I have divided this study into four chapters. The first deals with the Cheslatta community in a broader context of Central Interior First Nations. The Cheslatta people are placed alongside other Carrier communities to highlight both the typical experiences of British Columbia Aboriginal peoples and the unique aspects of Cheslatta society. This chapter also includes a discussion of the Cheslatta people's perspectives on their community history before 1952. I argue that their isolation and self-sufficiency left them particularly unprepared to cope with relocation. The second chapter is a discussion of

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28 Chief Marvin Charlie, June 10, 1996.
British Columbia's provincial government policies and rationale for resource development. Here I highlight that the ethos of 'progress', so prevalent in the years following World War II, made no room for dissenting voices. The prevailing attitude made it easy for government officials to dismiss the Cheslatta people and others who opposed Alcan's dam in central British Columbia.

Chapter three recounts the events immediately before and after the Cheslatta relocation. Clearly the people had no warning, though DIA officials knew in advance of the impending flood. I emphasize band members' own stories to show that the coercive nature of their relocation caused wounds too deep to heal even after forty-five years. The next chapter outlines the current state of the Cheslatta community. Band members are divided and angry, and lack an economic basis for adequate subsistence. I argue that powerlessness, which in part comes from the lack of economic opportunities, is one of the band's biggest problems. This, compounded with the knowledge gap between elders and young people, is one of the main reasons that band members cannot work together to create a viable and strong community.

Much of this thesis relies heavily on interviews with the Cheslatta people, conducted in the fall of 1996 and spring of 1997. I have also used transcripts of interviews conducted for the specific claims negotiations between 1985 and 1992. Various documentary sources have also helped to shape the argument. Newspaper articles and editorials shed light on the mindset of government officials and the ideals of the 1940s and 1950s. They are also useful to help clarify the extremely complicated process of licensing and construction of the Kenney Dam and Alcan's smelter at Kitimat. Bev Christensen's study of Alcan's Kemano projects is particularly useful in this respect. Maps are another important resource
for determining the Cheslatta traditional territory and the changes to the land when Alcan flooded it. Maps have also helped me to assess the loss to the Cheslatta people in terms of traplines, hunting and fishing grounds, and agriculture.

Various legal documents have been an invaluable source of information. Dick Byl's *Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender* has provided some of the legal foundation for my claims that government agents acted against, rather than for, the Cheslatta people. As well I have looked at the transcripts from the hearings into the Kemano Completion Project, which, though they do not cover a lot of the history of the project, do provide insight into the effects of the original Kemano project on the Cheslatta people's lives. The Cheslatta band has also furnished me with a select portion of their claims documents, though many more are unavailable under terms of their settlement with Alcan and the federal government. The studies I have seen have shown that the Cheslatta people lost nearly as much economically in terms of houses and belongings, as they did spiritually and socially.

I have used these legal documents to focus much of chapter three, recognizing that I only have access to a small sample. Federal documents, I suspect, would reinforce many of my conclusions, though these records are sealed and unaccessible.

Available archival material is limited to some of the studies and surveys that the government conducted during the summer and fall of 1952, and to the reports of the damage that the flood did to traplines. Certain Department of Indian Affairs logbooks are open, however the meetings that took place between 1952 and 1954 are unrecorded in these books. Thus to construct my argument for chapter three I relied heavily on the legal documents mentioned above. Much the same is true for the current state of the Cheslatta band. Records from the RG10 series that refer to the Cheslatta band deal almost
exclusively with trapline disputes. There is a deafening silence in the records when it comes to the Cheslatta First Nation.

My greatest reward in doing this research has been in the interviews I conducted. All of the people I spoke to welcomed me into their homes and told me many of their stories. They were for the most part enthusiastic and curious about my research. They spoke to me from their hearts and patiently answered my questions. Having never conducted interviews before I was somewhat anxious at first. However, most of the interviews were more like conversations and the people all seemed to speak their minds freely. Therefore, in the few places where I have used sensitive material I have not used names or specific dates. Admittedly the designation 'sensitive' is arbitrary. My rule has been that the information I use is only that which the interviewees might share with anyone else, or that which would not hurt another individual. As well, I do not use any information that is not on tape except in three cases where I took notes during the interview rather than recorded it. These people have all read my notes and agreed to let me use that information. As well, I have had many informal conversations with band researchers and they have consented to my use of their information. Again, I apply the same rule as with interviews. Other material I have gathered during my time in Grassy Plains is often impressionistic but has also been valuable to me. For example, the layout of the reserves, and the drive from Grassy Plains to the Kenney Dam near Vanderhoof, have all taught me a lot about where the Cheslatta people come from and why it is so difficult for them to gather now.

My greatest sorrow in doing this research has been confronting the hurt and anger people feel. Many a time I heard heartbreaking stories not only about what the Cheslatta
people have lost, but also about what they cannot regain or recreate. Often I heard frustration and felt it, too, when people had wonderful ideas about how to revitalize the community but for one reason or another could not act on them. I felt overwhelmingly powerless and often wondered whether this project was an exercise in futility, for one of my purposes was to help the Cheslatta people reclaim their history, to be able to focus on at least one common identity. Much to my dismay, however, I cannot solve all, or even any, of the problems the Cheslatta people face. However, I have also learned that the Cheslatta people want to tell their stories. I feel a great sense of honour and responsibility in being able to help in this small way. Here, then, are their stories.
Chapter Two: Background

It would be a serious injustice to the Cheslatta people to claim, as Dick Byl did in 1993, that Cheslatta history "really starts after the Second World War, after 1945." Until that time, the Cheslatta had lived quietly. However, a peaceful existence does not mean an unremarkable one. It is not my intention to claim that the Cheslatta lived idyllic lives, as they certainly faced many of the same challenges as other First Nations. However, I argue that there were some aspects of their lives that made them particularly unprepared for their relocation, such as their relative isolation and self-sufficiency. Many other Native bands faced tumult and were forced to adapt to non-Native domination much earlier than the Cheslatta people. Before 1952, the Cheslatta people had rarely seen a government agent. A priest visited the reserves only once a year, unless it was to take Cheslatta children to Lejac, the residential school near Fort Fraser. Even then, not all of the children attended school, as they were often away with their parents on the traplines or hunting grounds and could not be found to go to school. In general, the Cheslatta controlled most aspects of daily living and were not used to the outside intervention that became such a large part of their lives after 1952.

This chapter will be divided in two ways. First I will discuss Carrier history in general, including traditional social and political structure, and economics. I will introduce changes to the traditional way of life such as reserve allocation, the arrival of missionaries, residential schools, and changes to the traditional economy.\(^2\) In some instances the

\(^1\)BCUCH: Hearing Transcripts: Volume 5. November 1993, p.676. Byl was trying to point out that until the late 1940s the Cheslatta people had lived peacefully and kept to themselves. His choice of phrase is unfortunate as it suggests that peaceful existence is not 'real' history.

\(^2\)'Traditional' is not necessarily strictly indigenous. For my purposes 'traditional' activities or structures are those which the Cheslatta incorporated into their lives on their own terms. For example, the potlatch was not an indigenous ceremony or feast, but one they adopted from the Northwest Coast First Nations. Another example would be their use of tools and guns acquired from traders. These implements facilitated their seasonal round of activities and allowed them to gain more from their work which left more
Cheslatta people responded to these pressures in much the same way as other bands, inasmuch as they incorporated wage labour and cash into their traditional lifestyles. Other pressures did not touch them to the same extent as they did other Carrier people. For example, non-Native settlers did not compete with them for resources as they did in more populated areas.³

Secondly, I will discuss those aspects of their community that left them ill-prepared to cope with their relocation. They were used to living and working together, depending only on one another, not concerned as other bands were with persistent government intervention.⁴ Cheslatta people did not learn to deal with government officials because they did not need anything from the government, who left them alone. The few settlers in the area, with whom they enjoyed good relations and shared resources, treated them with respect. Band members were relatively free to live their lives and develop their community without outside interference. Thus they were totally unprepared for the hostile enviroment in which they suddenly found themselves, the government control over their lives, and their separation from one another after they moved to Grassy Plains. The link between their community strength and their self-reliance must be emphasized. A strong community was perhaps a matter of survival.


⁴For example, unlike most British Columbia bands, the Cheslatta villages were not even classified as reserves until the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs (otherwise known as the McKenna-McBride Commission) in 1916. See the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs. Victoria: 1916, p. 771.
Carrier bands occupy the central interior of British Columbia. Generally bands formed as groups of families joined with others in the same territory. Within those larger groups, however, the first allegiance was to the family and village group. Ties with other village groups in the same band, later reserve groups, were maintained and strengthened through resource exploitation and shared work. Father Adrian Morice notes that Carrier bands moved seasonally to hunt, fish and trap, generally remaining with their village or family groups. They gathered in spring and summer, dispersing in late fall and winter.

Bands traded with one another and intermarriage between the Carrier and the Bella Coola or Gitksan was a direct result of Carrier success in the fur trade. This is important, as it transformed the Carrier social system in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. The wealth-conscious Gitksan and Bella Coola had rejected the Carrier as marriage partners until the Carrier succeeded in amassing wealth from the fur trade. Once the bands began to intermarry, the Carrier quickly adopted "the Northwest Coast systems of social organization and stratification, the 'potlatch-rank complex'...." Previous to this, the Carrier seem to have had less of a hierarchical social structure, formed around the extended family unit. They recognized the limited authority of a head man, the eldest male of the sibling group, called the detsa. The family controlled the access to hunting and fishing grounds, though only during their seasonal use. Inheritance was bilateral but


8 Ibid., p. 417.

9 Tobey, "Carrier." p. 418.
tended to pass through the patriline, as extended families grouped around male siblings. Changes from bilateral to matrilineal descent occurred more in Northern Carrier territory as the matrilineal Gitksan influenced this group. Southern Carriers had more contact with the Bella Coola, who recognized descent bilaterally.\textsuperscript{10} Carrier peoples, influenced by Northwest Coast bands, began to potlatch for the transmission of titles and status, naming ceremonies and funerals, and although the rank of chief carried limited authority, the position was highly regarded and prized.\textsuperscript{11}

Children learned their place in the world at a young age with both secular and religious training. As soon as they could walk they began to learn the tasks they would be required to perform later in life such as cooking, sewing, and preserving food, or learning how to build structures and tools, hunting and fishing. All relatives were responsible for a child’s education, and among the Northern Carrier, the mother’s siblings assumed greater responsibility as the child grew older.\textsuperscript{12} Religious instruction began at a young age as well. The Carrier believed in the presence of animal spirits and guides who differed from humans in shape alone. Beliefs about spirit guides differed between bands, with some believing that all young men had spirit guardians while others believed this only of shamans.\textsuperscript{13} Carrier spiritual beliefs were less affected by intermarriage with Northwest Coast bands, though the changes were felt in this area as well.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid. See pp. 418-423 for an excellent explanation of kinship groups, ranks, responsibilities and marriage rules.

\textsuperscript{11}Tobey, p. 421.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 427.

\textsuperscript{13} Tobey, “Carrier.” pp. 428-429.

Potlatching, trade and visiting usually occurred in late summer, a time of abundance. Bands would fish for salmon, collect berries and supplement their diet with wild vegetables such as turnip root, and later in the nineteenth century, with farm produce. Bands dispersed in early winter, and families went to their hunting grounds until around late December or January when the weather was too severe to hunt. At this time, families returned to their permanent village sites where food had been stored. There they remained until later in the spring when food once again became more plentiful.\(^\text{15}\)

Carrier bands usually acted as middlemen between the northwest coast bands and more eastern bands and began to trade directly with non-Natives beginning in the late eighteenth century. The goods accrued from the maritime fur trade made their way east through trade and potlatching. Trade in iron began before interior bands had direct contact with non-Natives. However after non-Native traders established posts in Carrier country, an influx of hunting equipment and tools soon changed hunting techniques, living patterns and settlement, as posts were visited regularly.\(^\text{16}\) Bands exchanged food and fur in return for food “staples” such as flour, sugar and tea, and hunting and cooking equipment.

More dramatic changes in Carrier culture occurred with the arrival of missionaries, increased settlement, and the allotment of reserve lands between 1876 and 1908, modified between 1913 and 1916 with the McKenna-McBride Commission. Many Carrier bands such as the Cheslatta were able to continue hunting and trapping in their traditional territories as they were less affected than others by rapid settlement. Increased settlement opened transportation routes and transformed the regional economy to one based on cash

\(^{15}\text{Tobey, "Carrier." p. 425.}\)

\(^{16}\text{Ibid., p. 417.}\)
rather than trade. This afforded new opportunities for Carrier people, particularly the railways, which employed many men to hack ties, pack and freight equipment and goods.\textsuperscript{17} Carrier bands continued to trade furs and began to work for non-Natives cutting railroad ties and in canneries on the west coast. As noted above, bands had been confined to reserves by early in the twentieth century although many continued their traditional seasonal round of activities because they occupied the same territory they had for centuries.

Wage labour, however, was an assault on traditional lifestyles, as many people found it easier to work for cash and buy what they needed rather than to hunt or fish. Others used that cash to buy the equipment necessary to continue their traditional livelihoods. The transition from semi-nomadic to more sedentary ways of life occurred gradually, though not without considerable strife. Paid work placed First Nations face to face with the growing numbers of non-Natives who often forcefully asserted their domination. The first white man passed through the area in 1793. By 1908, the northern interior was being touted as an ideal place to settle, and railways and mining attracted a rapid influx of settlers who competed with Native peoples for land and food.\textsuperscript{18}

Growing settlement created jobs for Aboriginal people and increased the pressure on them to abandon, or at least modify, their traditional ways of life.\textsuperscript{19} Government

\textsuperscript{17}Margaret Whitehead, ed. \textit{They Call Me Father: Memoirs of Father Nicolas Coccola}. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 47.

restricted their access to resources, making cash necessary to survive in the changing world. The fur trade was still a large component of the province's economy but as prices dropped its importance diminished until the 1940s when trapping began to account for a significantly smaller proportion of people's annual income. Many Aboriginal peoples worked for non-Native people or companies in the summer as farmers, fishermen, canners, guides and railway workers, returning to their reserves to hunt or trap in the winter. The Cheslatta people often worked for the few non-Native farmers in the area as well as or instead of farming their own land, at which many succeeded. The Cheslatta, like other Carrier bands, often left their reserves in the summer to trade, work for cash, and visit relatives, and spent the early winters with their families trapping and hunting. Missionaries encouraged First Nations to lead more sedentary lives as farmers, partly in the belief that traditional subsistence activities could not support the people, but also because they hoped to 'civilize' Native peoples. Farming increased their prosperity and added to their cash income from fur trading.

Father Coccola notes in his memoirs that growing non-Native settlement in the Bulkley Valley increased the contact between Natives and non-Natives, making it virtually impossible for Native peoples to keep to themselves. Some groups, however, such as the Cheslatta, managed very well to limit contact. Other First Nations found themselves further confined to smaller areas which fostered resentment and anger towards encroaching

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20Whitehead, pp. 50-53.

21Douglas Hudson discusses the mix of wage labour and traditional economies in “Internal Colonialism and Industrial Capitalism,” in Thomas Thorner, ed. Sa Ts'e: Historical Perspectives on Northern British Columbia. Prince George: College of New Caledonia Press, 1989, pp. 177-213. Particularly into the mid-twentieth century, “with the seasonal nature of employment in the north, no [Carrier] could afford to become dependent on wage labour... In fact, the pattern of wage labour depended on the maintenance of the bush economy... Income from wage labour was used to maintain the bush economy, and fulfill reciprocal obligations to members of one's kinship group and community.” p. 194.
settlers. Tension between settlers and First Nations was common, though of course there were exceptions. Father Coccola notes his concern that settlers and transient non-Native workers got along too well sometimes, often with non-Natives sharing their alcohol with Natives.

Compared to many other Carrier bands, the Cheslatta remained relatively untouched by the changes taking place. Their experience with settlers was limited, allowing them to escape, at least partially, the repercussions that settlement had for other bands. As they did not have to compete as forcefully with settlers for resources, the Cheslatta people continued their seasonal activities as they had for generations. They incorporated wage labour when they had the opportunity to do so, but were not forced to do so. They traded for furs and goods with non-Native traders, but continued to do so largely on their own terms. And because they were able to participate in their regular subsistence activities, they were not forced, as many other bands were, to apply for government relief when their hunting and fishing were restricted. Douglas Hudson notes that reserves functioned as gathering centers while most economic activity occurred elsewhere. When settlement increased, many bands were confined to their reserves, unable to access the source of their economic activities. The Cheslatta began to register their traplines in the mid-1920s as new laws required, however even then they did not face non-Native usurpation of their territories as other bands did. As Donald Harris and George

22 Margaret Whitehead, They Call Me Father, pp. 42-52.

23 For a good discussion of the Carrier-fur trader relationships, see Erik Anderson, “Ready for the Religious Relationship,” p. 47.

Ingram argue, "remoteness served as a buffer for the Indians, giving them a period of almost 50 years in which to assimilate the goods and accoutrements of the western world without being overwhelmed by them.\textsuperscript{25} The Cheslatta had an even longer buffer owing to their lack of contact with settlers and government officials. This is an important component to the discussion of agency and community, as the relative lack of intervention in their daily lives allowed them a freer reign, one manifestation of which was strong community and family bonds.

