

LOOKING FOR SNOB HILL AND SQ'ÉWQEL: EXPLORING THE CHANGING
HISTORIES OF ABORIGINALITY AND COMMUNITY IN TWO ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITIES

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

Katya Claire MacDonald

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis/dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis/dissertation in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis/dissertation work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis/dissertation or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis/dissertation.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other uses of materials in this thesis/dissertation in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5
Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores notions of community and Aboriginality within the histories of two Aboriginal communities: the primarily Métis town of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan and the Stó:lō reserve of Seabird Island, British Columbia. By “reading” community members’ oral histories in terms of these two concepts, it historicises the accounts, giving temporal context to academics’ writings and local histories that at times act as snapshots of a small span of time. Considering Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island in terms of their communal and Aboriginal components also complicates definitions of community and Aboriginality or indigeneity as they relate to these two places, thereby reinforcing the links between histories and the places and people from which they originated. Thus, the first part of this thesis situates Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse historically and physically, and demonstrates how local oral histories introduce broader historical themes. The second part focuses on the community aspect of these places: the Aboriginal component to both Seabird Island’s and Île-à-la-Crosse’s existence is what has tended to attract outside academic research and attention, yet an Aboriginal community exists as such because of influences that make and sustain a community as well as its Aboriginal components. While each “category” draws on understandings of the other in order to create a cohesive definition of the whole, a community does not become a community simply by being Aboriginal, nor is it Aboriginal simply as a result of Aboriginal people living together. Therefore, diverse definitions and histories of Aboriginality are also significant in maintaining historical links among inhabitants of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island. There exists a historiography in these communities that, while sometimes unintentional or implicit, links community members’ accounts of their community and its Aboriginal features with outside observations. This connection places these interpretations of historical events into a historiographical context of ways these Aboriginal communities have been both, and alternately, communities and Aboriginal places.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of preparing a thesis represents far more than my own research; it's also an implicit history of the ways that other people have supported my learning, and I am immensely grateful for their involvement along the way.

Firstly, I thank my supervisor, Professor Keith Carlson, for his enthusiasm, encouragement and guidance, and for allowing me to draw on his immense experience at all stages of my research. My committee members, Professors Geoff Cunfer and Jim Handy, and my external examiner, Professor Kristina Fagan, also offered helpful comments and questions that enabled and encouraged me to see my thought processes through new eyes.

This thesis, let alone the wealth of information and understanding I've gained from it, would not exist without the generosity and knowledge of community members in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island (and Stó:lō territory more generally). I am indebted to them for sharing their homes, memories, and histories with me, and for their feedback and input into my research. The following people provided interviews that directly informed the writing of my thesis, but the list of people who have provided me with meaningful experiences over the course of my academic travels extends far beyond this: Vince Ahenakew, Archie Charles, Dorothy Dubrule, Liz Durocher, Tony Durocher, Don Favel, Irene Gardiner, Jim Harris, Norma Malboeuf, Bea Mann, Colin Mann, Ivan McIntyre, Spud (Allen) Morin, Maggie Pettis, and Clem Seymour. I also extend my gratitude to the following research and archival staff for their invaluable assistance with finding sources, facilitating introductions to people and communities, and discussing ideas: Jay Hope at Seabird Island, Sonny McHalsie and Tia Halstad at Stó:lō Nation, and staff at the Saskatchewan Archives Board in Saskatoon.

My research was supported financially by a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship (Master's), as well as a Graduate Research Fellowship and a travel grant from the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan. Elise Pietroniro created the base map of Île-à-la-Crosse that I used for my place name map.

Finally, I am grateful to my own community of family, friends, and history department cohorts (not necessarily mutually exclusive categories), for asking and provoking questions, and for providing encouragement, distractions, conversations, food, and links to the world outside this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
1. CHAPTER 1 METHODOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY	1
2. CHAPTER 2 HISTORICAL CONTEXTS.....	18
3. CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES.....	38
4. CHAPTER 4..... THE ABORIGINALITY OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES	70
5. CHAPTER 5..... CONCLUSION	105
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	110

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	
Two views of Snob Hill, Île-à-la-Crosse.....	2
Figure 2	
Photo of Seabird Island.....	7
Figure 3	
Map of Île-à-la-Crosse place names.....	19
Figure 4	
Copy of June Harris's map of Seabird Island fishing sites.....	63

CHAPTER 1

Methodology and Historiography

Approaching the town of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan along the highway leading to the community, the first glimpse of the place is a neighbourhood of relatively new houses locally known as Snob Hill. While unofficial in the sense that it is not ensconced in town planning documents, the name, along with several other similarly humorous and descriptive ones, is an integral tool when communicating about the physical layout of Île-à-la-Crosse, but the ubiquity of names also alludes to commonly-held understandings of local histories, and serves to reinforce their significance for named places and the people who have inhabited and interpreted them. During my first encounters with Île-à-la-Crosse – a predominantly Métis community about 450 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon – as an undergraduate student researcher, of immediate interest to me were the etymologies of the names: the time, circumstances, and significance of their origins, and reasons for the relevance of the names (and by extension their histories). Within the town of Île-à-la-Crosse, it is often not the landscape that precipitates naming, since various named places in Île-à-la-Crosse have no discernible boundary or noteworthy physical characteristics. Instead, the names draw on residents' understandings of their town's identity, and they refer to ways in which people have interacted: the town of Île-à-la-Crosse is arranged as a series of social rather than physical spaces. As a result, place names associated with these spaces represent relationships in the community: with each other, with people outside the community, and with their history, and as a result, they become expressions of local and cultural identity.



Fig. 1: Two views of Snob Hill, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK. May 2008; photos by author.

These names, an intriguing aspect of local history, were the catalyst for this thesis, even though they did not turn out to be its focus. Instead, during my first forays into community-based oral history research, they served as an introduction not only to the town of Île-à-la-Crosse itself, but also to historical issues and events that have taken place there. Processes of place-making also help to historicise community members' definitions of Aboriginality and community, and thus place names and other descriptions of community features and identities (that is, other ways of place-making) were a useful device around which I was able to form my interviews, and acted as a mnemonic to help interviewees

answer my questions and add information they felt was important for me to know. Often, discussions of names introduced themes of community, which in turn introduced questions of how these places have come to see themselves as Aboriginal communities. Yet the very term “Aboriginal community” can be ambiguous, fluid, and mutable across time and circumstances. Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, separating – even if somewhat artificially – what is communal from what is Aboriginal in the histories of Aboriginal communities establishes meanings of events and issues that remain significant in community members’ historical narratives not necessarily because their perspectives represent one side of an Aboriginal/colonial binary, but because they make reference to varied and changing ways that these places have existed in people’s pasts and experiences, and in reference to definitions of both community and Aboriginality.