Wage labour and growing settlement wreaked havoc in many Native communities to varying degrees, but these things did not disrupt people's lives as did residential schools. Under the guise of Christianity, residential schools attempted to assimilate First Nations into the non-Native population. Granted, priests and nuns sometimes taught Native children some very valuable lessons such as reading and writing. Unfortunately, the lessons were overshadowed by the harsh ways in which they were taught. Native children were not allowed to speak their own languages. If they were caught they were beaten and severely punished. Many children were mistreated daily. They were underfed and forced to work long hours outside of their lessons, which were sometimes minimized so the children could work instead.\textsuperscript{26}

Cheslatta children's experiences differed from other Carrier groups only in that their


remote location sometimes made it difficult to find the children when it came time to take them to Lejac. Many did attend the school, and when they returned they taught their brothers and sisters some basic lessons, even spurring some of those children to attend for themselves. Many children, however, were totally unprepared for their experiences at school. They also did not realize that they could not attend and leave as they chose. Later generations of Native children would learn this lesson, though the children who attended Lejac when it first opened in 1926 had yet to face this reality.

Pat Edmund is an elder who went to Lejac on his own. He is outspoken and expressive, cheerful and quick with a joke and a friendly word. He values his family and hard work. He worked hard to build his home and continues to do his best to make it comfortable for his family. He seems energetic, though he says he would like to take some time for himself, as he has worked his whole life. He feels that he learned a lot in school. His older sister, Evelyn Tom, went to Lejac, and Mr. Edmund decided he wanted to go too. He wanted to know how to read, write, and work with numbers as well as his sister. “They taught me. I wish they keep getting, teaching me, I could’ve learned lots from them... I wanted to go to school.” He got to Lejac but soon ran away. “I try to go to school one time in Lejac Indian School. They say I was stealing bread and I was getting beat up for that so I run away from there. I never went back to school.” Had he known what the school held in store for him, he says he would not have gone. He does not elaborate, but says instead that the lure of money was more powerful. During his adult life he often considered upgrading his education but by then he had other responsibilities such as a job and a family. Although he regrets not learning more, he reasons that people must simply do the

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27 Pat Edmund, September 1996.
best with what they are given. His experience of Lejac was in some ways typical of First Nations children, though most children did not go of their own accord, and most did not and could not run away.

Abel Peters is a Cheslatta elder who also went to Lejac for five years. He is a quiet man who laughs easily and loves to tell stories. He is devoted to his large family and still makes time to tell stories to those who will listen, hoping to pass on his knowledge to others. Despite his often unpleasant experiences he seems to trust people and speaks with a gentleness that draws people toward him. His eyes light up when he remembers that some subjects at school filled him with a wanderlust which inspired him to enlist as a soldier during World War Two. He does compare his experiences at Lejac with the discipline of being a soldier, however. His voice sounds uncharacteristically angry when he remembers Lejac, as though someone had played a cruel joke on him. “When I was in school ... oh, there was a trick! We get punished like little kids. Real rough. We get punished there. Oh, that was good. We make, they make good soldiers out of us....” ²⁸ He still tries to balance these memories with his more positive school experiences as he recalls the nun who worked with the children to teach them English. “[W]hen I got to Lejac I couldn’t speak a word in English, so they had to get the lady there, she was translating English to ... our language and so that helped me quite a bit you know.” ²⁹ He learned well, and later interpreted between his people and government officials when they discussed their impending relocation.

²⁸ Abel Peters, September 1996. See also We Remember Lejac [videorecording]. Yinka Dene Language Institute, 1994. There is a scene in this video depicting the children in their school uniforms marching in rows, reminiscent of soldiers on parade.

²⁹ ibid.
Cheslatta children had been going to Lejac since the 1920s. Undoubtedly the school's effects rippled through the subsequent generations like a poison whether or not they attended school. "It is not possible, however, to draw a distinction between First Nation individuals who attended residential school and those who did not: all First Nation individuals were affected, in one way or another, by residential school."\(^{30}\) Regardless of whether or not the children attended school, the experience traumatized every band member. Not only did residential schools become a place where many children were sexually, psychologically and physically abused, but they also separated families and kept children and parents from sharing important knowledge and work. Residential school was "devastating to the Indian economy and was the beginning of the end of trapping as it was known...When the children were forced to go to school, it broke an important link in the cycle and increased the workload of the parents...[T]he children lost contact with their culture and lifestyle of which trapping was a very important part. Many of these children never got back to the trapline."\(^{31}\) Children lost the opportunity to learn a way of life that had helped to sustain First Nations for centuries, and parents had to take on work when otherwise their children would have helped them. Along with practical hunting, trapping and fishing knowledge, families could no longer share the stories that had at one time been passed to every generation. This gap in knowledge has had serious repercussions for all Native peoples.

For the Cheslatta people, residential schools began to erode people's sense of family and community, which has almost completely broken down since the band relocated

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\(^{31}\) Robin Kendall, former Regional Fur Supervisor for British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. Interviewed by Mike Robertson, October 30, 1992.
in 1952. School not only left children without the skills they needed for parenthood themselves, but also taught children that abuse was an acceptable outlet for anger and frustration. School also taught them that violence meant power and control. One Cheslatta elder says that her father “was sometimes abusive” towards her and her siblings. He went to residential school and she feels that maybe his school experiences taught him to be abusive. In light of the work being done on the legacy of residential schools, it is reasonable to assume that child and spousal abuse are indeed linked to lessons learned in the schools. Peter Gagnon, the Cheslatta Band’s drug and alcohol counsellor, says that Lejac had a lot to do with beginning and perpetuating a cycle of abuse. Another elder says that he had siblings that went to school, and when they came back they seemed not to have time for him. This may be because the children that went away no longer knew how to relate to their families when they came home.

No matter the degree of the dislocation, all Cheslatta families suffered from the residential school system. It is significant, however, that most children who went to Lejac returned to their reserves after school rather than moving to the towns. This could help to explain why even residential schools did not prepare the Cheslatta people for their

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33 Peter Gagnon, October 1996.
relocation. It would be reasonable to conclude that residential schools began the process that led to the Cheslatta people's disempowerment and the breakdown in their community. Most Aboriginal communities endured the disruption that residential schools caused, and here the Cheslatta people are no different. However, had there been a greater level of dispersal, the community may have eroded much more rapidly and much earlier than 1952.

It must be stated that there is a very sharp difference between First Nations' experiences of residential schools and those of Christianity. Christianity was much easier for First Nations to incorporate into their traditional world view than the residential school experience which seriously undermined children's self-esteem and damaged many children irreparably. Christianity had spread throughout British Columbia even before the missionaries arrived, so that by the time missionaries encountered First Nations, the latter were already familiar with the Christian message, as opposed to residential schools which were unlike anything Native families had hitherto known.34 Though one could argue that knowledge of Christianity facilitated missionary work, many missionaries had difficult experiences and many Native peoples did not receive the missionaries' work complacently. Missionaries who had tense relations with Native peoples would often try to punish their Aboriginal charges, which instilled fear and obedience in many but undoubtedly kept many others aloof. Abel Peters, a Cheslatta elder, says, "[T]hose days were really rough. Like you know, many years ago when the first priest come around that time you know they could punish people you know, just like kids if they did something serious offence ... against

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Even if the people did not necessarily believe in the priest’s message immediately, they respected and even feared him. Today some are still devout Catholics, but they distinguish between the priests of the Catholic religion and those of the residential schools.

All involved tried to negotiate the subtle boundaries of Christianity and traditional spiritual beliefs. Often their results, or lack thereof, frustrated them. Mike Robertson, who has worked for the Cheslatta people for more than 15 years as senior researcher, says that missionaries had a difficult time dealing with the Cheslatta people. Many times the missionary arrived to preach and try to convert the people. Band members listened patiently but paid little heed to the message. Even before the priest left, band members returned to their traditional spiritual practices. Although the band had built a church on Number One reserve in the late 1860s, it was not until the early 1900s that the Christian message really caught on with the Cheslatta people. Priests, for their part, often learned to communicate with their Aboriginal “charges” in their own languages, which increased the esteem in which they were held. Father Coccola, for example, learned many languages in order to better help Native peoples understand his message. He often related Christian tales to the peoples’ own stories, trying to draw parallels between the two worlds. Father Adrian Morice believed that “religion should be taught in the language of the people.” His biographer, David Mulhall, notes that Morice felt that learning Native languages was

35 Abel Peters, September 1996.
37 Abel Peters, September 1996; Mike Robertson, May 1997; Margaret Whitehead, ed. They Call Me Father.
essential to a missionary's success.\textsuperscript{38}

Often, however, the Native and missionary worlds were diametrically opposed. Abel Peters remembers hearing stories about how the priest convinced the people that their practices were evil. "[F]irst time priest they come out, and then ... the Indians they ... show that kind of tricks. [Y]ou know how they drum those guys, they drum. And this guy ... he lift up, way up ... he just lift way up and he comes back down slow. And the priest, you know, he was there, and he watch. When this guy he did that again and this priest he pull out his cross, show it to him that guy he falls down." Ever since that time, "the Indians they never, no more everything is have to become religious and everything. Now right from the day nobody saw such tricks anymore.... He says that's the devil's work he tells them.\textsuperscript{39} The priest appointed watchmen, who were to ensure that the people did not revert to their old ways. "We ever do something, just same thing down Cheslatta years ago, same thing. In the church there's a watchman, always watch. Somebody looking across that way, this watchman he brought that stick he keeps always....It was the priest's idea."\textsuperscript{40} Mike Robertson notes that the watchmen were respected and that although the priest appointed them, their authority came from the people themselves.\textsuperscript{41}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{39}Abel Peters, September 1996.
  \item \textsuperscript{40}Ibid. See also Erik Anderson, "Ready for the Religious Relationship"; Margaret Whitehead, ed. They Call Me Father, David Mulhall. Will To Power.
  \item \textsuperscript{41}As noted earlier, the Cheslatta, as well as other Carrier bands, recognized an authority figure, and though this person had limited powers he was greatly respected and the positions of clan leader were prized. There is no indication that the position of watchman carried as much weight as that of clan leader, though still garnered respect. Remember that this was also a time when priests began to pressure First Nations to dispense with the potlatch. The feasts held to celebrate and confer status were driven underground and I surmise that the position of watchman, though certainly not replacing that of chief or leader, may have represented a middle ground of authority between the church and traditional spiritual
\end{itemize}
He adds that Christianity may have been slow to take root among the Cheslatta people, but once it did it caught like nothing before. He tells how the people would announce the priest's arrival by preceding him with shouts and gunfire, welcoming him to the reserves.\textsuperscript{42} They began to attend church regularly by early in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{43} Evelyn Tom is a quiet and softspoken elder who remembers visiting relatives to pray every Sunday. Though the priest usually only visited once a year, band members got together to keep up the faith.\textsuperscript{44} Mary Quaw is another elder who tells of the ritual of prayer. She says that even when the priest was away her family would gather in the church beside their home, sometimes every evening. Church for her family not only became a place of worship but also a place to gather.\textsuperscript{45} The Cheslatta people, like many other First Nations, accepted Christianity largely on their own terms. This is significant, as while Christianity and its coercive component is the subject of great debate among scholars who study Aboriginal history, many conclude that the adoption of Christianity allowed Native people greater flexibility in dealing with non-Native missionaries, government officials and settlers.

As the Cheslatta example demonstrates, Christian ritual became a manifestation of community strength as were the rituals of daily life such as hunting, farming and fishing. People did not only visit each other on Sundays but spent most of their time working with beliefs and traditional band leadership.


\textsuperscript{43}Mike Robertson, May 1997.

\textsuperscript{44}Evelyn Tom, September 1996.

\textsuperscript{45}Mary Quaw, September 1996.
and visiting others. The Cheslatta reserves were spread out along Cheslatta Lake with a series of trails connecting them, and linking reserves to hunting, trapping and fishing grounds. Reserves were usually extended family groupings which were laid out to facilitate community activities. Houses and outbuildings sat along the periphery of an open area which was often garden and farming space. It appears that Cheslatta families arranged their villages in this way to facilitate cooperation in farming and drying, preserving and storing food. Family groups were in close contact with other reserves, although in terms of daily activity the families worked together. Elders remember how much fun they had working with and learning from their parents and other family members. Evelyn Tom remembers that life was very peaceful on the reserves. “There were no motors, no boats or cars... Nobody bothered you.” There were ten children in her family, and each one had chores to do. They all helped one another. “We used to do things right when we helped someone so they’d be happy. Don’t want to hurt their feelings.... No one pushed us to get the work done but we got it all done on time.” The morning was reserved for chores, and in the afternoon they took care of the farming and haying. They had chickens and travelled on horseback. Her grandfather lived on a hill where they used to visit. They brought food to his place and her father’s sisters used to cook vegetables. Afterwards they all walked home together.

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46See map of traditional trail routes.

47Reserves were laid out in 1916 by the McKenna-McBride Commission. The heads of Cheslatta families applied for, and often received, certain land allotments which were classified as reserve. Each reserve was for an extended family group. Cheslatta people had laid out their villages well before the Commission classified the land as reserve. See Mike Robertson, ed. “Cheslatta Indian Reserve Composites.” Grassly Plains: Cheslatta First Nation, 1991, which also includes notes on the Royal Commission, existing improvements on the lands such as housing and agriculture, and reserve acreage.

48Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
Mary Quaw has similar memories of the work everyone shared, which meant, too, that everyone shared the rewards. "[W]e just have big garden and have more vegetables all winter. When we get too much vegetables we used to give it away to families, if they live around us we give it to them....Winter time we go to Grassy's.... Give them fish, a box at a time.... We always share with the rest of the people. Fish too. Everything what we got, we share with the rest of them." Activities varied throughout the year and the children helped with all of them. "Mom used to work really hard....And we makes moccasins, gloves and robes....Springtime and my dad and the boys they do the garden...[W]e have our own chickens and we get eggs, and then springtime when cow had calf...Mom makes lots of butter...." Part of the summer was spent on the lake. "[M]y dad and the boys they build really big roothouse and that's where we fill it up [to last] us all winter... Summer... we go berry picking in August, where we used to live, right over the mountain there's huckleberries, we go with horses and pack the pail beside us." Haying started in July. "And we hay until September. We... watch the garden, and just about September we start to dig the garden out. We put the vegetables away, and after that we started hunting. Moose, all the dry meat, berry picking... we can them, and some we dry them, berries we dry them. We got lots of dry fish, lots of dry meat." They spent the fall and winter hunting and trapping. Wood bent in the spring would be dry enough for snowshoes in the winter.\(^49\)

Chief Marvin Charlie is a strong leader who always makes time to help people understand Cheslatta history. He has worked hard to pass on what he can of the traditions that seem to have been left behind on the old reserves. He tells vivid stories of the work that people shared and speaks proudly of his people's independence.

\(^{49}\)Mary Quaw, September 1996.
Mainly to earn a way of living was to fish, trap, hunting, and some of our people had farms, had hay, had livestocks, our people were well off. We didn’t need no government handouts. We build our own homes. Community get together and they help one another build houses. Everything what we had we earned it, we worked for it. And if they had a spare time they would go to Grassy Plains, look around to the first rancher that lived in Grassy Plains, his name was Billy Bickle, he used to hire all of our people for haying. And many summers we spent in Bella Coola. On the way they trap or harvest berries. And they trade for salmon in Bella Coola and bring that home for the winter. During the stay in Bella Coola they used to work for canneries, we work for farms. [Back at home we] start setting up for the winter, foods, hunting, moose, bear, caribou. Get some mountain goats and things like that. Our people would go trapping early part of October. They would trap till winter time, they stay out in the bush all these times, and Christmas time they come home for a few days and they go back out and you never see them again till June. The fur was cheap but it was plentiful. They made a lot of money, that’s the way they used to buy their farm equipment, furnitures, not one piece of nail or piece of board that was given to us by the government.

Every band member played a role and helped out wherever possible. They learned how to survive at a young age and knew that they could contribute something important to the rest of the band. The people traded their furs and other items for food or clothing, rarely for cash. The cash they earned went towards their farms and homes.

The elders remember these activities fondly, and one of the recurring themes is that everyone helped one another. Some of them say that the conveniences of living on their current reserves make life easier than it was before they relocated. However, they all say that they used to have a sense of community that they no longer feel, and that the convenience does not replace. Chief Marvin Charlie was eight years old when his family moved to Grassy Plains. He was a scared child then, and his parents could not allay his fears because they were just as frightened of moving from their home. Since that time he has learned each family’s history. “That’s what you have to know when you’re a leader for your community.” He also remembers some of the ways in which the community feeling manifested itself.

The community as I understand it back where we used to live in Cheslatta the people

50 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.

51 Mary Quaw, September 1996; Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
help one another.... Some elders are unable to do anything for themselves. The young people would help them... The people loved one another. They visit one another. Sometime they travel two days to get to some relatives and visit them, just to visit them.... People moving around from one place to another. Even in harvesting, fur, people help one another stretch fur and clean furs and that... Community means to me that everybody works together. And build a strong relationship. Everything we do, we support one another.... During the summer we used to harvest fish, gather woods, gather berries, did everything as a family.... My dad used to tell me a lot of stories... The legend of our people. Every night after the meal and the dishes were put away, sit around my dad and he would tell a story. If it wasn't my dad, then other elders that we would go and visit they'd tell us stories. And every time they start to tell stories to the young people they always said this is a word that you may learn to live by. It's a story that you can learn from, it's a story that gives you idea how to protect yourself.... When they tell stories... it always seems to be so true.

The Cheslatta people cherished that feeling of home and community. They often say there was comfort just being with each other.

Pat Edmund adds that people did not have to ask for help. If someone needed something, others would take care of it. “Yeah, in Cheslatta... we used to like I finish haying and my place here, and then I see your place, you never finish haying yet your place. Okay I'll give you a hand and then come around on this place and help you. Soon as we finish your place, we'll go look next place down the road. Oh, he's not finish yet, let's go help him. That's how we work.” Peter Gagnon agrees that helping one another contributed to a strong sense of community. Band members used to have huge gatherings where everyone would get together. As well, the band used to have special elders who would be there to help people with problems. People felt free to go to these elders and would not have to manage their problems on their own.

These memories seem to indicate that although there were problems, most of them were not due to a specific lack in the community. Rather, the people felt challenges and

52 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
53 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
54 Pat Edmund, September 1996.
55 Peter Gagnon, October 1996.
pressures from the outside. However, they still remember the good times they had as a group and maintain that their community was close-knit. They dealt with a change in their traditional economy by incorporating wage labour into their seasonal round of activity. They traded furs, usually for clothing or food rather than cash, and used the cash they earned to build or maintain their farms and homes. They did not have to face, as other First Nations did, the problem of settlers encroaching on their land. There were non-Natives in the area, however they were few, and they enjoyed good relations with the Cheslatta band. Christianity was slow to take hold among the Cheslatta people: they built their church in the 1860s under the instruction of Father Lejac but did not begin to attend church regularly until the 1900s. The slow speed at which Christianity took hold among the Cheslatta was due in part to the priest's absence and to their own lack of interest. In the meantime they slowly adjusted their spiritual practices to incorporate Christianity. In all of this, they incorporated most changes on their own terms at their own speed. They still controlled, if not the changes themselves, then certainly how they adapted to the way their community took shape.

The most serious problem they, and other First Nations faced, was residential school. School exerted a powerful destructive influence in Carrier communities. It taught the children a vicious cycle of abuse, and created a profound gap in the way knowledge was transmitted. One of the results of this, besides the emotional and physical scars the children bore, was that they could not pass on lost knowledge to their own children. Another result was that the younger generations could not experience the same level of

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56 Father Nicolas Coccola repeatedly notes in his memoirs that the Carrier often seemed disinterested in his message. Several times he threatened to withhold services if, for example, the churches on different reserves were not built by the time he returned to the area. Margaret Whitehead, ed. They Call Me Father.
community that previous generations enjoyed and depended upon. Cheslatta people were no different. However, the Cheslatta community was able to withstand those negative experiences in part because their children returned to their reserves and because the community as a whole was still largely secure in itself. The people were still able to define their world and operate within it according to their own needs and desires largely without daily interference. There on the Cheslatta reserves, the community continued, in part, as it had for centuries. The hardest challenges for the people were still to come.
Chapter Three: Political Context

The story of the Cheslatta people's relocation is an extreme case of mistreatment by a government obligated to protect them. When Alcan began to build its smelter at Kitimat, and its dam south of Vanderhoof, the Cheslatta were simply people in the way.¹ Alcan and government officials viewed the Cheslatta as an obstacle to the project that promised wealth and prosperity for the northern interior of British Columbia. Government agents avoided facing their responsibilities to the Cheslatta people when they failed to inform the band that they would lose their land, even though these officials knew months in advance.² As well, agents were responsible for securing fair settlement terms, using all available government resources for the benefit of the Cheslatta people during and after their relocation, and giving all information available to the Cheslatta people, though they did not do so.³ Rather, government agents and Alcan officials were party to a tragedy they could have easily prevented. I argue that the ethos of progress so prevalent in the 1950s, was expressed in the form of resource development projects.⁴ This attitude made it easier for the government to treat the Cheslatta as it did. Development was a high priority, while Native people were not.

Unfortunately, the Cheslatta were not the only people taken from their lands in the 1950s and 1960s. Many were forcibly removed from their territories to make way for resource development projects. People such as the South Indian Lake Cree and the Easterville Cree

³Ibid., pp. 125-127.
⁴It is important to recognize that until very recently, governments did not insist on Environmental Impact Assessments, nor did anyone, government or otherwise, consider that First Nations should be consulted about projects affecting their lands and lives. Although many people are dissatisfied with the current level of environmental protection, and with the consultation process, we must remember that in the 1950s no such standards were in place.
in Northern Manitoba were also relocated to make way for dams, in this case for hydroelectric power. In other cases the government literally swooped down to move entire communities in order to improve their standards of living. The Inukjuamiut and Ahiarmiut people, prompted by government promises of prosperity, were part of a "voluntary" relocation to the High Arctic. Several groups of people in the Eastern Arctic were moved to the High Arctic in the 1950s and 1960s often to help the Canadian government assert its sovereignty in the arctic. The Sayisi Dene of Northern Manitoba were taken from their land under the guise of community improvement. All of these people were subject to the whims of a distant government that had its own agendas for Native people. Aboriginal plans for their own futures were not accommodated or recognized as governments implemented their plans, be they resource development projects or paternalistic ideas of how to improve a community.

The Kemano project, like other resource development projects of the day, was more important to the government than the people whose lives it would affect negatively. Of course many people did benefit with jobs, and the provincial economy gained some much needed diversity. However, some would lose far more than they would gain. Still, many believed that the benefits far outweighed the costs. "If the company goes ahead with the project, ranchers, farmers, trappers, storekeepers and their families are prepared to pay the penalty for

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progress..."9 In the post-war era, development was the driving force behind government actions. Bigger and better' sums up the mentality of the times. Certain people's voices were marginalized, such as the Ootsa Lake settlers who lost their land and the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission (IPSFC) who argued that Kemano would devastate fisheries.10 However, they could not stand in the way of development projects. Progress was the catchword which justified such development, and people were optimistic that the future could only get better.

Caught up in this optimism, the government of British Columbia actively courted Alcan and its proposed aluminum smelter, even going so far as to legislate terms enabling Alcan to move into British Columbia relatively cheaply.11 Aluminum had proven to be a valuable commodity during World War Two, and an aluminum smelter in British Columbia promised jobs and wealth.12 Alcan favoured British Columbia because the provincial government promised cheap land and free water, and thus the company began preliminary investigation into an optimal site for the smelter and hydro plant.13 Neither Alcan nor the government seriously considered the environmental or human consequences. The government refused to hear settlers' concerns or consider those of salmon interests, and this was not unusual for

9 Prince George Citizen. July 28, 1949, p.7. Also see December 22, 1949, p.23; January 12, 1950, p.6; February 2, 1950, p.6

10 Government ignored dissenting voices, and seemed unconcerned about the dam's effects on the fisheries, because Alcan's scientists assured them that measures, such as a cold-water release system, would mitigate any ill effects. See discussion below.


13 Campbell, 58-59, 67.
development projects of the time. Just six years later a similar scenario unfolded when the province began to consider the future Bennet Dam in the province's north.

Those in favour of greater development argued that projects would benefit the residents of the north and the interior areas in that they would provide employment and greater services, and diversify the economy. Logging had been the mainstay of the interior's economy, and as it was unreliable work and vulnerable to market prices it subjected the entire area to periodic recession. Residents of the interior demanded some form of economic stability through resource development such as harnessing the province's rivers for hydroelectric power, and oil and gas exploration. Such projects would in turn allow the government to increase spending on health, welfare and education. New and better infrastructure would also link areas of the province that had once been remote or inaccessible, broaden markets and attract industry.

The interior of the province was certainly the center of unprecedented development. At the time that Alcan first arrived in British Columbia in the 1940s there were at least three other major projects begun or planned. The Pacific Great Eastern railway, which planned to link the north and Peace district with new markets in the south, was hailed as a monumental project.

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16 Berger, p.115.

construction that would increase traffic and business. The extension of the Hart Highway north from Prince George into the Peace district would do likewise, and would also prevent the drain of British Columbia resources into Alberta. A major hydro project planned for Quesnel (and later cancelled) was lauded as a long-awaited source of cheaper power for northern residents. New development "merit[s] generous financial assistance as being a useful measure of reconstruction and rehabilitation." Any new business attracted to the interior was a sign of growth, and reaffirmed the link between progress, expansion and economic development.

The drive to develop the province had begun in the 1940s, particularly after the Second World War. In the late 1940s British Columbia was governed by a coalition government concerned with attracting industry to the province. In 1942, even before the end of the war, the government had created the Post-War Rehabilitation Council, made up of representatives from all parties in the legislature. The council's mandate was to examine the needs of all areas of the province and recommend a course of action to meet those needs after the war.

The Interim Report of the Post-War Rehabilitation Council was the government's blueprint to develop the province's economy, infrastructure, and revenue. The council most strongly recommended that the government strengthen existing industries such as agriculture

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18 At the time, the Pacific Great Eastern ran from Squamish to Quesnel. The proposed development would extend it north to the Peace district. See Province of British Columbia. *The Interim Report of the Post-War Rehabilitation Council*. Victoria, 1943, p. 123.


and forestry, and encourage new ones such as steel and hydroelectricity to provide steady employment.\textsuperscript{22} An "atmosphere of expectancy about industrial development" began to permeate discussions about and attitudes towards the economy of the interior.\textsuperscript{23} People felt that the government should more strongly regulate resource exploitation, which would help to determine the direction of British Columbia's industries as well as stabilize growth and development.\textsuperscript{24}

The sparsely populated interior of the province was rich in natural resources, which because they were undeveloped led people to believe that the region's economy suffered.\textsuperscript{25} Economic stability eluded settlers, in part because it was difficult to access the resources and few companies or individuals had faced those challenges. Nevertheless, the region's economy was in fact complex and quite well-established considering the Native economy which was based on amalgamation of wages and traditional activities. For example, the Cheslatta people farmed, trapped, hunted and fished, as well as worked for non-Native farmers for wages, food or clothing. This economy went unappreciated, as people considered Native people backwards and unproductive because they did not fully participate in (and were often denied access to) the mainstream, non-Native economy.

These attitudes are exemplified in the ease with which the government could proceed with large-scale projects despite the potential negative effects on people's lives. The Cheslatta people were not consulted about, or even informed of, the proposed project. They

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22}Province of British Columbia. \textit{The interim Report of the Post-War Rehabilitation Council}. Victoria, 1943. See also \textit{Citizen}. April 28, 1949, p.2; Mitchell. \textit{WAC Bennet}, p. 74; Campbell. \textit{The Story of Alcan}, p. 68.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Berger. \textit{Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry}, p.xix. Berger is referring to northern industrial development but the idea is appropriate in this context as well.
\item \textsuperscript{24}Mitchell, 76-77, 255-57.
\item \textsuperscript{25}R.E. Powell, president of Alcan: Canada, quoted in Campbell, pp. 65-66.
\end{itemize}
were a small group of people, numbering about 150, which made it easier for the government to ignore them.\(^2^6\) As D.J. Allan, Superintendent of Reserves and Trusts said to W.S. Arneil, British Columbia Indian Commissioner, "I do not assume we should stand in the way of a development such as that proposed by the company even though it may mean the Indians will lose two or three small reserves."\(^2^7\) There is some evidence that Allan was unaware of the extent of the damage because Arneil, the man responsible for negotiating with the Cheslatta, had misled him.\(^2^8\)

The agents of the provincial government were not the only ones eager to secure a deal, as Alcan proved to be serious about building in British Columbia. In 1943 Premier John Hart had opened negotiations with Alcan, but it was in 1948 that these talks proceeded with an air of seriousness.\(^2^9\) As part of the ongoing discussions, perhaps to facilitate an arrangement, Alcan opened an office in Vancouver and began an advertising campaign aimed at convincing the public of the benefits of aluminum.\(^3^0\) According to Duncan Campbell of Alcan, the public did not need much convincing. He claims that the 1949 provincial election was fought largely on the issue of Alcan's presence in British Columbia.\(^3^1\) The return of a majority coalition government, as well as an opinion poll stating that 93% of people interviewed believed Alcan's project was good for British Columbia, was all the


\(^{2^7}\) Allan quoted in Dick Byl. Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender. 1992, p. 27.

\(^{2^8}\) Ibid, 27, 34, 71, 99. This will be covered more thoroughly in chapter 3.


\(^{3^0}\) Citizen. July 15, 1948, p.2.

\(^{3^1}\) Campbell, The Story of Alcan, 68-69.
encouragement Alcan needed to act on its development plans. Alcan's proposed smelter called for an estimated expenditure of $500,000,000 and the province would go to great lengths to ensure its completion. In an interview with the Prince George *Citizen* in April of 1949, Premier Byron Johnson is quoted as saying, "I did everything I could to persuade them to come in... If we do not get [Alcan] into British Columbia, I for one will be very disappointed...[I]t will provide the employment we want...All they want from the people of B.C. is the right to use water now running from the mountains into the sea." In 1948, Minister of Lands and Forests, E.T. Kenney (after whom Alcan's dam was named), wrote an official invitation to Alcan in which he noted that three separate watersheds were set aside for Alcan's preliminary investigations and engineering studies. The province promised the company water licenses and amended legislation, if necessary, in order that "such a project might be economically pursued to the mutual advantage of both our Government and your Company." Alcan accepted Kenney's invitation and hired International Engineering Company Inc., to investigate the feasibility of locating in British Columbia.

No evidence has been found that Alcan requested laws to be changed or that existing legislation would make the project too expensive to carry out. Nevertheless, in 1949 the government of British Columbia passed Bill 66, the Industrial Development Act (IDA). The IDA

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32 *ibid.; Citizen*. April 29, 1949, p.7. Public opinion was generally favourable. People expected that Alcan would bring further industry to British Columbia by providing extra power for new business. As well, the sheer magnitude of the project inspired something close to awe in some, leading to optimistic editorials about the province’s bright industrial future and great luck to have attracted such an industrial giant. *Citizen*. December 28, 1950, p.2; January 22, 1951, p.2; *Burns Lake Review*, July 28, 1949. People in the area who would lose their land were naturally opposed to the project and felt that Alcan was treating them unfairly. See various issues of the *Burns Lake Review* and *Burns Lake Register* between 1949 and 1953. Major R.C. Farrow, Comptroller of Water Rights, dismissed the residents’ concerns in 1949 on the grounds that landholders would be compensated. See Campbell, *The Story of Alcan*, p. 74; Christensen *Too Good to be True*, 45-48.

33 *Citizen*. April 28, 1949, p.7.

34 Campbell, 58-59; Rankin-Finlay, 14.
was the foundation for the 1950 Agreement between Alcan and British Columbia and was perhaps formulated to circumvent future difficulties in granting Alcan its water license. The Act gave the government the power to accommodate Alcan and guaranteed Alcan that political opposition would not halt the Kemano project. The IDA states that "[n]otwithstanding any law to the contrary" the government may sell or lease "any Crown land or interest therein" and grant a water licence to use or store "any unrecorded water in the Province" to anyone wishing to establish or expand an aluminum industry in British Columbia. Furthermore, the government was authorized to enter into any agreement for those purposes.

The 1950 Agreement would likely have been signed even without the IDA, as the surveys had already begun, and the government and Alcan had started negotiations for the Agreement in 1949. The importance of the IDA, then, is not so much what it accomplished as what it symbolizes. That the provincial government was so eager to facilitate an enterprise of this magnitude without independent surveys of its implications shows a serious lack of confidence in its ability to attract stable industry. The "government thought it had to hand over sweeping powers as the price it had to pay for development." And that lack of confidence, combined with the attitudes of DIA officials, led to actions such as those perpetrated against

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35 Bev Christensen goes further and suggests that the IDA was a means to avoid public hearings into the Kemano project. However, as the 1949 election results were interpreted as being in favour of the project, there is reason to believe that the government would be optimistic that opposition would be minimal and would thus make avoidance of hearings unnecessary. See Christensen, pp. 72-73; Citizen. March 9, 1950, p.6. It is possible, however, that the IDA was more a form of insurance that Alcan would pursue the project. Campbell says that Alcan was unwilling to invest millions without some sort of guarantee that the project would go through. See pp. 66-69; Citizen. February 2, 1950, p.5 The provincial government, anxious to accommodate Alcan, provided that guarantee in the form of the IDA.