Examined in the context of Île-à-la-Crosse alone, it remains somewhat unclear to what extent the communal and Aboriginal aspects of the town’s history are local phenomena, or whether they also refer to or grow out of more widely applicable explorations of these issues.¹ It follows, then, that an expanded perspective would help to draw out and elucidate themes within a broader history and historiography of the relationships between notions of community and notions of Aboriginality. Therefore, seeking to build on both my work as a student researcher in Île-à-la-Crosse and the relationships I had begun to form in Stó:lō territory during the jointly-run University of Saskatchewan/University of Victoria Ethnohistory Field School, I spoke with Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, one of the members of the Research and Resource Management Centre at Stó:lō Nation about the prospect of augmenting my Île-à-la-Crosse research with perspectives from

Seabird Island, a Stó:lō community in British Columbia's Fraser Valley, about 35 kilometres northeast of Chilliwack.

Unlike Île-à-la-Crosse, where nearly twenty kilometres of highway along a peninsula anticipate a vehicle's arrival in the village, approaching Seabird Island First Nation is an exercise in attentive driving. The road into the main residential and administrative area of the reserve intersects with the busy provincial highway largely unannounced, catching many a first-time visitor by surprise. This is the first physical indication that Seabird Island is a place distinct from its immediate surroundings in the populous Fraser Valley, and the suddenness of entering this space suggests intersections of histories of the reserve and its inhabitants where insiders and outsiders have interpreted the meaning of this place in different and sometimes conflicting ways. During my first trip to Seabird Island, I soon learned that although Sonny McHalsie had brainstormed a handful of place names that people might use within that community, they were usually not forefront in my interviewees' minds when I asked about them. In response, I started to rephrase my questions in terms of broader ideas of place-making, asking about what place or places they considered home, what they considered significant events or issues in the community's history, and whether they noted changes in lifestyle and settlement patterns where they lived. These discussions were instrumental in transforming the focus of my thesis away from place name etymologies to the ways that local histories have helped to establish Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island as distinctly Aboriginal communities.

Discussions of community and Aboriginality have particular current significance for these two places. Having both grown out of colonial planning and involvement, Native people in Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse have been engaged in ongoing processes of definition, which has included, in light of outside, non-Native involvement in these

communities, considering how to maintain local uniqueness and identities as Aboriginal people. As these places deal with concerns of lifestyle and language loss, land and resource rights, and an assortment of other community issues on small and large scales, theoretical concepts of community and Aboriginality become concrete ones that are invoked in a variety of ways to address and contextualise contemporary concerns. Yet this is also not a new phenomenon; community and Aboriginality have been ongoing themes in the histories of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, and so discussions of these ideas also reflect the ways that people in these places have sought to acknowledge, communicate, commemorate and re-evaluate particular identities in the face of change.

Aboriginal communities have come to exist through processes of community definition as well as the formation of a specific, unique identity as Aboriginal people in that place. Notions of Aboriginality and community, in their diverse definitions, are therefore interdependent, and work together to form histories and historiographies of what tends to be an all-encompassing concept of an Aboriginal community. By considering a place's history as an Aboriginal community first in terms of people forming a community, and then as a community that has developed its own notions of Aboriginality – or more simply in terms of its community and its Aboriginality – I hope to connect and compare community members' interpretations of history with outside, academic ones, to imbue these concepts with their own history that has grown out of local experiences. Exploring these local specificities in histories (that is, attending to the ways that community members' and academics' analyses interact with each other) helps to set the stage for discussion of specific impacts of colonialism and the establishment and reinforcement of community-based definitions of Aboriginality. The concept of place, as experienced in communities, acts as both a mnemonic that local people use when narrating the past, and as a point of reference

against which we can historicise both academics' and community members' accounts.

Themes of place and place names therefore introduce the issues and diverse notions of community and Aboriginality discussed here, just as they did in my conversations with interviewees.

The terms “community” and “Aboriginality” (as well as related concepts such as indigeneity and Métis-ness) are intentionally used and defined flexibly within this thesis, reflecting similarly diverse usage by academics and community members alike.

Anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins and Bruce Granville Miller and political scientist Chadwick Allen have discussed the ways that in a national or global context, the term “indigeneity” can take on an array of political definitions and implications.² In the more limited contexts of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, however, I use the term largely synonymously with Aboriginality. On a local or individual level, Aboriginality is in some ways a practical outcome or expression of broader implications of indigeneity.

² Sahlins, for instance, argues in *How Natives Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) that applying a universal definition of indigeneity to all Native people serves to insert these people – at times ethnocentrically or inaccurately – into the intellectual culture that formulated the definition in the first place. By extension, then, indigeneity is a concept that changes based on circumstances and environments. Similarly, Miller suggests that governmental recognition is not a “prerequisite” for indigeneity, since whether they have outside recognition or not, the indigeneity of groups can be used – by indigenous and non-indigenous people alike – to further legal, economic and political arguments. While North American treatments of the issue of indigeneity are most relevant in discussions of Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse, but this research has also been informed by perspectives outside of the North American Aboriginal context. Some of these works consider specific cultural groups (such as Brent E. Metz’s argument that efforts to define Mayan indigeneity are both historically imprecise and contemporarily critical in matters of justice, and Marshall Sahlins’ exploration of the historical significance of being Native in the South Pacific), while others consider theoretical notions of indigeneity on global levels. Roger C. A. Maaka and Chris Andersen consider indigeneity to be a term or concept that is defined nationally and internationally, while Bruce Granville Miller confronts the complicated nature of most definitions of indigeneity, and how these are or are not applicable to Aboriginal or marginalised groups in various parts of the world.



Fig. 2: Seabird Island First Nation, B.C. May 2009; photo by author.

Because this thesis discusses ways that Aboriginal communities have defined and depicted themselves over time, it is important to consider that my interpretations come from the perspective of a newcomer. Throughout its evolution, my research has centred around residents of Aboriginal communities introducing these places to me, a newcomer, and navigating and negotiating our various understandings of the histories comprising a place can sometimes emphasise in unexpected ways ideas of belonging and difference. One of my first visits to Île-à-la-Crosse was with a group of fellow student researchers to attend the commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of Métis scrip in northwestern Saskatchewan, where events included a series of presentations by academics on issues relevant to Métis community life and histories. During one of these sessions, I sat beside an elder from Île-à-la-Crosse, who struck up a conversation with me about what brought me to the commemorations, and what I had thought of the presentations thus far. A few minutes later, after the next talk had begun and we had settled into our seats, he leaned over to me

and, sotto voce, inquired quite perplexingly if I was happy. Thinking that perhaps the long, hot day had made me appear otherwise, I responded cheerfully that I was, indeed, happy. The remainder of the talk was punctuated with seemingly unrelated questions from my new acquaintance about my ethnic background, as well as a particularly baffling comment that I needed to “marry a Métis man and go and live in a ditch,” and afterwards, as I went on with my day, I tried to make sense of our conversation. Several hours later, it finally dawned on me. He hadn’t been asking if I was happy – he had been asking if I was a halfbreed, and I had misheard the question. Given my obvious newness to the community, my confident answer was probably as puzzling to him as his question had been to me. While I had been pleased by this friendly, though somewhat unconventional, expression of interest in my well-being, he had been jovially correcting what appeared to him to be my presumptuous interpretation of my place in the community.

My perspective as an outsider has highlighted, too, how community members and outsiders alike envision communities and their residents in diverse ways and with diverse intentions. When I met with Grand Chief Archie Charles at his home on Seabird Island to ask about aspects of the reserve’s history, he commented to me that “just lately they changed it, they took all the boxes away from the post office and they deliver the mail now. So they had to mark – that name on that post out there is my Indian name. They gave them all Indian names – I can’t even spell it!”³ These street names, chosen by band council and infrastructure committees to refer to Seabird Island’s heritage and significant community figures, are clearly unique to Seabird Island. Yet at the same time, for Archie Charles, one of these influential and well-respected people, the street signs do not reflect his understanding of what it means to belong to that community, and perhaps speak more clearly to outsiders

³ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C. Recording available at Stó:lō Nation Archives.

seeking insight into the place than to residents, who draw on a far more extensive history to establish themselves there. In the end, aspects of Aboriginality and community that are most apparent to outsiders are not necessarily the same ones that community members find most meaningful, and consequently, discussion of these themes refers to an array of interactions that make up the histories conveyed and understood by community members.

Implied in a name or place are ways of using place names, ways of interpreting history (and to whom), understandings of what these histories impart about ideas of community, discussions of how a community is an Aboriginal place, and what “Aboriginal” means depending on community’s particular history and understandings thereof.

Anthropologist Keith H. Basso has called these processes of encompassing histories in a physical space “place-making;” that is, drawing meaning from and instilling significance in these places through understandings of its history.⁴ While Basso focuses his place-making discussion on place names, naming represents only one way that a community may engage in place-making; a community’s interpretations of its past may manifest themselves in a multitude of ways that are unique to that community and its conceptions of itself. Thus, despite their very different historical, cultural, and geographical situations, both Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island are home to processes of place-making, and it is these processes that I hope to “read” for the ways that they imply particular interactions and events.

Naturally these processes have been enacted in very different ways, depending on the specific experiences of the respective communities – perhaps most notably, a Métis community will have experienced colonial influence quite differently than a First Nations community, despite both being Aboriginal places. With that in mind, then, and taking under consideration Seabird Island chief Clem Seymour’s comment on my research that “you can’t

⁴ Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 5.

find a comparison looking in two different directions,”⁵ I do not envision this as a comparative study, but rather one that invokes multiple answers to questions about place-making, histories, community, and Aboriginality, and seeks to deepen the historical and historiographical breadth of these issues. While a side-by-side comparison of two very different places runs the risk of becoming superficial, considering two communities rather than only one introduces questions, ideas and themes that would not otherwise have emerged. Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island have both experienced non-Native involvement in their space and activities on small and large scales, and these interactions have shaped the way people evaluated their communities and the ways in which they have become identifiably Aboriginal places. Yet this basic information can take on new meanings in a different temporal or interpretive context, and thus historical issues in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island meet at times in this thesis to illuminate and explain the larger theoretical concepts of community and Aboriginality.

Just as place names in Île-à-la-Crosse provided an introduction to larger theoretical and historical issues, the historiography of place-naming helps to describe how community members’ narratives communicate their understandings of community, Aboriginality and history. Furthermore, while naming is but a facet of place-making, processes of naming have an influential historiography whose themes can apply to place-making more generally. In both the creation and ongoing interpretation of histories, place names provide an explanatory role, in which they act as indices and bookmarks that refer to what is significant in those histories for the people who live in these places. Basso has indicated a need for more focus on what he calls “cultural instruments” that shape people’s understandings of

⁵ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008. Recording available at Stó:lō Nation Archives.

their environments.⁶ In Aboriginal places like Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, there is an Aboriginal aspect to place and place-making, and so in referring to their communities, ways of place-making in these communities discuss not only the community itself, but also the definitions of Aboriginality that exist there. This thesis, then, represents an effort to explore the relationship between local place-making and the broader themes raised by place-making's references to past interactions. In both Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, senses of Aboriginality and community have emerged in tandem, highlighting the uniqueness of place and history while referring to broader issues at work within those local histories.

Basso's phrase "cultural instruments" refers largely to place names and the roles they can play in ethnographic or ethnohistorical studies, and indeed, toponymy has found a place in these types of studies for several decades. Yet while Basso's work highlights place names as the most significant evidence of place-making occurring in the Western Apache community where he did much of his research, the same does not necessarily hold true, or at least not in the same ways, for other communities. Place-making is a process by which a physical space becomes meaningful for an individual or for a group of people, and while, broadly speaking, this occurs by emphasising roots and connections to that space, the way these are communicated, and to whom, may take more malleable and diverse, though no less public routes. Thus, while the historiography of Aboriginal toponymy is by nature focused on the names themselves and their specific implications of place-making, the ideas about culturally- and regionally-unique ways of defining place and belonging have shaped my understandings of the ways that histories themselves are both evidence of and contributors to place-making. Rather than serving as the focus of my study, place names have opened the

⁶ Basso, 66.

initial doors into less explicit or visible discussions of the relationships between communities and their indigeneity.

Work by the anthropologist Franz Boas during the early twentieth century set the stage for subsequent toponymic studies among Aboriginal people, but also for ethnographic conventions whose traces remain in contemporary anthropological and ethnohistorical work. Boas catalogued and mapped some eighty-three pages' worth of place names in his 1934 work *Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians*, introducing them by noting that “geographical names, being an expression of the mental character of each people and each period, reflect their cultural life and the line of development belonging to each cultural area.”⁷ This approach, while firmly rooted in the salvage ethnography tradition that understood Native peoples as being on an inevitable course to extinction in the face of modernity, was among the first to argue for a humanistic rather than a purely scientific approach to anthropology and toponymy, in which an ethnographic approach was taken in order to elucidate the interpretation of geography by various cultures.⁸ In a broad sense, this has been the basis for the questions I ask in this thesis, though my goal has not been to record or preserve place names so much as to explore how local specificities (of which place names are but an example) interact with broader issues relevant to a community.