36 Rankin-Finlay, pp. 31-33; Campbell The Story of Alcan, p.84.

37 Rankin-Finlay, p.24.

38 Campbell, p.73.

39 Howard DeBeck, Comptroller of Water Rights, quoted in Christensen, p.74.
the Cheslatta two years later. The Industrial Development Act, and the Agreement which followed it, are striking for their generosity, however even more noteworthy is the cavalier attitude displayed towards the people of the area and the environment the project would affect. The provincial government seemed to agree with Alcan official R.E. Powell, who declared that certain rivers in British Columbia had done "little or nothing so far" for the people of the province, and likely would never do anything without a huge amount of work (supplied by Alcan), for which the citizens should be grateful.\footnote{Campbell, p.66.}

It is common nowadays to believe that the 1950s were some sort of "environmental dark ages," and the 1950 Agreement reflects the view that resources could be free to anyone who would develop them.\footnote{British Columbia Utilities Commission Hearings (BCUCH): 4: S0035; S0004; S0006; S0009.} However, although the provincial government was willing to give away rights to all of the water in the Nechako River, there is plenty of evidence to suggest they knew, or had been warned about, the implications of their actions.\footnote{Rankin-Finlay, p.70.} Many people who expressed their concerns were laughed off or simply ignored. For example, Senator Tom Reid of New Westminster, maintained that the proposed plans were dangerous to salmon runs.\footnote{Hansard, June 25, 1948; Burns Lake Review. December 15, 1949. Reid was also a member of the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission (IPSFC), the body designated to watch over salmon interests.} On more than one occasion he voiced his opinions only to be dismissed as eccentric.\footnote{["Reid was a well known figure in Ottawa, who sometimes entertained his fellow guests in the Chateau Laurier with midnight strolls in the corridors playing his bagpipe." Campbell, p.63. "Please pay no attention to the remarks of Senator Reid, or any other Senator...some of whom are apt to be men who were thorns in the side of the Government in the House of Commons. Experience tells me that the remark of any Senator has no impact whatever on public opinion." C.D. Howe to R.E. Powell, April 6, 1950, quoted in Campbell The Story of Alcan, p.89.]}

Harold Winch, leader of the provincial CCF, was another who criticized the project as giving away
too much for too little. Although Winch did not oppose industrial development, he did protest the sale of water and the perpetual licence.\textsuperscript{45} Winch, however, was easy to dismiss as a left-wing radical. Winch’s penchant for strident remarks against large corporations did not help his cause, and political opponents did not often take him seriously.\textsuperscript{46}

Other objections by “fisheries interests” and settlers were dismissed as invalid or as “the price of progress.”\textsuperscript{47} When the government did acknowledge that fisheries would be affected at all, officials felt that “the value to the economy of the province ... far outweighs the possible losses to the fisheries.”\textsuperscript{48} When the province issued the licence for the Nechako River, the water comptroller, Major R.C. Farrow, overruled objections on the grounds that Alcan’s plans and specifications were subject to federal fisheries and BC Games Commission approval.\textsuperscript{49} Later, the government would claim that the project would not hurt the fish at all, citing as evidence a report by IPSFC that cold-water release would mitigate the potential damage to the salmon runs.\textsuperscript{50} One proposal was to install a release facility in the Kenney Dam but this never happened. Instead, Alcan chose to store water in the Cheslatta / Murray Lake reservoir, which was less expensive, but would flood the Cheslatta reserve lands.\textsuperscript{51} The impending flood was not common public knowledge.

The Cheslatta Alternative, as it became known, was part of the 1950 Agreement with

\textsuperscript{45}Rankin-Finlay, p.16; Campbell, pp. 67-68; Christensen, p. 76; BCUCH 2:138.
\textsuperscript{46}Mitchell, pp. 72-80; various issues of the Prince George Citizen, 1948-51.
\textsuperscript{47}Editorial, Burns Lake Register, August 25, 1949.
\textsuperscript{49}Citizen. February 2, 1950, p.6.
\textsuperscript{50}Citizen. January 25, 1951, p.6.
the provincial government, which further highlights the province's lack of confidence in its ability to attract and maintain industry by its sweeping generosity. This Agreement, signed December 29, 1950, authorized Alcan to construct the Kenney Dam and the Kitimat smelter. Alcan was granted rights to store, divert and use the water and all of the land necessary for construction and operation of the smelter.\(^{52}\) They were authorized to buy the land for no more than the minimum specified in the Land Act. The Agreement also gave Alcan a perpetual water licence (to be granted on all construction completed by December 1999); mineral rights on all land before flooding; rights to the timber in the reservoir without stumpage fees; all of the water in the Nechako and Nanika rivers; a harbour and townsite at Kitimat (approximately 14,000 acres for about $1.60 per acre); cheap water rates based on the price of aluminum, so that even now Alcan pays approximately 10% of what other hydroelectric producers in British Columbia pay (water rentals are in lieu of all taxes and other charges). This Agreement was to prevail over the Water Act in case of any conflict, as well as over any future general statute.\(^ {53}\)

In terms of human conflict, Alcan was authorized to expropriate land if anyone refused to sell. Ootsa Lake settlers feared expropriation because an arbiter would then decide the value of their land, and with land prices being low, they worried they would be under-compensated.\(^ {54}\) The Cheslatta Band was never consulted or even notified.\(^ {55}\)

Alcan and the government proceeded to conduct new surveys in conjunction with construction of the Kenney Dam, though no one informed the Cheslatta whose lands were

\(^{52}\)Campbell, pp. 92-95.

\(^{53}\)Christensen, pp. 74-76; Rankin-Finlay, pp. 14-15, 26-27.

\(^{54}\)Christensen, pp. 52-55.

\(^{55}\)Byl, pp. 13-24.
being studied.\textsuperscript{56} It is almost as though the government presumed them to have already vanished. The Tweedsmuir Park Archaeological Project was formed in 1951 by a special grant from Alcan and the government of British Columbia. For two months, University of British Columbia archaeologists surveyed the Nechako reservoir area, and anthropologist Wilson Duff conducted ethnographic surveys.\textsuperscript{57} Many of the Cheslatta people were away from their reserves, and Duff reported that "a lack of suitable informants" prevented him from gathering much information on his brief trip to the area.\textsuperscript{58} As well, Alcan conducted surveys all through the summer and fall of 1951 in order to appraise the land that would be flooded for compensation purposes. The government relied on the company's appraisals without conducting any surveys of its own.\textsuperscript{59}

Alcan had already begun construction, not only in advance of the surveys, but also before the government officially granted its water license. Before construction could even begin, the Nechako River had to be diverted and the land had to be dry.\textsuperscript{60} In order to remain on schedule, Alcan needed to begin as quickly as possible. This meant that even as the surveys were taking place, the Nechako River was re-routed. Later, as Alcan's reservoir filled, the river was shut off entirely.

Negotiations with Native people were not high on Alcan's or the government's list of

\textsuperscript{56}Mary Quaw, September 12, 1996; Abel Peters, September 26, 1996; Dick Byl, pp. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{57}C.E. Borden. \textit{Results of a Preliminary Survey of the Nechako Reservoir in West Central B.C.}. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1951, p.1.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., p. 3.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p. 24; Mike Robertson, ed. \textit{Cheslatta Indian Reserve Composites}. Cheslatta Band, November 5, 1991; see also "General Comments on Cheslatta Reserves" in Mike Robertson, ed. \textit{Resident Land Sales}. 1991.

\textsuperscript{60}The legality of this issue is questioned in Dick Byl's \textit{Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender}. See also Christensen \textit{Too Good To Be True}, p. 16.
priorities in 1951. Instead, Alcan was preoccupied with blasting a tunnel through Mount DuBose, named after Alcan vice-president McNeely DuBose. The purpose of the tunnel was to provide a safe place for the powerhouse that would power the smelter at Kitimat. The tunnel is 16 miles long and was blasted through the rock in 50 days, an incredible engineering feat. The tunnel, along with the Kenney Dam, the construction of the power lines that would conduct the power from the Kenney Dam to Mount DuBose to the Kitimat smelter over Kildala Pass, and all of the roads and related work were expected to be complete by some time in 1952.\textsuperscript{61} At first Alcan assured Ootsa Lake residents that flooding would not occur for another five or six years. Instead, a faster construction pace precipitated by the Korean War and American aluminum shortages meant that flooding would be complete by 1953.\textsuperscript{62}

Still no one told the Cheslatta people that they would soon be forced to leave their land, houses, and belongings when their reserves were flooded too. The government fully embraced the ethos of progress and placed industrial development above a few settlers in a sparsely populated area.\textsuperscript{63} The government and many citizens of British Columbia were so hungry for development that it assumed monumental importance, despite warnings that Alcan’s project would adversely affect the fisheries, and completely oblivious to the negative effects on the region’s settlers. Many people instead assumed that Alcan’s Kemano project would strengthen or even replace the existing “undeveloped” economy of the area and provide jobs enough to increase the population. Opposing voices went unheeded, and the Cheslatta people remained unaware of the project that would change their lives so quickly.

\textsuperscript{61}For an excellent description of Alcan’s construction in British Columbia, see Christensen, particularly chapter one, “359 Billion Beer Glasses,” pp. 11-36.

Chapter Four: Relocation

While many people in British Columbia celebrated Alcan's development, the Cheslatta people remained unaware of both the project and its consequences. Even band members who lived away from the reserves did not realize the impact that Alcan's project would have on their lives. Department of Indian Affairs officials did know, and could have significantly lessened the project's ill effects for the Cheslatta people. Had they received adequate warning, reasonable compensation, or even had they been shown some respect in the course of negotiations, they may have been able to preserve or recover their community and dignity. However, events between 1951 and 1957 illustrate that DIA agents consistently worked against the Cheslatta people, leaving them demoralized and divided. The process by which the Cheslatta lost their land disempowered the people and accelerated the community breakdown that first began with residential schools.

Underlying the actions of DIA agents was a deep-seated racism fostered by government policies. Department officials were not unique in their attitudes, despite their regular contact with Native peoples, and they accorded very little respect for traditional ways of life that they did not understand. Government policy dictated that Native peoples should be persuaded to assimilate into non-Native society, which would ultimately release governments from their responsibilities towards Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, government policies and popular attitudes made it very difficult for Aboriginal people to leave their reserves and participate fully in the larger society, even when they wanted to. Employers would not hire them, yet hunting and fishing restrictions, and the ban on the potlatch, stifled their traditional economy. Off-reserve they could not obtain certain benefits, meagre as they were, such as government housing. Increasingly, Native peoples were forced to rely on government welfare and then were condemned for doing so.
Furthermore, they usually had no choice as to where or how to live their lives. As noted earlier, several Canadian First Nations were relocated in the 1950s without their consent. Policy makers assumed that First Nations could not make even basic decisions, and therefore could not be trusted with the means to improve their situations, such as the same access to education as mainstream Canadian society.¹

As early as 1951, Alcan and the province of British Columbia conducted surveys that would determine the future of the Cheslatta people. Some of these were engineering surveys, conducted in conjunction with the Kenney Dam construction. Other surveys took inventories of the land, such as the 1951 Archaeological Survey sponsored by the University of British Columbia. One of the most important surveys as far as the Cheslatta were concerned was conducted by Mr. Davis, Alcan’s land appraiser, who determined the amount Alcan would pay the Cheslatta people for their land.

Officials realized that, rather than build a cold water release facility into the Kenney Dam, the “Cheslatta Alternative,” or damming the Murray and Cheslatta water system, would be a cheaper and, according to Alcan, safer way to release cooling water into the Nechako river to mitigate the dam’s ill effects on the salmon fishery. Although the Indian agents knew that this option would flood the Cheslatta’s traditional lands, they did not inform the Cheslatta people, nor did they negotiate with Alcan as to the compensation the Cheslatta should receive. The Indian agents seemed to think that Alcan’s offers were fair

and reasonable, although the offers were for the depreciated costs of buildings and improvements, and not replacement value.²

Often the surveyors sought out band members to provide information, as did Wilson Duff. Neither Duff nor Borden of the archaeological survey specified what they had hoped to gain from the ethnography. Duff seems to have been concerned with Carrier social organization in general, and noted that the Cheslatta were a “sadly decimated and widely scattered group.”³ It appears that many of the Cheslatta were unwilling to discuss their clan divisions, and thus were deemed unsuitable informants. Borden reported somewhat better luck. His survey team was able to interview one Cheslatta man, Jack Michel, who pointed out many things that they would have missed otherwise, such as the ways in which the people had marked certain trees. Borden notes that a more extensively trained ethnographer would have obtained much more useful information from the man.⁴

The authors' definitions of useful information reveal much about the attitudes of the times, and reflect the esteem in which Native peoples were held. Duff considered good material to be historical details about social units and intermarriage. His suggestion that the Cheslatta were not knowledgeable implies that only such material was relevant. The

²See Dick Byl. An Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, pp. 127-133.

³Duff, p. 29. In this conclusion he does not seem to have accounted for the Cheslatta's seasonal dispersal to work in canneries or to hunt, although he does note that most Band members were away from their reserves. As well, his claim that the Cheslatta were “sadly decimated” does not seem to have any statistical foundation. Margaret L. Tobey notes that since 1929 when the first population figures were obtained, the Cheslatta population had remained relatively stable, and had actually increased between 1939 and 1963. Furthermore, while not the most populous Carrier band, several other bands in the area had similar population figures. See Margaret L. Tobey. “Carrier.” in June Helm, ed. Handbook of North American Indians Volume 6: Subarctic. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981, p. 416. It is also important to note that Duff's visit to the Cheslatta reserves was brief, conducted in a matter of days. It is unlikely that he could have gathered significant information in that short of time, especially if, as he notes, most people were away from their reserves.

⁴Borden, p. 6. The man's name was more likely Michel Jack. There is no record of anyone named Jack Michel at the Cheslatta reserves, and Jack is a common surname among the Cheslatta people.
Archaeological data is similar in that the researchers listed few sites as worthy of further investigation. Places that had been used relatively recently were considered "unimportant," including one that had a grave and was reported to be "an old site," possibly because they contained abundant material. The places that warranted closer examination were mostly very old living areas and those that had been used to prepare food. The apparently arbitrary selection of sites indicates a lack of concern for most of the recent history of the First Nations in the area. The more modern material found was dismissed, although all of it was to be flooded. Curiously, the Native peoples to whom this material belonged were not given the opportunity to claim their artifacts before they disappeared under water. Furthermore, the team conducted the entire survey in the space of one month. Mike Robertson, senior researcher for the Cheslatta band, feels that they could not gain even a basic understanding of the material in that short space of time.

Contrary to Commissioner W.S. Arneil's claims, nobody consulted the Cheslatta people during Alcan's appraisal survey, later causing DIA much grief. Davis and DIA officials toured the Cheslatta area in the summer and fall of 1951 to evaluate the Cheslatta holdings. These appraisals did not include the replacement value of houses or improvements on the land, but the depreciated costs. Then, in a convoluted and inaccurate series of "forced" calculations, DIA officials assigned lesser values to the buildings and

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5Borden, p. 14.

6Recently, the Royal British Columbia Museum has begun a reclamation project whereby First Nations have the opportunity to reclaim their artifacts, providing they have suitable storage facilities. Robert Diaz, personal communication, August 1997.


8Byl. Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p. 43.

9See Appendix 1 for a list of the key players in the Cheslatta negotiations.
land for which the Cheslatta would be compensated. DIA officials Arneil and Howe had not acknowledged to their superiors, let alone the Cheslatta people, that they had accepted Alcan’s initial offer without bargaining on behalf of the band. They then needed to justify why the compensation fund was less than the original estimate, which also included $3500.00 that Alcan and DIA had agreed upon (again without Cheslatta input) as a price for moving expenses. In the meantime, Davis filed his report on the value of the Cheslatta land. Band members would not learn of this report until they tried to claim their compensation nearly one year later.

On April 3, Alcan executives and DIA officials met with Cheslatta people to notify them of the impending flood. They greeted the news with shock, horror, fear and incomprehension. Cheslatta people had had very little contact with the Indian agent prior to this meeting, leading to the remark that perhaps the people had been left on their own for too long, as they had become too set in their own ways and were difficult to deal with. W.J. MacGregor, DIA regional supervisor for Vanderhoof; Robert Howe, Indian Agent; and Ralph Andros, Assistant Indian Agent, the three men sent to negotiate with the band, were unsympathetic. They told the band that if they did not vacate their land immediately they would be sent to jail. Band members had no one to advise them, as Cheslatta hereditary Chief Louis had died the previous year. The Indian Agent appointed a new chief and two councillors, and set another meeting for April 16. He advised people to begin moving right

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11 Byl, pp. 42, 62.


13 Chief Albert George, transcript of meeting, 1981.
away. Five days later, on April 8, the water of Cheslatta Lake began to rise.¹⁴

People began to gather at Bel-ga-tse #5 reserve for the meeting with Alcan and DIA agents, although some members were on their traplines and could not be contacted. The ice on Cheslatta Lake was beginning to break up, making travel dangerous. MacGregor, Howe, Andros, and E.A. Clarke of Alcan, were delayed when the weather closed in and prevented their helicopter from making the trip to the reserve. People who had gathered for the meeting grew anxious when they were forced to wait four days until the officials arrived. The negotiations were already off to a hostile start as their food was running out and their tempers were short.

When the meetings convened on the morning of April 20, Cheslatta people presented the negotiators with a list of demands that were immediately deemed "fantastic and unreasonable."¹⁵ Included on the list was the demand that Alcan buy new lands and buildings for the people before the move, and that Alcan compensate them for the traplines they would lose. Responding to these demands, Clarke told the people that Alcan and the Department had already discussed and settled upon "fair and just" compensation. They advised band members that compensation included money for traplines, and furthermore that Alcan would pay them on a rate similar to, if not better than, the non-Native Ootsa Lake residents who were also surrendering their lands.¹⁶ Clarke's statements were patently

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¹⁵Byl, Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p. 46.

¹⁶Ibid.
false, as Alcan paid the Ootsa Lake residents far more than the Cheslatta people. Clarke was in the midst of negotiations with one Ootsa Lake family at the time, and would have known the terms of other settlements. His words also did nothing to appease the Cheslatta people, who were not convinced that they were being treated fairly.