More recent anthropological work than Boas's has taken a similar view; Thomas F. Thornton's historiographical article on Aboriginal place naming has suggested a variety of areas for potential new research, pointing out a study undertaken in Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska in which Tlingit place names and their cultural associations were collected

⁷ Franz Boas, *Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 9.

⁸ Thomas F. Thornton, “Anthropological Studies of Native American Place Naming,” *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (1997): 210-211.

with the aim of illustrating cultural ties to the area over time.⁹ Thornton notes that place names evoke associations of a place, act as cultural artifacts, but also reflect individual experience, as each person has a distinct repertoire of meaningful place names.¹⁰ Tracing these characteristics of names gives them and the places to which they refer a temporal element, so that they can act as historical sources and raise historical themes and questions. At the same time, however, inventorying place names can also suggest, if not addressed explicitly, that naming is a static process, rather than one that historicises itself through ongoing processes of naming. Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, who has done extensive research on Stó:lō place names and who is Stó:lō himself, has commented that while his published work focuses on Halq'eméylem names, naming continues, particularly in English, in Stó:lō society in order to reflect new relationships that occur in places.¹¹ In particular, McHalsie notes that Stó:lō place names typically fall into one of three categories: those referring to historical happenings (*sqwelqwel* in Halq'eméylem, sometimes translated as “true news”), which can change or be created in parallel with historical circumstances; those referring to and describing geography, to locate oneself in the landscape; and those referencing miraculous events from *sxwōxwiyám*, or histories of the mythic past. In this last category, the names, though not necessarily their meanings or significance, are meant to be unchanging.¹² Most present-day naming of Stó:lō places falls into the first category, since it most flexibly and usefully accommodates changing Stó:lō experiences and interactions in the places significant enough to require a name. In this way, names refer not only to place, but also to reasons for their meaning, and when imbued with historical context, place names serve to

⁹ Thornton, “Anthropological Studies,” 222.

¹⁰ Ibid., 221.

¹¹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “Halq'eméylem Place Names in Stó:lō Territory,” in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 135.

¹² Ibid., 134.

reinforce a history of a sense of place. They can interpret historiography as well as geography, and indeed, this metaphorical reading of significant places is applicable in more theoretical discussions of community and Aboriginality in this thesis.

Expanding the usefulness of place names in this sense to include place-making in various forms provides a more diverse collection of historical subjects and sources through which to explore histories of Aboriginal communities. Acknowledging his role as an outsider in the community where he did his research, Basso comments that it is important to consider the “indigenous cultural forms” that help shape how people experience and communicate geography.¹³ Place and geography (or toponymy), however, are not necessarily one and the same, particularly when considering the concepts from the perspectives of different cultures. Indeed, various ways of place-making exist because there are various ways of existing in relationships, and so the ways that place is historicised and communicated, and to whom, will reflect what aspects of places and their histories are most significant in a given community. Senses of place grow, to an extent, out of the cultural environment to which inhabitants of that place relate as a whole, with common understandings of its history.¹⁴ But because cultural understandings tend also to be rooted in their environment of origin, they are also influenced by their locality within a larger set of interactions – that is, not just by their ethnographic (and, in the case of this thesis, Aboriginal) features. Place-making, then, takes on both cultural and local characteristics that are unique to the particular place that has been endowed with meaning, in processes of what Basso has called “retrospective world-building.”¹⁵

¹³ Basso, 109.

¹⁴ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

Retrospection implies a certain amount of re-evaluation of the past, and so the implications of places represent an ongoing process of historical interpretation.¹⁶ For both Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, physical change and growth of the community caused reconfigurations of knowledge of themselves and of others, and so in that way, understandings of a place refer to both its community and its Aboriginal features. Historical geographer Cole Harris has considered the relationship between historical events and Native space, noting that with the creation of reserves in British Columbia, “life became a matter of working out the spatial strategies that would allow them to survive in such circumstances. Old regimes of custom had been weakened or broken, and something else had to be put in their place.”¹⁷ Within renegotiations of space, though, are processes of place-making as well, and so histories of Aboriginal communities grow not only out of a series of events or encounters, but also take shape through ongoing interpretations of these things.

People remain the conduit through which histories are communicated most clearly, and their interpretations of those histories to others help to show how they view the significance of particular events or issues, as well as how they consider themselves within ongoing historical processes. Literary theorist Elaine A. Jahner has called the manifestation of these processes “cognitive style,” which she describes as “the linguistic evidence of historical processes at work in speech acts that function to define an individual’s place in a textual community.”¹⁸ Jahner’s concept points to a useful way of hearing and reading histories, particularly oral histories, when considering the understandings of Aboriginality and community contained within: it is not only the words exchanged in an interview that

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 274.

¹⁸ Elaine A. Jahner, *Spaces of the Mind: Narrative and Community in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), xvi.

relate these histories; evidence of the historical processes that led to the salience of the topic of conversation emerges as interviewer and interviewee interpret their ideas to each other. Seeking out interpretations of place (that is, communities and how they have become uniquely Aboriginal places) by inquiring how people have lived and interacted there can help to historicise these interpretations.

The very nature of places and communities as largely public entities implies that people who live in these spaces engage with a variety of others, both within and outside of the community, however they envision it. Drawing on two quite separate places for their residents' histories of place-making thus increases the scope of those interactions, as depicted in this thesis, quite significantly. Examined concurrently, Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island provide depth and breadth to each other's understandings of being Aboriginal communities, but it is also significant that they do so primarily through their geographical, cultural, and historical differences from each other. Considering themes suggested by place-making in the two communities is thus a process of exploring how ideas raised in one community might illuminate questions or answers in the other; to consider these places comparatively would perhaps be too strict an approach, risking essentialising aspects of one community or another. Recalling once again Clem Seymour's comment on comparing histories, I hope to look not in "two different directions," but rather at themes of community and Aboriginality, through the histories suggested by place-making in Aboriginal communities. Anthropologist Crisca Bierwert frames the relationship among voices and places in these terms: "My narrative arranges texts about different positions rather than

trying to speak in different voices.”¹⁹ Places, then, imply and house a multitude of experiences, and in so doing, also contain historical contexts for those experiences.