The meeting did not proceed smoothly. If the Indian agents and Alcan expected the Cheslatta people to give into coercion easily, they were mistaken. Had they foreseen problems they most certainly would have approached the band sooner. Rather, Arneil was confident enough in the outcome that he misled his boss in Ottawa when asked months earlier to report on the state of discussions with the band. His assurances that negotiations were well in hand even before they had begun, indicate that he fully believed there would be little resistance to the surrender. The scheme that the Indian agents later used to satisfy the conditions set by the Indian Act, namely the forgery of surrender documents, had not yet been devised. The agents' reaction to the Cheslatta resistance is further indication that they had not expected problems. Officials labelled Abel Peters in particular, translator for the band and a World War II veteran, truculent and an obstacle

17 For example, a non-Native resident of Cheslatta Lake at the same time received $12,802 for 32 acres and a small cabin. This was five times the amount per acre given to the Cheslatta people. See Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back. Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1996, p.479. See also Dick Byl, Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p. 47.

18 Byl, p. 49.

19 Ibid., p.34.

20 Ibid., p. 43.

21 The Indian Act requires that a majority of band members vote on the surrender and that it is approved by a majority vote. As well, surrender documents must be signed by the elected chief and councillors (they had been appointed, not elected) and that terms and conditions of surrender must be negotiated with the band. For a full discussion of the legality of the Cheslatta case, see Dick Byl's Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender. More will be said about the Indian agents' scheme below.
to settlement. The agents displayed a lack of foresight in not approaching the band. Worse, though, are the lengths they went to in order to hide their mistakes, at even further cost to the band than necessary. It must be remembered that the Indian agents were obligated to secure the best possible deal for the band.

As the meeting continued into the late afternoon and evening of April 20, it became clear that the Cheslatta people would stick to their demands, and the agents grew increasingly impatient. The officials simultaneously cajoled and harassed the band. They told people that they would be set up in a manner comparable to or better than their current conditions, and that whatever they could not take with them would be replaced. They did not tell the people that they could refuse to surrender, that they had the right to a lawyer, or that they could fight the project. Instead they strictly controlled the negotiations, and agents told them that if they did not surrender their land they would still have to leave but would get no compensation. Former Chief Albert George, now deceased, said, "They said they were going to wash us down the lake anyways, so we had better move." Abel Peters remembers vividly that the restrictions increased the people's fear. "No young people allowed, and no pencil allowed. No, you're not supposed to carry pencil or anything. They just have to speak for yourself. [T]hat's how it was... that's how come people they got so scared, you know. What's the idea? We were not allowed pencils or anything to write down. And so another thing is that they don't want us to tell other people outside about what's we gonna do and all that. That's DIA's idea! That's why I got so mad,

22Abel Peters, September 26, 1996; Mary Quaw, September 12, 1996; Dick Byl, p. 49.
23Byl, p. 39.
24Chief Albert George, interviewed December 7, 1981.
you know." Mr. Peters says he felt a lot of pressure as the interpreter for the band, and he was the brunt of much of the agents' frustration.\(^{25}\)

The meetings adjourned that evening with no progress having been made.\(^{26}\) Alcan's E.A. Clarke left to spend the night at the Kenney Dam site with MacGregor and Howe, while Andros spent the night in the priest's cabin on the reserve. That night, dam engineers told MacGregor and Howe that the water would not rise as quickly as once thought, so the rush to move the Cheslatta people was not so urgent after all. MacGregor believed that it would be wisest to allow the negotiations to proceed at their fast pace, because if given more time to think, the Cheslatta would be more difficult to deal with.\(^{27}\)

That evening, Howe and MacGregor devised their plan to negotiate with the Cheslatta people one on one, feeling that once divided, the people would settle more quickly. This was the same tactic Alcan had used successfully in its negotiations with the Ootsa Lake settlers. The next morning, Howe and MacGregor returned to the reserve. Clarke did not go with them.

The Cheslatta still refused to surrender their land. The Indian agents told the people that Alcan would not grant any further concessions, though none had been made in the first place. As Clarke was not at the meeting, it was clear that Alcan had gone as far as it was willing in its dealings with the band. When the people still rejected the compensation


\(^{26}\)I will rely most heavily for this information on Dick Byl's Analysis, as he uses the original memos between DIA agents and Alcan officials for his evidence. Slightly different versions can be found in Christensen's work, as well as the presentations to the BCUC Hearings on Kemano II. The original memos are also reproduced in Mike Robertson's compilation of statements (noted below). These records are now restricted.

\(^{27}\)Christensen, Too Good To Be True, p.85; Byl, Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p.49; Memo, MacGregor to Indian Affairs Ottawa, April 1952, cited in Mike Roberts, ed. Individual Statements Re: Before and After Surrender. Grassy Plains: Cheslatta Band, 1992.
package, the DIA agents began to take the people aside one at a time. "They bring them out one at a time ... my dad and all the old people, they bring them out one at a time, and Alcans DIA said they make them sign by themselves, secret, they tell them sign this piece so you'll get more money when you move to your new place... They lied to them!" Mary Quaw's anger at the unfulfilled promises is still evident forty-five years later. While some people then decided to take what they could get, others held out for more.28

It is unclear when and how the Indian agents decided to forge the surrender documents. It is also unclear what the people signed, when they signed anything at all. Bev Christensen notes that the Cheslatta people deny they signed surrender documents, although transcripts of interviews conducted between 1980 and 1985 show that some people signed compensation papers.29 Abel Peters and Mary Quaw note that when the DIA agents took them aside, they held out as long as they could but eventually signed the documents. Mary Quaw says that her family and Abel Peters were the last to leave, as all the other families had signed in order to get what they could of the compensation money.30 None of the Cheslatta's records, and none of the interview transcripts, show that anyone other than DIA officials signed surrender documents. On the other hand, Dick Byl states in his legal analysis of the Cheslatta surrender, that even the compensation documents were forged or tampered with. One possibility is that those who signed papers in fact signed blank documents, later to be filled in by DIA officials. Some documents were signed

28Mary Quaw, September 12, 1996.

29The difference between surrender and compensation papers must be noted, as it is easy to confuse the two when discussing the myriad forgeries and legitimate documents. Surrender papers were those that Band members were to have signed ceding the rights to their land. Compensation papers were meant to set down the prices that Band members agreed to in order to leave their land.

30Ibid; Abel Peters, September 26, 1996; Abel Peters, transcript of interview, 1984. See also Christensen, p. 87.
with figures partially filled in, the rest to be added at a later date. Still other papers bear a combination of original and carbon-copy print, meaning that the originals were only partially complete at the time of signing.\textsuperscript{31}

On April 21, band members did finally agree to leave their homes, and they dropped all of their original demands on the condition that Alcan bear the total cost of re-establishing the band elsewhere to its (the band's) satisfaction on a comparable basis, meaning that the Cheslatta people expected Alcan to provide homes, farms, equipment, and anything else they could not take with them.\textsuperscript{32} DIA agents agreed to these conditions, though Alcan never met any of them.

The Cheslatta people began moving immediately, taking only their most essential belongings. The Indian agents, who required helicopters to transport them to and from the reserve, expected the Cheslatta people to pack up and move their belongings on foot or on horseback. While he could, Abel Peters helped many people move with his truck. Most people were left to traverse the forty miles to their new homes during spring break-up with only their horses and carts to carry their possessions. Cheslatta people who were present during the evacuation remember this time with pain. Chief Marvin Charlie was eight years old when his family moved from their home to Grassy Plains, yet he remembers clearly. He remembers the long line of people, "like an expedition. But this was not a sports kind of thing... when we came across the river, we had to tie a rope around the wagon or sleigh, both sides, to keep the wagon or sleigh from floating down."\textsuperscript{33} The people camped in the

\textsuperscript{31}Byl examines the forged documents in detail in his \textit{Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender}. He concludes that all of the documents dated April 21, 1952, were "a riot of forgery and deception." See pp. 47-57.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{33}Chief Marvin Charlie, September 24, 1996.
snow at night, and navigated the nearly impassable trails by day. The DIA agents could have requested, even insisted, that Alcan help the people move, but they did not. The Cheslatta people left everything they had ever worked for, and everything they had ever known, behind while DIA agents looked on dispassionately. Howe had written to MacGregor on April 7, acknowledging that it would be “practically impossible for the Indians ... to move ... by team sleigh and wagons under present conditions ....”34 Later, though, Howe would send Alcan a check for $35.00 from the amount given for moving expenses, saying it was unnecessary to use the full amount.35

The people had no homes to move into once they reached Grassy Plains. DIA bureaucracy dictated that they would not surrender money for new land and homes until band members paid for the land themselves.36 Needless to say, however, the forced evacuation had left most of the people suddenly destitute. Thus when they arrived at the new location, most of them continued to live in tents throughout the summer, or else in abandoned shacks or makeshift houses. They moved from one location to another until they found a landowner who was willing to rent to them. Marvin Charlie’s family wandered for three years until his father found a steady job and land. The time spent homeless took

34Byl, p. 65; Mike Robertson, ed. Individual Statements Re: Before and After Surrender.

35Byl, p. 60.

36Mike Robertson explains that because the land they moved to was not yet classified as reserve, the people were without the protection and benefits that come with living on reserve. The people were to have requested their compensation money, which DIA would then pay directly to the existing landowners. However, the Indian Act states that this money was to have been paid directly to the band members themselves. Furthermore, DIA agents refused to surrender the money until the land had been paid for, at which time band members were to have been compensated. Finally, nearly twelve years later, the Cheslatta were granted reserve status for their new parcels of land. Until then, however, the government ignored requests for help with schooling, machinery, livestock and housing because the Cheslatta were not living on official reserves. See also Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back, p. 481; Dana Wagg. “The Cheslatta Story in Brief.” Grassy Plains: Cheslatta T’en First Nation, 1993, p. 2.
its toil on the Charlie family. Marvin's brother Scotty died of tuberculosis, and Marvin himself spent five years in hospital. People lost even the few possessions they brought with them. They had no fields for their livestock, and many eventually let their animals go because they had no means to feed them. In other cases, landowners confiscated, or people stole, livestock grazing in fields.

Memos between provincial and federal DIA agents make it painfully clear that they knew of the people's plight, yet it always seemed to be someone else's responsibility. DIA officials assumed that it was Alcan's responsibility to re-establish the people, after all, those were the Cheslatta's surrender terms. Yet officials did not insist that Alcan find the band new lands or houses. Arneil believed that Alcan had been troubled enough already. "The Aluminum Company have surely paid dearly to the Cheslatta band for the land they acquired and the inconvenience they caused in moving these families ...." Nor could officials decide amongst themselves on a course of action, though they all knew that something had to be done, if only to save the department some bad publicity. In a chilling report on July 21, Howe reminded Arneil that the Cheslatta were still homeless. He went on to say, "It is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs, and if something is not done in the very near future the Department will be subject to adverse publicity and unfavourable criticism." Many families were still homeless for the rest of the summer, and although the

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37 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 24, 1996.
38 Mike Robertson, Cheslatta senior researcher.
39 Byl, p. 63.
40 Arneil to Ottawa, December 20, 1952. Robertson, ed., Individual Statements Re: Before and After Surrender; Byl, p. 82.
41 Ibid., p. 65.
Local people complained to the Department about the Cheslatta's plight, DIA agents took no definitive action.  

The devastation did not end with lost lives and impoverishment. Perhaps the greatest indignity and injustice was yet to come. The people had left most of their belongings at their old reserves. At first they were told that Alcan would replace everything. By mid-summer, however, Alcan began advising DIA agents that the Cheslatta would have to finish moving out, as demolition was imminent. The serious problem of housing still remained, though. While the Cheslatta were homeless they could not even contemplate returning to collect their possessions, as they had nowhere to put them. The department was in a position that it could have seen to the removal and safekeeping of Cheslatta belongings, as agents spent a great deal of time salvaging the contents of the church on reserve #5.  

Yet they used none of this diligence on behalf of the Cheslatta people. Rather, Howe oversaw the demolition of the reserves, which had begun by mid-July. Near the end of August, Howe wrote to Chief Thomas Peter to inform him that band members should remove their belongings before the complete destruction of buildings and property took place in a few weeks. Because this was impossible, the destruction proceeded. In April a few people had tried to hide some of their assets for safekeeping by burying them, to no avail. Alcan's contractors swept the reserves with metal detectors. Eventually, everything left on the reserves was either stolen or burned before the Cheslatta could

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42 Byl, p. 70.

43 Furthermore, the Catholic church insisted upon compensation for the church, to which DIA consented, though there were clear indications that the church and its contents were built by and belonged to the Cheslatta people. DIA furthermore insisted that the church be paid out of the compensation money that Alcan still owed the Cheslatta people. See Byl, pp.102-107, 65-68.

44 Ibid., pp. 65-70.
The heartbreak continued. During its destruction of the Cheslatta reserves, Alcan made a token effort to move the graveyards to higher ground. This was one thing on which the people had refused to compromise. Yet only four graves were eventually moved, the rest apparently too old and fragile to move. Instead, contractors collected all of the grave markers and gravehouses and burned them. Over the ashes they erected a stone cairn. Inscribed on an aluminum plaque are the words: "This monument was erected in 1952 to the memory of the Indian men, women, and children of the Cheslatta Band; laid to rest in the cemetery on Reservation Five, now under water. MAY THEY REST IN PEACE."

This eerie memorial was perhaps a sign of worse things to come. In the period between 1953 and 1957, during testing of flows from the Skins Lake Spillway, the graveyards at reserve #9, which were supposed to be safe from flood waters, completely washed away. This horrifying occurrence was first reported by W.J. Desmarais, Indian agent beginning in 1956. In a confidential memo to Arneil on May 7, 1957, he reported that the water was twelve feet above the expected levels. "The Aluminum Company of Canada Ltd. is aware of this and they ordered the gauge shut in order to inspect the damage, saw that it was irreparable and reordered the gates open. There is absolutely no vestige of the cemetery left to the eye." Desmarais was understandably distressed but not as upset as he knew the Cheslatta people would be. He was also concerned because he had read the files "but there does not seem to be any clause respecting cemetery sites, their removal,

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or any answer as to why they were not relocated." His letter was ignored.

The Cheslatta people were absolutely sick when they discovered what had happened, and the memory continues to cause as much pain as it did forty years ago. At first they tried to go back to the lake to look for the remains of their loved ones. Their searches were futile. The force of the water gouged the earth and carried everything in it away. Evelyn Tom recounts tearfully that the people had taken a lot of heartache, but this was simply unforgivable. Particularly the children buried there, including her sisters, "didn't deserve that! They'd never done anything to anyone!" The Cheslatta people wondered how much more they would have to endure.

Unfortunately, the events surrounding the relocation initiated struggles previously unknown by the Cheslatta community. Band members agree that moving, and the circumstances under which they left their territory, tore apart a group that had once been close-knit. It was as though when DIA agents negotiated with band members individually, they set the tone for the band's history since 1952, which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. Chief Marvin Charlie notes that the disorientation began as soon as they left their reserves. "Our people live in a traditional way one week before we moved. That traditional way of our lives been disrupted immediately after we moved." Very little remained of the people's old way of life. People who had once lived very close to one another were suddenly scattered, not knowing where they would eventually settle. Most of the land they finally occupied was very poor in resources, making it difficult if not

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47 Evelyn Tom, interview September 3, 1996.

48 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 24, 1996.
impossible to make a living or even a subsistence from the land. Hunting, fishing and trapping were restricted, and many families lost their traplines when their land flooded.

Being confined on insufficient land was just one of the adjustments the people had to face. The daily and seasonal routines were completely lost, leaving most people with nothing to occupy themselves. As Mike Robertson writes, "Jobs were scarce. Jobs for Indians were more scarce."49 People began to depend on government money when before most of them had never even seen cash, because most of them could not find work and had no other means of subsistence. Alcohol, never present on the old reserves, became a staple. English eventually supplanted their Carrier language, when at the time of the relocation only one person spoke English well enough to understand what was happening. Partly this is the result of increased immersion in an English world and young people's unwillingness or inability to learn Carrier. Their settlements are so far apart from one another that visiting them all would require a round trip of 173 miles. The Cheslatta people, no longer sharing work and leisure activities, had nothing holding them together. They began to compete for limited resources and government handouts. Bitterness, jealousy and resentment replaced closeness and sharing. They lost their traditions.50

One of the saddest things about the Cheslatta story is that all of it could have been prevented. Knowing the disruption and turmoil the Cheslatta band would face, DIA officials could have done as much to ease the transition as the government did to bring Alcan into British Columbia. The Cheslatta people could have been told much sooner, giving them more time to prepare. DIA could have negotiated for them, rather than pretending to


50 All of this will be explained further in the following chapter.
bargain with them. Officials could have made an effort to locate decent new land for them. None of these things happened. The decision to relocate the Cheslatta people was made without their knowledge, and once the agents informed the band, they had even settled on the compensation. Indian agents solved the problem of lack of official band consent for the surrender by forging signatures and falsifying surrender and compensation documents. Moving was difficult for the band physically and emotionally, and in their new area they were left homeless for months, sometimes years. Their possessions were lost, stolen and burned, and their graveyards destroyed. Such ill treatment has left its mark on the Cheslatta band, making recovery an almost insurmountable task.
Chapter Five: Aftermath

Since 1952 the Cheslatta people have endured the complete dislocation of their once peaceful lives. The Department of Indian Affairs had promised the people that Alcan would reestablish them on a comparable, if not better, basis than they had known on their old reserves. Instead, the new housing and land were sub-standard by Cheslatta accounts.¹ Their traplines were flooded, their land would not hold crops and they did not have jobs. Many were forced to accept government welfare, a foreign concept to such independent people. Suspicion, mistrust and resentment replaced cooperation and reciprocity when the social and economic inequities between people grew. Traditions from the elaborate, such as the potlatch, to the everyday, such as praying together, fell by the wayside. Many began to speak English rather than Carrier, as they needed to learn English to get along in their new environment, and children began to learn and practice the new ways of living in a non-Native world. People turned to alcohol instead of each other, which dramatically increased abuse and neglect. Before the move, Carrier was the language most used, even for the few who learned English in residential school. Alcohol was unknown on the old reserves.

Many elders note that there are positive aspects to their lives in Grassy Plains, such as the close proximity of doctors and schools. However, when they lost their land in 1952 they lost the only lives they had ever known, and they could no longer provide their children with any sort of foundation in the suddenly foreign world. I argue that the most obvious problems the Cheslatta face, such as drugs and alcohol, welfare, suicide and abuse, are rooted in their disempowerment and feelings of helplessness. These problems have become endemic and can be traced to their relocation. Social ills are not unique to

¹Dana Wagg, Cheslatta researcher, July 1996.
the Cheslatta people however, and they occur in most reserve populations where resources are scarce. People have lost the means to care for themselves and now must rely on outsiders for assistance. These problems are more difficult for the Cheslatta to overcome because of the lack of community, which manifests itself in the loss of language, isolation and individualism, and the miscommunication between young people and elders.

Peter D. Elias proposes two ideas that I will explore in this chapter and modify to the Cheslatta situation. First, Elias maintains that an abrupt loss of resources and economic opportunities may increase rates of alcoholism, violence, drug addiction and similar social problems. The Cheslatta people suddenly lost all of their only sources of income and many people were left with nothing to fill their time. They soon became depressed and many turned to alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, they felt they had to compete with each other for limited government funds, which fostered divisions in the community.

Second, Elias states that the widening gap between elders and youth disrupts the flow of information, knowledge and traditions. Although he does not specifically account for the effects of residential schools, he maintains that as generations of children continue to learn from sources other than traditional ones, elders lose their influence with young people. Many Cheslatta people attended Lejac residential school, and the disruption began there. Since they left their homes in 1952, the gap between elders and youth has increased, partly because of geographical distance and a sudden inundation of non-Native ways. Furthermore, Cheslatta people who are now elders were still young adults when they moved and had not had enough time to learn many of the lessons their elders could have

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taught them. Where elders traditionally commanded respect, they now lack the confidence to pass on traditions and claim that young people do not listen. Many young people have lost faith and feel that elders do not have time for them. The rise in social difficulties from the sudden loss of resources, and the disrupted flow of knowledge, help to explain why it has been so difficult for the Cheslatta people to regain the community and culture they lost. To demonstrate these ideas I will first place the Cheslatta relocation in a broader context of relocated First Nations groups in Canada, following the findings of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Secondly I will discuss the kinds of resources the Cheslatta lost and the effects on people when those resources disappeared. Finally I will examine the rifts among the Cheslatta by looking at the relationships between elders and younger people and noting the effects of these relationships on the entire community.

Unfortunately the Cheslatta are among many Aboriginal groups who have lost their land and their ways of life to relocation. Recently the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has linked the problems many First Nations face to the effects of relocation. “[R]elocation has been a major contributing factor in declining health, reduced economic opportunities, increased dependence on government and cultural disintegration... Isolating people from their habitat breaks a spiritual relationship and compounds subsequent... problems.” These problems manifest themselves as the complete breakdown of most aspects of community life.

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4 By ‘younger people’ I am referring specifically to teenagers, however where applicable I also refer to adults and all people not old enough to be termed ‘elder.’

For example, many relocated people lost the sense of identity that had come from a connection with their homeland. Once familiar with their environments, they found that their knowledge and skills were useless in their new locations. This contributed to a profound sense, both physically tangible and emotionally felt, of isolation as people were "set apart culturally by their dialect, customs and inexperience with their surroundings." Feelings of isolation and fear were further exacerbated by unfamiliar living arrangements. For example, the Sayisi Dene were forced to live beside a graveyard when they were moved to Churchill, violating several profound cultural beliefs. In other cases, families were separated, and often people had to live closely with those who would not have been traditional 'neighbours', aggravating old hostilities that had may have been checked by distance beforehand.

Family disintegration not only disrupted traditional social relationships, which is serious in itself, but also compounded the problems of passing knowledge in strange environments where such knowledge may not be practical. Traditional means of passing knowledge were threatened or halted altogether, leaving young people without the strong sense of culture and identity that their elders may have had. As generations grew up in the new environment, that identity was lost completely until the people were permanently displaced, lacking connections to both the old and new surroundings. Traditional support

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6 Ibid., p. 492.


8 Report of the Royal Commission. For example, a group of Hebron Inuit moved from their homes faced poverty and low status in their new homes, and many drifted from place to place, belonging nowhere. The Sayisi Dene recently located in Tadoule, Manitoba, after being forcibly moved to Churchill from their homeland. The young people found it difficult adjusting to life in the bush after living in non-Native society. The conditions in Churchill had been brutal and devastating, yet it was all they had known. The breakdown in Sayisi Dene culture had left them unprepared for either life in town or in the bush. See also Ila Bussidor and Ustun Reinart. Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene.
systems broke down as families turned on each other. Parents could no longer care for their children and even the simplest tasks, such as preparing food, were foreign in the new land. Children attending school learned only English, while their parents often spoke only Native languages, leaving families unable to communicate. As well, alcohol abuse left children without support or protection, and often with little or nothing to occupy their spare time. They learned about a way of life that was unfamiliar to their parents and the adults could not teach them anything about the world they would grow up into.\textsuperscript{10}

Such displacement and sudden helplessness also accounts for a rise in social pathologies such as alcoholism, violence, and suicide. In the Yukon, for example, many groups encountered problems unknown to them on their old reserves, such as neglected children, murders, and substance abuse, all related to the loss of their traditional social organizations.\textsuperscript{11} Parents could not rear their children in the only ways they knew. Gender roles shifted or even reversed, which led to a deep frustration and loss of self-esteem as people no longer knew their place in the world. Individual and community power, strengthened by the security of knowing one's place in the world, weakened. Alcohol became an escape from the pain of relocation and the loss of a world. The Sayisi Dene clearly show how a community could fall apart because of alcoholism, brought on by relocation. "Unable to hunt or trap, scorned by the townsfolk of Churchill, living in grinding poverty, and filled with a sense of powerlessness and loss, most of the adults at Camp-10

\textsuperscript{9}Ila Bussidor and Ustun Reinart. Night Spirits. People were unfamiliar with store bought food and did not know how to prepare it. As well, "[e]ven those few families whose adults didn't drink ate food from the dump." The grinding poverty left them no choice. See pp. 72-73.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

became addicted to alcohol. Within a couple of years, their community collapsed into disorder and despair."\textsuperscript{12} Traditional roles were undermined and community cooperation decreased, making it difficult to move beyond the cycles of abuse, violence and neglect.\textsuperscript{13}

Compounding the attack on social relationships was the sudden loss of resources which created dependence, increased alcohol and drug abuse, and further broke down community cooperation. Self-sufficient people were reduced to welfare as their major or only source of support. "In moves like that of the Cheslatta people, the haste and lack of planning, the absence of consideration for people's interests, and the denial of their right of self-determination practically guaranteed an economic disaster."\textsuperscript{14} This theme has been echoed repeatedly among relocated bands, as the sudden lack of access to traditional resources, and unfamiliarity with or inaccessibility to new ones halted the economic life of the people. The resulting attack on people's self-esteem combined with the grief, uncertainty and powerlessness people felt and still feel, heightened both the lure and the devastation of alcohol and drugs. People were "wrenched from their traditional lands and, consequently, from their traditional way of dealing with things... Elders [often feel] responsible for the disaster...The loss of their homeland left them unable to cope with the challenges of life at a place that belonged to other people."\textsuperscript{15} Systems of caring for and locking out for one another disappeared. Instead people learned to expect to pay and be paid for every favour. Anxiety and fear pervaded everyday transactions when no one could

\textsuperscript{12}Bussidor and Reinart. \textit{Night Spirits}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{13}Report of the Royal Commission, p. 501.

\textsuperscript{14}Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, p. 498.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 491.
be secure in the availability of resources, increasing 'atomism', or individualism. The Cheslatta people experienced all of this and more. Individualistic attitudes began when people discovered they had no homes to move into once they reached Grassy Plains. Whereas before they could have rallied around to help the unfortunate, now all of them were in dire straits. Each person was concerned with his or her own survival and could not afford the luxury of looking out for others. While people wandered around looking for homes and work the regular patterns of daily living disappeared. They were too far apart to visit each other in the evenings, as even families no longer lived together, and did not have the time to tell stories. On their old reserves families lived close to one another and worked together, which gave them the opportunity to share knowledge. In their new land they were scattered all over, separated from each other by sometimes great distances. They could no longer hunt or fish without being harassed by game wardens who told them they now needed permits and licenses, which meant among other things that people could not share food as easily. Instead people grew increasingly conservative with their meagre resources. Such attitudes became more entrenched over time. In part this may be because the Cheslatta people have never recovered their economic stability. At one time the people would have worked together and shared resources even if they were scarce. However, they could not share what they did not have. Nor were they close enough physically to share anything they did have.

It was years before some people could afford to buy or build new houses in Grassy Plains, although non-Native landowners provided jobs and houses for a fortunate few. Mary and Peter Quaw, for instance, rented land and a house by farming for their landlord.

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“And ever payday little bit at a time he took it out so we just bought it ... for $5000 this place and the rest we didn't work it all out but that guy ... he died...”\textsuperscript{17} They had not finished paying for their home but their landlord's death left them suddenly free of their debt to him. Freedom had not come easily, however. Mrs. Quaw's parents had moved into an abandoned house. “And that guy they own the place he said 'You can't live here, you never pay for this place here!' Mom, Dad, they had to move out and they live in a tent ... And I don't know how long after, a year, us we live in a car, my husband was working ... and pretty soon we move to the farm and work for him.”\textsuperscript{18} Their landlord gave them the opportunity to set up a farm for themselves. “And then after we start a little somebody make hay for us, we didn’t have machineries, and then we take half, they take half, white people they make bale hay for us, and after that, we don't get much hay, they take over half....”\textsuperscript{19} They had lost all of their farming equipment when they moved and had to rely on local non-Native farmers who took payment in kind.

It took longer for Marvin Charlie's family to re-establish themselves. They lived in tents for three years. “I know one year we were lucky to find an abandoned house that we moved into, and we lived there for the winter....”\textsuperscript{20} The following spring Mr. Charlie found work as a guide in Tweedsmuir Park. He became friends with an American named Wes Leback, and together they set up a business. Wes Leback also owned cattle and would give the Charlie family cattle as payment for watching the ranch when he was away. They finally seemed to get back on their feet when misfortune struck again. “My dad build house

\textsuperscript{17}Mary Quaw, September 12, 1996.
\textsuperscript{18}ibid.
\textsuperscript{19}ibid.
\textsuperscript{20}Chief Marvin Charlie, September 24, 1996.
and we helped building log house. We build a barn, fence, it was quite a joy for me to, to have a land that we can call our home, a new home. After a year or so we had a big house it burned down we lost everything. And that same summer I lost my youngest brother Scotty.\textsuperscript{21} The memories of his people's trauma are engraved deeply in his mind. He remembers what life was like on the old reserves but fears that the people may never recover the self-sufficiency and peace of mind they used to enjoy.

Abel Peters was beginning to make a comfortable life for himself after returning from the war, though he soon had to leave it all behind. Mr. Peters interpreted for his people during the meetings with Alcan and DIA, and while he tried to make people understand what was happening, he could not have known the extent of the hardships they would soon face. "People there, they didn't want to move ... but I know what's gonna happen ... so I try my best to try and tell them how it gonna be... Well they didn't know it was gonna be any welfare or nothing. We never heard of welfare we come out here."\textsuperscript{22} Welfare was not the first problem they faced, however. "Oh, it was really rough. Oh, when we move out ... and then there no place to live. We couldn't get any house or anything... I was alone and had to live down in a garage ...And the DIA told us they gonna leave us a house, everything you know, but then no, had to wait till quite late about September before finally we got the house. By that time the hay wasn't very good you know, so, still we had to survive it."\textsuperscript{23} He left behind a house only a few years old that he had built himself, along with a sawmill and lumber.

\textsuperscript{21}ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Abel Peters, September 26, 1996.

\textsuperscript{23}ibid.
Homeless and destitute, suddenly they were also no longer free to move about as they pleased. Everywhere they went someone accused them of trespassing. Alcan sent a letter to DIA some months after the move insisting that Chief Thomas Peter be evicted once and for all from his trapline. DIA wrote to Chief Peter soon after. "You realize that ... you are not allowed to live on this land... and if you are injured or lose traps or other like property you will be outside of the law and without the help from this office... [R]emove any personal effects as soon as possible ... in such a matter that you would not cause the Alcan any inconvenience or trouble."24 Alcan owned the land now, and they would not tolerate any trespass. Non-native landowners in Grassy Plains had pretty much the same attitude towards the newcomers, though some were sensitive to the Cheslatta's plight. In a letter to DIA the president of the Burns Lake Board of Trade wrote that landowners would not allow the Cheslatta grazing for their cattle or horses until DIA committed to buy the land. He insisted that the Department attend to the Cheslatta immediately.25 Still, while people saw the problems the Natives faced they often resented the disruption the people caused in their search for new homes.

Laws the Cheslatta had never before encountered impeded their subsistence activities, even when rising water had not destroyed them altogether. People now had to apply for permits and licenses to do what they had always done freely. Evelyn Tom says that non-Natives prohibited them from hunting, and for a while they lived only on rabbits.26 It took some time for the people to understand the new ways and game wardens made

24Dick Byl. Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p. 100, emphasis is Byl's.
25Ibid., p. 70.
26Evelyn Tom, September 1996; Mike Robertson. The Story of the Cheslatta Surrender, pp. 5-7.
numerous arrests to drive home the lesson.²⁷ Hunting, trapping and fishing were growing ever more difficult anyway. Water obliterated hunting and trapping grounds and upset fishing habitats. Some trappers found themselves surrounded by water literally overnight. Evelyn Leon says the rising water nearly stranded her father. One morning as he went to return home he found his way blocked by water. The paths he had used just days before were gone.²⁸ Chief Charlie says that the loss of the land has devastated the Chesiatta people. "Before the move, I think the people were well self-sufficient, and the freedom they had, the freedom to hunt and fish anytime they needed. Where we moved ... we are unable to do the things that we used to do... Cause our tralines and hunting areas have been flooded."²⁹ People tried to keep up as much of their seasonal activities as they could but soon found that even dry land yielded very little.

Even when people could fish or their tralines were not flooded, many of the animals disappeared. By November 1952, R. Kendall, Regional Fur Supervisor for British Columbia wrote to W.S. Arneil informing him that "a majority of seed stock of beaver and rats will be a loss to predators, starvation and freeze-out, not to mention the depletion of the fishery upon which the mink depend so much for their survival."³⁰ Mary Quaw notes that there was not much point in trying to fish or trap after the flood. "[H]ardly anything around our traline now. They cleared out, and even the little animals, they don't hang around. Cause there's no trees... How they gonna live, they live by trees?"³¹ Logging

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²⁷ Chief Marvin Charlie, June 1996.
²⁸ Evelyn Leon, interview, October 1996.
²⁹ Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
³¹ Mary Quaw, September 1996.
companies have cleared out much of the land that was not flooded, leaving small animals vulnerable to larger predators. “Squirrel especially. Marten and fisher, they eat them, and squirrels got to have trees.” The flood itself damaged the land and ruined the fishing. “[I]t’s not like before, how it was...I don’t know, it’s just after the flood, all the fish is not good, and the land is not good... It’s just good for nothing down there. We can’t use the land anymore.” Evelyn Tom used to take such pleasure in seeing the animals but now “the fish are spoiled and skinny,” and “all my little friends are gone.” Mrs. Tom says that even the berries are gone. When the animals and land disappeared, so too did the people’s ability to support themselves.

Government money, apparently the only alternative at the time, humiliated and demoralized people, and helped to turn a close-knit community into a group of individuals who resented one another. For one thing, settlement amounts varied because some people, such as Abel Peter, and Mary Quaw and her family, held out for more money than others during the surrender meetings. Secondly, some people received money for new homes sooner than others. Veronica Morris sent a letter to DIA in October of 1952. She accused officials of ignoring her and asked for their attention. “I have sweated for years on end. I want you to pay for that land that is rightfully mine and what are you going to do about me. Do what ever you please thats all I want [sic]. Since you took us off our lands at Cheslatta we have done nothing... But the horses will surely starve this winter if you don’t get us some hay....” Almost immediately people began to look outside the

32 ibid.
33 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
34 Byl, Analysis of the Cheslatta Surrender, p. 70.
community for support and sustenance, rather than looking to each other as they had done on the old reserves. Greed replaced sharing, and mistrust replaced cooperation.