Recognising that the histories of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island place those communities as significant for their members, and that is through re-evaluation and renegotiation of the reasons for their significance that senses of place are made and reinforced, it is important to consider what voices of interpretation speak, and when. Anthropologist Crisca Bierwert suggests that to write about the history of Native people, it is helpful to strive to write as “a genre of variations and disruptions rather than smooth inclusions;”²⁰ that is, to view diversity or conflict among historical accounts as part of the process of interpreting history, rather than complications in that process. Reading places for evidence of this dialectic between what Aletta Biersack describes as “the world-in-the-text and the text-in-the world”²¹ reveals that conceptions of places reflect the diverse interactions that have occurred there. Like histories themselves, places (and the people who find them meaningful) include or exclude particular pieces from their narratives, both intentionally and unintentionally. As a result, processes of place-making locate texts (or more specifically, historical interpretations) not only in some physical place in the world,²² but also within a community of shared pasts.

¹⁹ Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 269.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 270-71.

²¹ Aletta Biersack, “Introduction: History and Theory in Anthropology,” in *Clio in Oceania: Toward a Historical Anthropology*, ed. Aletta Biersack (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 8.

²² Basso, xiv.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Contexts

My own processes of “reading” community members’ narratives for the local themes they suggest have evolved as community members in Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse explained these places to me, and these encounters have raised new questions and suggested themes inherent in the study of Aboriginal community histories. Histories of place-making first set the stage for this thesis, forming the basis for much of my analysis, and so I turn now to an explication of these histories at work in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, as viewed through the lens of place-making and its role as a descriptor of broader themes. My first introduction to the historically interpretive nature of place-making was in Île-à-la-Crosse, while working as a student researcher conducting community-based research on topics identified by communities for a historical atlas of the northwestern Saskatchewan Métis. The set of vernacular names for places within the town pique an outsider’s interest immediately, but seeking to understand their etymologies and current usages and meanings raises new questions about the ways different interlocutors in oral histories hear and relate those interpretations in different, situation-dependent ways; about how names “bookmark” important events and interactions in the community; and – most significantly for this thesis – about the relationship between what residents consider “community” to be, and how that does or does not parallel the ways in which they consider it an Aboriginal place.



Fig. 3: Map of Île-à-la-Crosse place names. Each person familiar with Île-à-la-Crosse possesses an individual lexicon of place names, and the inventory given here is therefore incomplete. It represents the most common and popular of place names, but is by no means a comprehensive list. Base map by Elise Pietroniro.

Snob Hill is the area of town that is perhaps most immediately intriguing to newcomers to Île-à-la-Crosse, and in this role, it provided introductory insights into the recent history of rapid change in the town. Dorothy Dubrule explained to me how the place was named, alluding to interactions in the town that were particularly noteworthy:

There's several versions of why it was called Snob Hill, but at the time when I was going to school, we had a principal, an Englishman, actually, who was very, very strict. I mean he'd walk into the building and everybody would go "whew," you know, he just had this sort of command. Now when you think about it he was actually quite brutal. But because he lived over there, and we sort of deemed him as being snobbish, we called it Snob Hill. That was our version as young people, and that's why it's called Snob Hill. Other people have different versions. But I stick with mine because that's the best one.²³

Fellow Île-à-la-Crosse resident Spud Morin recalls the first Métis inhabitants of Snob Hill moving there in the 1960s,²⁴ and this temporal marker helps to contextualise the creation of Snob Hill's name. The town had, for the past fifteen years or so, been undergoing rapid changes in lifestyle and living patterns, as a combination of internal and external factors led to the consolidation of seasonal residences into a more permanent, sedentary, larger town. Previously, individual families had settled at various points around Lac Île-à-la-Crosse, with the town as a central meeting place between seasons and at other significant times of the year. Settlements on the lake were often associated with the name of the family who lived there (and indeed some residents will still point out geographical features by noting who used to live there), and this afforded each group a clearly-defined place and identity. However, internal and external factors caused this spatial arrangement to change. Most notably, the introduction of the fur conservation block system and the transfer of the school from the Roman Catholic mission to local governance altered the way inhabitants of the region related to the town and to the land. What this meant for Île-à-la-Crosse was that

²³ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell, and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

²⁴ Spud (Allen) Morin, interview with Katya MacDonald, 6 July 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

people lived in increasingly close proximity to one another, causing a rapid reconfiguration of the living space to which they had been accustomed. Yet narratives (of which place names in Île-à-la-Crosse have formed one component) do not reflect only historical interactions; when people use the names today, they are invoking their understanding of the current social characteristics of a space. Snob Hill was once home to an outsider who was physically and socially separate from the rest of the town, but is now inhabited by young, local families who are drawn there by provincial and federal housing subsidies. In some ways, then, Snob Hill serves as a metaphor for notions of community in Île-à-la-Crosse, where the meanings of places may change for residents, but remain rooted in a shared history of interactions.

Although his analysis focuses on the reserve system in British Columbia, Cole Harris's study of Native space points to more broadly applicable themes in the history of Aboriginal encounters with Euro-Canadian presence. Harris describes colonial land systems as having "disciplinary power," so that Native settlement and life came to be centred on the reserve, "which, whatever its shortcomings, was recognized Native space."²⁵ While Île-à-la-Crosse, as a primarily Métis community, has never had specific parameters on who is eligible to live there, it has nevertheless come to exist as an Aboriginal place, thereby reinforcing the situational nature of Aboriginality in communities. In turn, histories of these places often refer to encounters between Native and non-Native intentions for the role of the community. A 2002 document prepared by the government of Saskatchewan outlined many of the provincial political policies that had been put into place in northern Saskatchewan, creating or revising what the document recognised as "colonial histories,"²⁶ defined as

²⁵ Harris, 288.

²⁶ James D. Winkel, *Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation*, online publication by Saskatchewan Northern Affairs, 2002 (<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=22747>, accessed August 2006), 23.

policies that had created north-south inequities in the province and inhibiting northern Saskatchewan residents' agency in "institutions that directly affect their lives."²⁷ Among the institutions and activities named by the document were fur block councils that began to regulate fur trade and trapping in the 1940s, co-operatives and community councils in the 1960s and 1970s, and school board changes and conflicts during these same years.²⁸ Indeed, etymologies of place names in Île-à-la-Crosse allude to some of the aftermaths of these changes in people's lifestyles and relationships to each other socially and in physical spaces. Île-à-la-Crosse's Chinatown was noteworthy not for the nationality of its inhabitants, but for its dense population, with "so many little houses close together, tiny little houses that twelve people lived in, two or three room houses...and there were kids galore, all over the place."²⁹ Increasing numbers of people relying on spatial and other resources in the town was a notable change from dispersed family settlements, and these new neighbourhoods were, for their neighbours and inhabitants, perhaps more reminiscent of something foreign than something familiar.

New ways of relating to others, both in the Île-à-la-Crosse region and with outsiders more broadly, raised notions of community and Aboriginality, even at the same time that these new interactions were first occurring. A 1963 anthropological study by Helen Buckley, J.E.M. Kew, and John B. Hawley suggested that the Native/non-Native dichotomy of many interactions in northwestern Saskatchewan persisted, even though the details and circumstances of those relationships may have changed. The division, the authors argued, was not a purposeful one, but one that stemmed from the ongoing economic dependency of

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

Aboriginal residents of northwestern Saskatchewan.³⁰ Yet while etymologies of place names like Snob Hill or Bouvierville reflect ideas of belonging or a lack thereof, their origins and ongoing usage in Île-à-la-Crosse suggest similarly continuous processes of interpreting the salience of those names, and how they imply understandings of divisions in a community and what is significant about them.

Buckley, Kew, and Hawley's study focused on the social gap between Native and non-Native people as the most noteworthy marker of difference between the two groups, but emphasised that this divide, while between separate cultural entities, was perhaps not best solved by a push for assimilation or cultural uniformity:

There is, of course, no reason why they [Native people] should socially and culturally resemble the whites. Such an assumption springs mainly from an erroneous conception of social change as a one-directional process... Cultural and social change is not necessarily a progression and does not occur simply by the substitution of one system for another.³¹

This emphasis on equal standards of living, rather than identical measures of what that might entail, originated after two decades of rather more assimilative policies and public opinion, to which forms of Île-à-la-Crosse place-making were a direct response. Sociologist Victor F. Valentine was hired by the provincial government in the early 1950s to visit Île-à-la-Crosse and bring perspective to both government and Métis understandings of the "Métis problem," based on the question, "What happens to people who have been reared in one pattern of living when they are faced with the task of adjusting to another?"³² Valentine's concluding remarks stated that "change is inevitable. The people must change. Once the administration has accepted this point of view and is prepared to be patient, positive

³⁰ Helen Buckley, J.E.M. Kew, and John B. Hawley, *The Indians and Métis of Northern Saskatchewan: A Report on Economic and Social Development* (Saskatoon: Centre for Community Studies, 1963), 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³² V. F. Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: Department of Natural Resources, 1955), 1.

rehabilitative measures can be adopted.”³³ Valentine’s remarks reflect some of the complexities inherent in the rapid changes experienced by Île-à-la-Crosse and its inhabitants, and acknowledge the persistence of cultures and identities in the face of these changes. Yet Valentine is also representative of a colonial government that encouraged, perhaps both intentionally and unintentionally, centralised and sedentary lifestyles that were significant in Île-à-la-Crosse’s struggle to maintain a particular identity as it became more difficult to assert it in the ways residents previously had. Thus, at the same time that Valentine was depicting his understanding of Île-à-la-Crosse, Aboriginal people considered their interactions (though not always explicitly) in resistance to assimilative forces to which Valentine referred, thereby fostering ideas of uniqueness and independence.

These changing interactions were not limited to the increased contact that new governance and institutions implied. Since these tended to have a consolidating effect on previously small and far-flung settlements, people in Île-à-la-Crosse and other towns in the region began to spend more of their time in closer proximity to others. This entailed more frequent opportunities to consider what was significant in relationships with local people, as well as with outsiders. Valentine noted this occurrence in his observations of Métis identity, suggesting that “to be a Métis, one must accept the common values and attitudes of the group or else suffer ostracism.”³⁴ While community members’ recollections today do not tend to depict such drastic action as ostracism, understandings of the town certainly emphasised relationships among local, generally Métis people, as well as with outsiders. Emerging neighbourhoods in Île-à-la-Crosse, now less easily distinguished from other places and people than they had been, required more specific, descriptive ways of delineating space and communicating the meaning of the new and changing configuration of the town.

³³ Ibid., 36.

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

Bouvierville was a clear example of how families acquired a delineated space within Île-à-la-Crosse, but other places like Anthill and Chinatown had familial associations tagged onto their names as well: the large Durocher family populated Anthill, while the Larivieres, McCallums, Roys, and Malboeufs constituted Chinatown.³⁵ Dorothy Dubrule noted how families have been an important feature of Île-à-la-Crosse, and how retaining those connections has shaped how people consider their community:

When I think of Lower Snob I think of the Durocher family, and...when I think of this area [Town], I think of the Kenny clan, what we used to call the Kenny clan...I know a few years back when they were moving families around in the Sask Housing, they were wanting to place families closer, like it was in the days when I was young. I don't know how successful they've been in that, but...originally, this house I'm in, the house that was on here was my great-grandmother's, so this is really home for me. So my family of origin, my mother's family of origin, the Daigneault clan, actually had this area as their homestead. So next door is where my cousin Jimmy lives, and so we belong to the same Daigneault clan.³⁶

As Île-à-la-Crosse changed and adapted, place-making became a response to those changes and a way to highlight the nature of relationships that people hoped to maintain in the face of new environments for those interactions. These interactions became embedded in the places where they occurred, and in the process, they also became imbued with historical significance that, at least implicitly, has remained in the ways that residents have defined their community and expressed the importance of particular ideas of Aboriginality within it. Such ideas have become ongoing, changing historiographical responses to Valentine's depiction of Métis-ness as a concrete or absolute entity.