The effects from the loss of traditional resources such as hunting, trapping and fishing, farming and collecting berries, manifested themselves in all aspects of Cheslatta life. Almost immediately people began to act individually rather than as a group. Distance from one another often prevented people from sharing the way they used to, however, many people were simply unwilling to make the effort required to cooperate. Chief Marvin Charlie says that “nobody helps one another. It’s gotta change. We’re strangers amongst ourselves, we’re like one elder described ... as refugees in our own country.” Isolation became a problem for many people soon after the move to Grassy Plains. Chief Charlie points out that people used to travel for days to visit relatives in Bella Coola. That kind of travel nearly ceased after 1952 when people were too busy trying to find work and homes. Even visiting down the road seemed too far. Now many people say that even relatives stopped visiting one another because the distance between each other, both geographically and emotionally, has simply become too great. There is no longer a central reserve, or even groups of reserves, as each family’s parcel of land became a reserve unto itself. Abel Peters notes that the many parcels of land have scattered people all over. “Before down Cheslatta you know they all used to live in one big places like that...And now here, you know. When I first come here I was alone... It’s way different from people used to live down Cheslatta... That same people they move out here and they just, they don’t believe in helping one another.” Relatives who used to see each other every day began

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35 Chief Marvin Charlie, September, 1996.

36 Abel Peters, September 1996.
to see each other only at funerals.\textsuperscript{37}

People who used to be self-sufficient accepted welfare. Welfare has demoralized and undermined many Cheslatta people, making them feel as though they have no control over their own lives. Chief Marvin Charlie notes that at any given time as many as 95 percent of Cheslatta people are on welfare.\textsuperscript{38} Unlike people in many other northern Native communities, the Cheslatta do not have as much of an opportunity to supplement government money with food or clothing from hunting, trapping and fishing.\textsuperscript{39} Pat Edmund says that people feel ashamed of themselves when they accept government money. "I can take the checks and I can go and cash it. But I don't want nobody to watch me when I take the check, the welfare check, and cash it. But if I make, if I work for it, they give me the check, I'm not, I feel good."\textsuperscript{40} However, guilt and shame do not put people to work. Few job opportunities have opened up for Cheslatta people living on their reserves. Cheslatta-sponsored initiatives have been sporadically successful, particularly the Cheslatta Redevelopment Project, of which more will be said later.

Unfortunately the people have not remained employed over the long term even during the few times that job opportunities have developed. Sometimes this is because the work is only temporary or seasonal. Peter Gagnon, Cheslatta's drug and alcohol counsellor says that other times it is because people lack the confidence to follow through

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.; Romona Morin, September 26, 1996.

\textsuperscript{38} Chief Marvin Charlie, June 1996; as well a list of band members and their occupations reveals that 41 out of 51 people on reserve are unemployed or employed seasonally, approximately 80%.

\textsuperscript{39} For a good discussion of the integration of subsistence activities and government money, see Peter D. Elias, \textit{Northern Aboriginal Communities}.

\textsuperscript{40} Pat Edmund, September 1996.
on things they have started." Many people do not believe they will ever break out of the welfare, drug and alcohol cycle because they have been told too often that they will fail if they try. "At the same time, the agonizingly long periods they exist on social assistance make them social outcasts ... adding to the downward emotional spiral which erodes their self esteem and motivational levels." Unfortunately the economic opportunities at Grassy Plains are limited. In 1996 the band signed a contract to log the Nechako Reservoir, which was not logged before it was flooded. Apart from that, however, major logging companies, who control the timber rights in the area, do not employ Native residents. The Huckleberry Mine, located in Cheslatta traditional territory, is set to employ Cheslatta people, though many feel ambivalent about working in a capacity that they feel will destroy what is left of their land. Most of the non-Native residents of Grassy Plains commute to Burns Lake for work, apart from the ranchers and small hotel owners. Recent employment initiatives have failed because of problems with government funding, which is unfortunately typical of such initiatives since the 1960s. The longer they are on welfare the harder it is to get back to work even when jobs exist.

Drugs and alcohol also destroy people's spirits and their lives. People understandably did not want to discuss their personal stories, though drugs and alcohol

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41 Peter Gagnon, October 1996. See also Government of Canada. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Volume 1. "[P]roblems of overcrowding in homes seriously affect the abilities of people to maintain good work habits, and hence jobs...It is...possible that the problems of unemployment are so pervasive that there is an unofficial "taboo" against maintaining a job." p. 497.

42 Mike Robinson, Dana Wagg, John Hummell, July 1996.


44 Mike Robertson, May 1997.
have affected all of them.\textsuperscript{45} Chief Marvin Charlie says that except for a period of about five years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rate of alcoholism among Cheslatta people has reached as high as 95 percent.\textsuperscript{46} Drug abuse among young people is similarly high, although there are those who distinguish between marijuana and harder substances. One man says that when kids get stoned smoking marijuana they “go off and watch the sunset and have a good time. It’s the crack that makes people violent.”\textsuperscript{47} Pat Edmund relates an example of a young man who sniffs gasoline. “And his brain is half burned up, he doesn’t know what he’s doing. And he tell his family that he’s gonna kill them all... How do you sleep, one eye sleep, other eye open, watch for that guy.”\textsuperscript{48} Mike Robertson and Marvin Charlie say that the violent death rates are so high that band members often fear someone they love will die. “We have many deaths over the years where we didn’t have deaths before we moved. [Violent] death was rarely known before we moved from our old reserve. And over the years we’ve had car accidents, committing suicide, getting run over, drowning, many different forms of deaths has occurred on Cheslatta today.”\textsuperscript{49} Evelyn Tom says that they discovered welfare and alcohol soon after they moved, and many people

\textsuperscript{45}Drug and alcohol abuse on reserves is all too common, but its high occurrence does not minimize its impact. However, here I follow the lead of Mary Christina Koyl, who in her M.A. thesis argued against falling into the same trap as Anastasia Shkilnyk did in A Poison Stronger than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Shkilnyk “did exactly what she emphasized the Grassly Narrows people did not want...exposing] their community and the full range of its social problems...” so much so that Band members “feel violated...and do not want her to return to their reserve under any circumstances.” See M. C. Koyl. “Cultural Chasm: A 1960s Hydro Development and the Tsay Keh Dene Native Community of Northern British Columbia.” Victoria: University of Victoria M.A. Thesis, 1992. Social problems are an undeniable result of the Cheslatta relocation, however I have tried to allude to the problems without “exposing” anyone or delving into matters that people did not wish to discuss.

\textsuperscript{46}Chief Marvin Charlie, June 1996; also see Chief Marvin Charlie, guest speaker at UNBC, February 1995, taped appearance courtesy of the First Nations Studies program.

\textsuperscript{47}Interview July 1996.

\textsuperscript{48}Pat Edmund, September 1996.

\textsuperscript{49}Chief Marvin Charlie, June and September 1996; Mike Robertson, July 1996.
died from alcohol. If people do not die from overdoses they get killed in fights or on the roads. It is not difficult to trace the origins of these social problems. Had they wanted alcohol before the relocation it would not have been hard to obtain from traders, from those with whom they worked on the railroads or in the canneries, or even from the few settlers in the area, even considering the ban on the sale of alcohol to Natives. Alcohol became an escape for many after 1952, an escape that was unnecessary before then.

Substance abuse has further devastated the community. Families have turned against each other because alcohol increases abuse dramatically, and people then isolate themselves because they do not want anyone to know what is happening in their family. Sometimes grandparents rear their grandchildren when their children cannot, however when the family network breaks down as it has among the Cheslatta, often grandparents cannot or will not fill that role. In other cases, social workers take the children away before family members can intervene, often to be adopted by non-Native families. Evelyn Tom cared for her grandson for much of his childhood when his father could not. Her grandson visits occasionally but work prevents him from spending a lot of time with her, and she says her children, who live off-reserve, do not visit because they drink too much. Mike Robertson says that alcohol is one of the reasons why community events have fallen by the wayside, and Peter Gagnon notes that people do not seem very interested in participating.

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50 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
51 Mike Robertson, John Hummell, Dana Wagg, July 1996.
52 Ibid.
53 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
54 Mike Robertson, July 1996; Peter Gagnon, October 1996.
Non-Natives' perceptions of Cheslatta's drug and alcohol problems create hostility between Cheslatta people and non-Natives, and among the Cheslatta people themselves. Often non-Natives falsely assume that someone has been drinking when they simply disapprove of the person's behaviour. Pat Edmund does not drink. However, he does live directly behind an elementary school. "I don't like it here, you know. I like to stretch my arms once in awhile here. Then if I walk around with [out] t-shirt outside then the school they phone the town and 'that Indian Pat next door, he's getting drunk'. Just because I'm a Native... they phone the cops and then they say that the Indian's getting drunk again, he run around naked."55 Unfortunately the people in the area often expect the worst of Native people because sometimes all they see is drug and alcohol abuse. Those who do not drink then suffer prejudice because of those who do, just as they feel the effects of friends' and relatives' addictions. Resentment and hostility build, and people turn against one another. Ironically, as Romona Morin and Abel Peters point out, the police know where Cheslatta people live more often than Cheslatta people themselves. "[Y]ou know us people right around here... we spread out everywhere, all over...So much of more, make it more isolated. But funny thing about it you know, if the law comes around, he know exactly where to go, fast too. He don't have to look for." Romona Morin notes that "[I]t just goes on and on. So all the cops know where to go." Ms. Morin believes that the reason people do not know where others live is that there is a lot of drinking, and visiting one another is just too much trouble.56

Many people link the high level of drug and alcohol abuse directly to the lack of

55 Pat Edmund, September 1996.
56 Romona Morin, September 1996; Abel Peters, September 1996.
economic resources. When they could no longer do the things they used to do they became increasingly despondent. Worse, there were few paid jobs open to them, which left many people with far too much time on their hands. Romona Morin says that drinking interferes with community events. In 1991 the Cheslatta began to meet annually on the shore of Cheslatta Lake for a community gathering, which many people hoped would foster some community spirit and healthy activity without drugs and alcohol. In 1996, however, Chief Charlie cut short the annual Cheslatta gathering because he was worried that people would drink despite the no-alcohol rule. Drugs and alcohol have even stifled the one opportunity to gather as a community. "And that's cause that's what everybody's been doing these days now. Cause they haven't, they don't have anything to do around here."

Young people face the same problem. "I think nobody cares anymore. Drinking around here, I think. A lot of drinking. There's a lot of alcohol on reserves. Cause they have nothing to depend on. Before they used to have a lot of things to do and it was really nice. Now, nobody, it seems like nobody cares anymore." Chief Charlie says that the drastic change from self-sufficiency to poverty devastated people. "That's why our people took to alcohol and drugs. [A]lcohol destroyed these people. Me and Violet, when we first met, 18 years ago, we used to drink a lot. There was nothing else to do." Mary Quaw also blames the lack of jobs for people's problems. "Nowadays kids they live on [Social Assistance] and everything like that, us we didn't when we lived on that way... we make our own, that's why we have so many problems..." Other evidence reinforces the people's belief in the link

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57 Mike Robertson. The Story of the Surrender of the Cheslatta Reserves, p. 6.

58 Romona Morin, September 1996.

59 Mary Quaw, September 1996.
between addictions and resources. For example, while the Cheslatta worked on the Cheslatta Redevelopment Project, Chief Charlie notes that drinking declined drastically, dropping to 35 percent of the people from 95 percent.60

Hampering their recovery is a lack of community as people remember it from their old reserves, one indication of which is that people are more individualistic than they used to be. Even younger band members, who do not know what life was like before the move, say that there is no community among the Cheslatta people. Romona Morin says that people are greedy, more interested in money than each other.61 Mary Quaw agrees. She says that no one shares the way they used to. "[W]e always used to share our fish with them. Now they sell it to us. They forget all about back what we used to do to them. You can't get anything free around here...Now people are, nowadays they hungry for money. Anything they give you they want money right away."62 Peter Gagnon says that money is a big issue with a lot of people, and seems to be "a driving force" with some.63 Most Cheslatta people live in poverty and it is not difficult to understand why money would be so important. However, greed used to be a foreign concept to the Cheslatta people, and the difference between then and now is striking. Now people fight amongst themselves for government money and begrudge each other the funds they get.

That many Cheslatta people are isolated from one another is good evidence that they do not feel a sense of community. Abel Peters says, "[T]he way it is now, we cannot

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60Chief Marvin Charlie, June 1996.
61Romona Morin, September 1996.
62Mary Quaw, September 1996.
63Peter Gagnon, October 1996.
call it community because we all separated now." For many, isolation means loneliness. Evelyn Tom, for example, says that where there used to be a lot of visiting, and no one was ever alone, people even stopped going next door. Instead, people are mean to one another, laugh at one another. There is "a lot of cruelty and tears now." And people no longer respect each other. For some, isolation goes beyond loneliness. One woman did not want to be interviewed because she said that even though she feels lonely and needs help, nobody in the band ever does anything for her so she does not want to have anything to do with them. Chief Charlie also says that people do not help one another. "Everybody is for themselves. Nobody helps one another...Nobody helps the elders." The fight against the Huckleberry Mine threatens to further erode the community. "[T]hings like that changed people. Now we're once again isolated from one another." Unlike the fight against Kemano II, Huckleberry Mine has divided the community into those who want the jobs it will bring and those who want to stop the environmental destruction of their remaining territory. Perhaps this issue is more divisive than it would be if band members felt they were part of a strong community.

One of the greatest obstacles to healing is that elders and younger people do not communicate. Neither understands the other's world. Elders say that young people do not want to listen to them or learn from them. For example, many elders are dismayed that so many young people do not know how to survive in the bush. Pat Edmund says, "Most of these young people they need... some people that knows little bit about bush. Like I try to

64 Abel Peters, September 1996.
65 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
66 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
teach my kids. Most of the time they don't want to come with me so I go by myself. I don't feel good doing that. You know if I keep on doing that, where do... these kids they're gonna get the idea to keep the family going?" Mr. Edmund says that his children more often want to watch television than learn to hunt.67 Chief Charlie says that he often takes young people hunting but they often do not know what to do. He once took his sister's son hunting. "I wanted him to experience that. We're standing by the pickup and you can hear the bull moose calling down below in the woods. I asked him, 'can you call them?' He stared at me, not knowing what I meant, and I said 'call them in.' And he looked down for a long time and he looked back up at me, said, 'I don't know his phone number.'" Chief Charlie believes it is imperative to teach children how to hunt and prepare food and clothing.68 Unfortunately, many elders believe that young people do not want to learn.

Elders also worry that the language is disappearing, and Abel Peters says that this may be one reason why people do not get along anymore, because they do not have a common language to hold them together.69 Some elders still only speak Carrier, and their valuable stories and lessons are being lost on young people who cannot understand them. Pat Edmund and Chief Charlie both try to speak Carrier at home. The children understand some of it but do not speak it themselves. Pat Edmund says that speaking English began in Lejac Residential School and became more common when people moved to Grassy Plains because everyone around them spoke English. Lately, "[W]e try to put Cheslatta tongue in here so they can teach our native tongue here just as good as they do French

67 Pat Edmund, September 1996.
68 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
69 Abel Peters, September 1996.
Evelyn Tom says that not speaking Carrier is just one sign of a lack of respect for elders and for the culture in general. When they began to speak English, people forgot their identity as the Cheslatta Carrier First Nation. "Most kids understand white man language, no Indian. English means non-Indian." Mrs. Tom equates the loss of language in young people with disrespect for others. "Young people scoff now. Don't have ears anymore. They don't understand." She says that people's "heart[s are] mud, full of head, the head that came with the flood." People are mean and insult one another, and young people now run wild. Sometimes she confronts the young people she sees doing drugs. She tells them they are hurting themselves but they laugh at her. She says she often does not bother saying anything anymore. Many elders feel that there is no point in trying to teach young people anything anymore because they do not listen.

Other people say that elders do not give young people a chance. Some people insist that if elders would tell the stories, the young people would listen. One man maintains that many elders fear that others will mock them or contradict them if they do not tell the stories properly, so they do not say anything at all. They lack the confidence in their history and traditions to pass them on to younger people. This has serious implications, for if they cannot rebuild that confidence the people will lose the stories forever, and younger generations will never be able to ground themselves in their history and traditions. When elders do tell stories, as they do at the annual Cheslatta gatherings, they tell of the relocation and relive their loss. This can benefit younger people because

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70 Pat Edmund, September 1996.
71 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
72 Interview, October 1996.
then they more firmly grasp the implications of that loss. However, one man believes that these stories only teach young people bitterness and hate.\textsuperscript{73} Unfortunately, many young people have lost respect for the older generations, elders included. They often do refuse to listen because the elders appear to have no time for them.\textsuperscript{74} They look to their elders to guide them, and when the elders cannot fulfill the role of teacher the children turn away and look elsewhere for help. They do not have the grounding they need to root them firmly in the community. They begin to resent the elders for the community's problems.\textsuperscript{75} Peter Gagnon maintains that it is time that people move beyond their losses and work towards healing.\textsuperscript{76} Certainly the Cheslatta people must find a way to regain the sense of tradition that they lost when they left their old reserves.

There have been times when communication between elders and young people has improved. Particularly while working on the Cheslatta Redevelopment Project many young people had the opportunity to hear Abel Peters tell his stories. After work they would gather around and listen while Mr. Peters talked about how things used to be. Once when Mr. Peters had to go to Vancouver for a few days, the young people continually asked when he would return. They so enjoyed his stories and Mr. Peters enjoyed telling them. Chief Charlie says, "That's about the only person that was telling them stories about the old time, how they used to do, telling them the story that he was, that was handed down by his father. I never, I've never witnessed any elders telling story to young people like that. The world is much too fast for them." Abel Peters was a good choice to work with the

\textsuperscript{73}ibid.
\textsuperscript{74}Mike Robertson, October 1996.
\textsuperscript{75}ibid.
\textsuperscript{76}Peter Gagnon, October 1996.
young people. "He understands the young people, what they need to know. And he's always playful and friendly, always got some good ideas." Chief Charlie also discusses how he and his wife spend time with children and open their home to them. "Non-Native, Native kids, they all weekend, they just come to our place, spend time with us. Just like sardines sleeping everywhere. And it's a joy for us. We love them. They know they're being loved." It is important to Chief Charlie that young people know they are cared for. And Mr. Peters feels it is important to teach children their history so that they will know how to survive on their own.