Dorothy Dubrule's comments on living arrangements in the town allude to government involvement³⁷ there and its varying goals, success, and interest from community

³⁵ Spud (Allen) Morin, interview with Katya MacDonald, 6 July 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

³⁶ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

³⁷ It is worth noting, however, that the housing assignments to which Ms. Dubrule referred involved the Île-à-la-Crosse mayor, council, and housing board as well as the provincial government, and so were not unilateral

members. The legislation that originally encouraged the resettlement of Île-à-la-Crosse (to employ a phrase from Cole Harris) took a variety of forms, and affected physical and social arrangements of Île-à-la-Crosse in a variety of ways. Buckley, Kew, and Hawley's study recorded northerners' immediate concerns as policies and programs were enacted, providing an inventory of some of the issues alluded to by place names. When the provincial CCF government first instituted programs in the north in 1945, they sought to address a deteriorating economic base, high death rates, and low education and literacy levels through attention to hospitals and health care, education reforms, development of a commercial fishery, constructing access roads to remote communities, establishing Crown Corporations for marketing fish and timber, and the establishment of the Fur Conservation Program.³⁸ When Buckley, Kew, and Hawley reassessed the impact of these initiatives in 1963, they wondered if government programs were perhaps not "a great leap forward, but a logical development along the lines laid down before... [they] operate within the framework of the fur and fish economy."³⁹ The fur economy was the catalyst for the formation of Île-à-la-Crosse in the first place, and thus for Métis people in the region as well, and so the idea that government programs relied on the already established systems of trade and credit negotiations between non-Native and Native interlocutors hints at another way that understandings of belonging and identity were accentuated. The entities in community life that built on what Valentine termed "in-group and out-group feelings"⁴⁰ increased in number, and so it followed that renegotiations of these feelings, or some less dichotomous variations thereof, increased and became ensconced in community members' understandings

ascriptions, but instead represented local negotiations of place-making on an official level. See Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

³⁸ Buckley, Kew, and Hawley, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰ Valentine, 24.

of what Aboriginality in Île-à-la-Crosse should entail in a given situation; that is, to be Métis or Aboriginal in the town was indeed predicated on belonging, as Valentine suggested, but what belonging entailed was and is not a definitive set of criteria.

It was not merely the influx of new institutions themselves that sparked a re-evaluation and reconfiguration of interactions. Regulations and services dictated more specifically how and where people could spend their time most productively, and this was sometimes at odds with people's earlier lifestyles and settlement patterns. Valentine commented that many people tended to live in tents on the shores of lakes in summer, and occupying permanent log cabins along traplines in winter.⁴¹ He also described families' desire for self-sufficiency, where individuals would feel responsible first to their families, and then to other people or institutions.⁴² Interpretations of Île-à-la-Crosse's history today grow out of these mindsets; the explanations of the town's physical layout that were given to me often made explicit connections between places, either within the town or earlier settlements on points around the lake, and the families who originally lived there.⁴³ Families tended to follow a similar yearly cycle as others in the region, consisting of an intensive fall and early winter trapping season, an interlude around Christmas and New Year, occasional mid-winter trapping and fishing, concentrated spring trapping, intensive early summer fishing, and sporadic late summer fishing.⁴⁴ However, Valentine and anthropologist Robert Jarvenpa, working in the region thirty years apart from each other, both noted similar causes and effects of changes in these subsistence patterns. Perhaps most significantly, trapping was

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Spud (Allen) Morin, interview with Katya MacDonald, 6 July 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK; Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁴⁴ Robert Jarvenpa, *The Trappers of Patuanak: Toward a Spatial Ecology of Modern Hunters* (Ottawa: Canadian Ethnology Service, 1980), 65.

less and less a viable economic venture, with few other occupations to take its place.⁴⁵ The provincial government response was to institute the Fur Conservation Program in the 1940s, which divided trapping regions into designated blocks, within which only specified trappers were permitted to work.⁴⁶ The block system was designed to preserve rights for local residents, and each of these fixed areas soon became associated with trappers from a particular settlement.⁴⁷ As these settlements nucleated near residents' fur blocks, finding productive trapping areas required a longer journey, and the result was an overcrowding of fur blocks near villages.⁴⁸ At the same time, though, villages housed most of the services that inhabitants of the region made use of,⁴⁹ and so as they became more central, permanent gathering places, the ties between people and the places they made for themselves were translated into the spatial and social layout of towns like Île-à-la-Crosse. Just as in the broader region, the town itself housed family settlements and well-defined spaces of belonging on a small scale, and defining these places served as a way of retaining and emphasising the familiar (in all senses of the word) while adapting to new situations.

Coinciding closely with economic changes was an increased emphasis from the provincial government on education for children in the north,⁵⁰ and this, too, accentuated the ways in which people now interacted. In Île-à-la-Crosse, the Roman Catholic mission-run boarding school allowed parents some flexibility of location and lifestyle during the school year, but their children, without the extended opportunity to learn the same survival and occupational skills their parents possessed, had more reasons to stay in town after completing their schooling. Furthermore, Île-à-la-Crosse was unique among northwestern

⁴⁵ Valentine, 11.

⁴⁶ Winkel, 9-10.

⁴⁷ Jarvenpa, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁹ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁵⁰ Valentine, 16; Buckley, Kew, and Hawley 27.

Saskatchewan communities in the settlement changes wrought by the education system; in the early 1970s, the town of Île-à-la-Crosse took control of its school, with strong feelings on both sides that, to an extent, still persist today.⁵¹ This move allowed the school to reflect local interests more closely, but, with the closing of the boarding school, also meant that families were tied year-round to the community in order for their children to attend school. With this development, permanence in the town was reinforced in another way, which in turn helped to accentuate interactions, and perhaps increase their significance beyond what it might have been in more diffuse geographical relationships among people.

Like social dynamics themselves, place names and place-making in Île-à-la-Crosse have not been static, and consequently neither have the changing notions of community and Aboriginality to which place-making hints. Before English place names came into use in the town, places around the lake were known by primarily Michif names, some of which continue to be meaningful points of reference for Île-à-la-Crosse residents.⁵² Similarly, not all English names originated at the same time that the community first underwent significant spatial and lifestyle changes. Naming of places is ongoing in Île-à-la-Crosse, in reference to issues and events that have meaning in the lives of people there today, and in recent years. Olympic Village was built from materials that came from Calgary during the 1988 Olympics,⁵³ and as the largest and most rapidly growing area of the town, Snob Hill has begun to incorporate names for places within itself that help to define features of that place as observed by current residents. Sometimes, names have referred mostly to increasing

⁵¹ Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁵² In particular, Alapwânt (known as McKay Point in English), *La kerrôsil* (Big Island), *Ôjôrr* (Anthill), Alabî (near Chinatown), Alipalô (a small island just off the peninsula on which Île-à-la-Crosse is situated), and Alampson (the mission) were mentioned most frequently by the people with whom I spoke. Orthography of all Michif names is based on *Michif/Cree Dictionary (Nēbīyanēwin Masinabīkan)* by Vince Ahenakew (Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1997).