These kinds of things are examples of the positive events that have sporadically rejuvenated the community. Indeed, the Cheslatta people have shown solidarity on a number of occasions. One of the biggest victories for the people was the successful fight against the Kemano Completion Project. Cheslatta people were instrumental in the fight that Chief Albert George began. They raised awareness of the damage that the original Kemano project caused both to themselves and to the Nechako watershed. They worked extremely hard and sustained their effort for a number of years, which was no small feat considering Alcan's legal and financial resources. The Cheslatta people could not have hoped to match Alcan's power, yet after years of rallying people to pressure the

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77 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
78 Ibid.
79 Abel Peters, September 1996.
80 In simplistic terms, Kemano Completion was Alcan's plan to expand its smelting capacity at Kitimat. Such expansion would have involved diverting most of the remaining water in the Nechako River, to which Alcan had legal rights as per its 1950 agreement with the government of British Columbia. Many concerned citizens and environmental groups rallied to fight what they saw as the complete destruction of the Nechako watershed and the serious danger to the Fraser River salmon stocks.
81 See the Cheslatta video Never Surrender; also The Fifth Estate; BCUC Hearings into the Kemano Completions Project.
government, Mike Harcourt, then Premier of British Columbia, scrapped the project in 1995.

Fighting Alcan was one aspect of the Cheslatta people's concern for their traditional territory. They also expressed this concern when they initiated the Cheslatta Redevelopment Project in 1992. They planned to restore the Nechako watershed and what they could of their original territory. Funded by various government agencies, the band hired twelve of its members to work on the Cheslatta and Murray Lakes. They hoped to restore the territory in order to preserve it for tourism and recreation, hunting and fishing, sustainable economic development, and also to help the band restore its economic stability.\textsuperscript{82} The Redevelopment Project went a long way towards restoring Cheslatta people's optimism for their futures, and put people to work. The project was also important because it helped younger people to see first-hand where their parents or grandparents had come from. Chief Charlie says that young people do not know where they come from.

\[T\]hey don't know their identity. They don't know what Cheslatta is, they don't know where it was. They don't know where their grounds their roots are. Where their ancestors come from. Until 1991 we did this redevelopment, that's when they began to realize where they come from, what they used to do. And that changed them a lot.\textsuperscript{83} Unfortunately the funding for the project ran out, however for a time it allowed the people to work on some of the same land their parents had lived on, giving them a feeling of connection with the territory that perhaps they had not had before.

The Cheslatta people also try to recreate some of that connection with their annual


\textsuperscript{83}Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
gathering on Cheslatta Lake. At this two-week camp the people listen to elders and others tell stories. Everyone is welcome at the camps, Native or non-Native, and nobody drinks. The band provides food and shelter for those who cannot afford it. The camps are perhaps the one time during the year that most of the band can get together in one spot. It is a time when band members put aside their differences and try to have some fun together. Most people say that the camps are a good idea and that they help the community for a little while. Abel Peters says, “Now it seems like the only time they have same thing like that go together is when we move down to Cheslatta Lake every summer you know. That’s the only one. There’s no others. That’s where people, the people get together and do little of talk to one another and the chief he talks to people and all sort of like that.” The gatherings also give young people a chance to listen to elders at the same time as it gives elders a chance to speak. Mr. Peters enjoys the gatherings. “When they come out there, you know, it’s like, more like histories. That, that’s how the chief or somebody who knows, he speaks up every once in awhile.” Music is also part of the gatherings. “[Y]ou know sometime somebody who knows some music or something, whoever want to do that. I brought my accordion there one time and they like enjoy that, cause they said all the histories, song, you know, never heard that before.” Mike Robertson says that usually for a little while after the gatherings the drinking and violence decline. The camps help people to connect not only with the land but also with each other, offering them a glimpse of a life without their daily hardships. Unfortunately, the

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64 Abel Peters, September 1996.
65 Ibid.
66 Mike Robertson, September 1996.
good feelings usually only last a couple of weeks, when their lives catch up with them once more and life on the Cheslatta reserves returns to its previous state. It may be all the more disappointing for band members to watch that sense of community dissipate when they see that working together once more is an attainable goal.

The Cheslatta people have signed a deal with Canfor that will allow them to log the reservoir that Alcan flooded in the 1950s. None of the land was logged before Alcan flooded it, and the agreement will provide work for ten years. People began to train in September of 1996 and many people are optimistic that the deal will allow Cheslatta people more control of the natural resources in the area. The Cheslatta find this deal particularly important when the Huckleberry Mine, currently being developed in the Cheslatta traditional territory, has been pushed through despite some of the membership’s vehement opposition. The Cheslatta people are now forced to choose between jobs and the degradation of much of their remaining traditional territory, and in either case they have had no control of their territory as their voices go unheard.

Overall, division has characterized much of the past forty-five years of Cheslatta history. When the Department of Indian Affairs negotiated with Cheslatta individuals rather than the group as a whole during the surrender process they unknowingly helped to divide the community afterwards. Because most of the Cheslatta people’s resources disappeared under water the people had to accept welfare when they could not find alternative sources of income. They became depressed and jealous of one another. They drank to fill the time and to forget the pain of their loss. Young people now feel equally hopeless about their

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87 Mike Robertson, October 1996.
88 John Hummell, June 1996.
futures because there are few jobs and fewer opportunities to create jobs. They also have very little self-confidence.

There have been times in the past decade particularly when the community has come together on certain issues or projects, however many of these projects have failed to create the atmosphere necessary for community healing. The fight against the Kemano Completion Project brought people together, though when it ended people suddenly once again had nothing to fill their time. Despondency returned, perhaps greater than before, because many people had pinned great hopes on the future after they defeated Alcan.

What the people have missed particularly besides economic stability, and what may help to recreate a sense of community, is better communication between elders and younger people. Many of the elders' skills disappeared or simply have not been used since they lost their land, and they claim that young people do not want to listen or learn. Others say that elders do not give young people a chance and do not try to teach them, though sadly many young people have lost respect for adults and elders. Relocation did more to the Cheslatta people than take away their land. It stripped them of any control they had over their own lives, shattered their community and left helplessness and despair. Relocation is an event from which they have not recovered.
became addicted to alcohol. Within a couple of years, their community collapsed into disorder and despair.\textsuperscript{12} Traditional roles were undermined and community cooperation decreased, making it difficult to move beyond the cycles of abuse, violence and neglect.\textsuperscript{13}

Compounding the attack on social relationships was the sudden loss of resources which created dependence, increased alcohol and drug abuse, and further broke down community cooperation. Self-sufficient people were reduced to welfare as their major or only source of support. "In moves like that of the Chesiatta people, the haste an

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Bussidor and Reinart. \textit{Night Spirits}, p. 71.
  \item \textsuperscript{13}Report of the Royal Commission, p. 501.
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, p. 498.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 491.
\end{itemize}
Chapter Six: Conclusion

The Cheslatta people do not see their relocation as something they can readily put behind them. Every single day since they moved from their old reserves has been a struggle to survive. On their old reserves, left very much to themselves, they prospered. Then in the late 1940s and early 1950s the provincial government decided that a mega-project dam and aluminum smelter would have to take precedence over a small group of Native people and some ‘empty’ land. With only days’ notice, Alcan officials and Department of Indian Affairs agents visited the reserves and told the people they would have to leave. They bullied the Cheslatta people and manipulated surrender documents, and then left the people to make their own way in a new territory with no money, shelter or support.

Band members scattered over this new land and began to fight over very scarce resources. They blamed one another for their misfortunes, and they turned to alcohol and drugs to ease their pain. They left their old traditions on their reserves but had nothing to replace them. They left their community behind. Because they could not prepare for their relocation they could not plan together for its effects on their community as a whole. Each person was left to him or herself. By the time the people could settle in their new homes it seemed to be too late to salvage their close-knit community. ‘Community’ seemed to be a distant memory, latent and not quite reachable.

Up until 1952 the Cheslatta band had done very well for themselves. They succeeded at farming, hunted, trapped, fished and collected berries. They integrated paid labour into their seasonal round of activities, travelling to Bella Coola during the summer to work and trade, returning in early fall to harvest their plants and prepare for winter. Unlike other First Nations in British Columbia, settlers did not disrupt their lives. There
were a handful of non-Native settlers in the area, however they got on quite well with the Cheslatta people. Some of them hired band members for farm and ranch work, and most of the settlers traded with them. Priests appeared in the area and the Cheslatta people were polite but unreceptive to Christianity until the twentieth century. Residential school posed the biggest threat to the Cheslatta people, and to all First Nations. School turned many families’ lives upside down and disrupted the regular round of work. However, the band was fortunate in that the basic sense of community, sharing, and caring for one another remained intact. That closeness remained, despite the trauma of residential school.

Meanwhile, the provincial government began negotiations with Alcan to locate an aluminum smelter on the west coast of British Columbia. The government was extremely anxious to bring in as much industry as it could, believing that industry would create jobs and wealth, would utilize the mainly untouched resources of the Interior and the North, and would fulfill the dreams of progress that so many politicians and citizens of the province shared. In order to persuade Alcan to set up in the province, the government offered and eagerly signed away the rights to the Nechako Watershed. In hindsight this act seemed unnecessary, as Alcan did not seriously consider any other location. However, the people of British Columbia and their representatives in government seemed to lack the confidence in their ability to make the most of the province’s natural wealth and welcomed any opportunity to have that wealth developed for them. Alcan took advantage of the chance to expand their operations cheaply and began to plan its smelter in Kitimat. No one, citizens and politicians alike, considered the people whose lives the mega-project would affect. There were some non-Native settlers in the Ootsa Lake area, near Cheslatta Lake,
who created a furor over losing their homes to rising water, an effect of the dam created to store water for the energy to run the smelter. However, politicians pointedly ignored their concerns, and Alcan negotiated with them individually over compensation, attempting to divide and conquer. They later used these tactics with the Cheslatta people as well.

Those non-Native settlers had at least two years to prepare for the loss of their homes, which also meant they had two years to try to wage a campaign against the project. Though they did not succeed, they had the opportunity to try. The Cheslatta people were not so lucky. From the time they first learned of the project to the time they began to move, twenty days passed. Negotiations with Alcan and the Department of Indian Affairs did not begin until April 16, 1952, after the water had begun to rise. Rather than negotiate with Alcan for the Cheslatta people, DIA agents instead frightened and harrassed them into accepting Alcan's offer, which DIA officials had pre-approved. When this did not seem to work, DIA agents decided to negotiate with the people individually and in secret. They had some of the people sign some documents, and they forged the other pertinent documents such as surrender papers. They later fixed still other compensation documents to reflect the amounts of money that they had already agreed upon with Alcan.

In any case, the Cheslatta people felt they had no choice but to move. However, they had no houses to move into in their new land. Many people had lost everything they had ever owned and wandered for sometimes years. They lived in tents and abandoned or half-finished shacks, fled angry landowners and had to apply for government relief. Another problem arose, as their new land was not classified as reserve, therefore they were not immediately entitled to benefits as status Indians. Compensation money was slow to make its way to the Cheslatta people, and in some cases did not materialize until years
later. In the meantime, band members learned that during water flow tests their old graveyards, which Alcan was supposed to have moved, had instead been washed away.

Since that time the Cheslatta people have watched as non-Native language and culture eroded their own. Most band members are on some form of government relief as there is a 95% unemployment rate. Alcohol and drug abuse have reached crisis proportions. Violence is an everyday occurrence and death is more often violent than natural. The people are heartbroken, sick and angry. They resent one another and fight over money that they do not have. They blame one another for most of their problems. Some say that the elders are responsible for correcting many of the current problems, that they should assume leadership roles and teach younger people better ways. Elders often say that young people simply refuse to listen, and they grow tired of trying to reach people who do not want to be reached. The generation gap has become a knowledge gap. Some people feel there is no longer any way to transmit knowledge that had been passed through many generations, as some elders still speak only Carrier and most young people do not. Much of that knowledge may be lost forever in just a few short years.

There have been some rays of hope during the years, though. The Cheslatta band put up a tremendous fight against Alcan’s Kemano Completion Project, and were an integral part of the government’s decision to cancel the project. Band members came together in a sort of new wave of optimism. They planned to redevelop and revitalize their old land, work together to clean up the watershed and regain some of what they lost in 1952. Elders began to tell stories and young people listened enthusiastically.

However, funding for the Cheslatta Redevelopment Project fell through. The Kemano Completion Project cancelled, the people seemed to suffer a sudden halt in their
momentum. The good feelings fizzled and old resentments began to rise to the surface. Once again they seemed to have nothing to work for. They are exhausted morally and spiritually. In 1997 there was another election dispute and once again the people lived with the threat of tempers boiling over. People feared other people's reactions and others were simply afraid to take a stand.

These problems are not unique to the Cheslatta people, as all First Nations face community breakdown and social strife. What can be learned from Cheslatta history, however, and from relocated communities in general, is that there is a strong link between disempowerment and the disintegration of communities. The Cheslatta people, like other relocated bands, were forced from their land without consultation. They were harassed and threatened until they relinquished their land, and were left to survive in their new homes with very little government assistance. Disempowerment came from their lack of access to their traditional resources and inability to take advantage of new ones. Disempowerment also grew out of band members' daily experiences with government relief, which taught them the humiliation of being forced to depend on someone else for money, and out of restrictions that curtailed their every move such as fish and game laws. Their serious social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, child and spousal abuse and unemployment can also be linked to powerlessness and helplessness. One of the results is that people could no longer communicate with one another. The community broke down in part because people could no longer rely on one another for help in their time of need.

Mary Quaw is a Cheslatta elder who is frustrated that children seem unwilling to learn from the elders. "Before Kemano everyone helped and shared, people were independent. Now mostly welfare. Children lose traditions because we can't teach them,
they don't want to learn, they think they wouldn't need it." That young people believe they
do not need to know their history and traditions indicates that they do not value their
community's past. They have no sense of where their community has come from and thus
cannot hope to recreate the close-knit family they once were.

Former Chief Albert George concurred with Mrs. Quaw in an interview conducted
before he died. "Our traditions are all gone. The young people don't speak Indian
anymore." Often elders equate the loss of their Carrier language with the loss of tradition.
As noted earlier, some elders still speak only Carrier. Their stories cannot be passed to
a generation that does not understand them. On a different level, the language is one of
the things that the Cheslatta used to have in common. Now it seems that one by one they
have lost most of the things that previously held them together and helped them work
together.

Despite many claims to the contrary, there are elders who still have not given up
trying to reach the young people. Chief Marvin Charlie is one of them. "My father, I say to
myself he's one of the best teachers I ever had in my entire life. He taught me the things
that I could never learn in school." He fully appreciates what his father taught him and
wants to pass on these traditions to young people. In the course of his adult life, he and
his wife have taken in numerous foster children and tried to raise them in an alcohol-free
environment. They try to instill in their children a sense of the knowledge that has been
passed for generations in order to survive as First Nations in a non-Native world.

1 Mary Quaw, transcript of interview conducted in 1984.
2 Chief Albert George, transcript of interview, December 7, 1981.
3 Chief Marvin Charlie, September 1996.
Abel Peters agrees that patience is necessary to reach the younger people. “[On the old reserves] we help one another. Very good. That’s how people they survive, you know. Like in the family like now here it’s best because we try to tell them what’s like in the past, and so ... they can learn how to survive after us old people gone you know, they understand that.” Mr. Peters works hard to pass on such knowledge. His patience and good humour make it easy for younger people to want to learn the old ways, as he fills them with pride about where they have come from. And that pride is one of the most fundamental components of a close community. The Cheslatta people were proud once. As Evelyn Tom says, “Being Cheslatta means the world. I’m proud. I like being a real Indian. I feel Indian. I’m happy to be Indian.”

It has not been my attempt to cover the history of the Cheslatta people in minute detail. Rather, I have tried to convey that the band had a rich and complex history before they moved that was suddenly disrupted by relocation, from which they have not recovered. I have tried to impart a general understanding of the reasons why a band that had been self-sufficient and close-knit became dependent on welfare and divided amongst each other. I have also attempted to understand the broader reasons why a people might be relocated against their will, although as I see it there is a sharp division between what may be good for a small group of people as opposed to the “greater good.” In no way do I advocate halting resource development completely. Rather, I hope that with this study and others like it we can begin to make more informed choices about where, what and how we develop, and perhaps begin to show a little more responsibility in becoming informed

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4 Abel Peters, September 1996.
5 Evelyn Tom, September 1996.
about the projects we advocate. I also hope that with this study perhaps those who read it will realize that development of any kind, particularly on such a grand scale as Kemano, will have its human consequences. There are ways to avoid such a tragedy as that which befell the Cheslatta people. Responsible planning and thorough consultation will help to give First Nations the opportunity to have their voices heard.
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Figure 3: Officials involved in Cheslatta Negotiations

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