⁵³ Liz Durocher, interview with MacKinley Darlington and Katya MacDonald, 19 June 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

development of the area and the mud it left behind: “So then after Snob Hill was formed, they started the other subdivisions, building these other buildings, and so along the lakeshore, that became Lower Snob, and then after Lower Snob, then the Mudvilles came in. Mudville 1, 2 and 3, I think.”⁵⁴ Others characterised physical features of new subdivisions, linking people and their place of residence in a name: “The guy there, they call him Tall Robbie, a tall guy...when that street first come on, the houses there were so colourful...and somebody came along and called it Sesame Street, and they called Tall Robbie Big Bird.”⁵⁵ With expansion of the town, though, came new concerns about the town’s character and well-being, and these, too, have become embedded in the physical makeup of Île-à-la-Crosse: “There’s a place actually called Crack Avenue over here...where the crackheads come...you ask anybody, and they’ll tell you where it is.”⁵⁶ Just as place names are public entities in the town, so too are many of the issues to which they refer, and the ongoing processes of narrating places and ideas that occur alongside form similarly augmentable historical accounts of what piques the community’s attention.

The links between place names, place-making, and community and individual histories in Île-à-la-Crosse reflect the way these aspects of past and present experiences have converged in one Aboriginal community. Other places with different pasts understand community and Aboriginality based on their own interpretations of their histories there, in ways that draw on unique collective and individual understandings. Like Île-à-la-Crosse, Seabird Island First Nation has experienced colonial intervention in the inception of the community and in its activities as the community grew and developed. Naturally, though, even beyond cultural and local differences between the two places, the means and effects of

⁵⁴ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁵⁵ Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Euro-Canadian involvement differed as well. It follows, then, that local responses to these factors on Seabird Island would take different forms and different meanings than in Île-à-la-Crosse.

For Île-à-la-Crosse, its identity as a primarily Métis community highlights the mutability of concepts of community and Aboriginality or indigeneity. By definition, Métis implies colonial involvement and influence, yet at the same time, Métis people resist these impacts of colonialism in defining themselves as Aboriginal people and in the ways (discussed further in subsequent chapters) they manifest and communicate their particular notions of Aboriginality. In a somewhat similar way, the settlement and subsequent ongoing habitation of Seabird Island reflect a reconfiguring of colonial influence into narratives of indigeneity. The reserve's origins as designated agricultural land grew out of government efforts to encourage Aboriginal people to take up farming, but eventually became a way for those people to assert their right to the profits derived from that space, the activities practiced there, and ultimately, the ability to assert the Aboriginality of Seabird Island and the people who lived there.

Seabird Island was designated as a reserve in 1879, intended as agricultural land, to be held in common by seven Indian bands, but had always been a site of seasonal dwellings, resource gathering, and fishing, and so was well known to the people who came to hold the reserve land. In the years that followed, those activities continued to some degree, some farming was established, and the sedentary population at Seabird increased, with families originating from both Stó:lō and Nlaka'pamux (the upriver neighbours of the Stó:lō) bands. At the same time, a series of struggles with outsiders ensued over Seabird's land and resources, and it was unclear at times whether or how the resources on the island should be allocated among permanent residents and the seven bands who held the land in common.

Matters eventually came to a head in 1958, when a federal commission was held to determine whether Seabird Island should be designated as its own band. The records of the proceedings contain the testimony of several Native leaders and authorities, and they point to the desire that Seabird should be a place to foster a self-sufficient community that would be faithful to the values of residents' ancestors.⁵⁷

The commission did indeed lead to the establishment of Seabird Island as its own band, something that inhabitants cite today as a formative event in the history of their community. It did not ensure, though, that the reserve would be free from intrusion from outsiders; the provincial highway and CPR rail line bisect the reserve, a gas pipeline runs through underground, and when I visited in the summer and fall of 2008, a traditional land use study was underway to assess the impact of a power line corridor scheduled to be built in the coming months. The Seabird residents that I spoke to felt that these were intrusions into their space, particularly as they were dissatisfied with the degree to which they had been consulted about them. These are the most recent incidences of events and issues to which Seabird Island has responded, and through which they have reinforced their sense of place and identity in relation to each other and to outside influences.

In 1945, anthropologist Marian Smith supervised a group of graduate students conducting work in the Seabird Island area, creating an ethnographic and temporal snapshot of themes, issues and daily life on Seabird Island. One of Smith's students, Eleanor Leacock, published a paper based on her research that summer, which discussed definitions and expressions of community on Seabird Island. Leacock argued that a community would not necessarily develop simply as a result of physical proximity among people in a particular

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive administrative history of Seabird Island, see Hilary Kathleen Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1999.

area, and she noted that Seabird Island residents had little sense of neighbourliness with each other.⁵⁸ Symptomatic of this was the fact that houses on the reserve were set far back from the road or across Maria Slough, and so Leacock inferred that “despite the fact that these people once lived in communal houses, they do not seem to desire interpersonal nearness.”⁵⁹

While subsequent chapters will discuss my own and others’ responses to Leacock’s interpretation of Seabird Island communal sentiment, her observations reveal how uses and interpretations of space reflects how people conceived and conceive of their relationships with each other. Seabird Island has never housed the phenomenon of place-naming in the community to the degree that Île-à-la-Crosse has been, nor do the named places have etymologies that do not immediately imply their origins, but a few notable places on Seabird were, and to an extent continue to reflect commonly-held ideas or values in the community.

Particularly significant for Seabird Island, a familial focus on belonging in a space hints at a common understanding of the meaning of places on Seabird Island. One of my first introductions to the spatial and social layout of the community was through a driving tour of the island with band council member Jim Harris. As we moved through the physical space of Seabird Island, we encountered a series of social spaces as well, most of which were based on the places in which families had established and associated themselves. Some of these are indeed identifiable geographic markers that have been endowed with the name of a person who played a significant role there; Maxie’s Place is the fishing site owned by that person; Lizzie’s Lake, on Lizzie Johnson’s land, was a popular swimming hole when Jim Harris was young; and Pettis Corner refers to a bend in a road where members of the Pettis

⁵⁸ Eleanor B. Leacock, “The Seabird Community,” in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed. Marian W. Smith (New York: AMS Press, 1969 edition of the 1949 printing), 187.

⁵⁹ Leacock, 188.

family own property.⁶⁰ These places have acquired their significance through a common understanding of who exists there, and, by extension, whose families have established themselves in that place in such a way that others are able to observe that connection as well. By extension, they refer to particular understandings of the community and its history that emerge in residents' narratives and interpretations. This process has occurred throughout Seabird Island, even if few of the places have acquired definite names; as we travelled along one of Seabird's main roads, Jim Harris commented on how families clustered their homes in groups along the road, and how prominent members of those families contributed to memorable aspects of Seabird Island's history. The McNeil and Bobb families were and are closely related, and upon settling on Seabird, chose to live near each other as well. The three branches of the Peters family are strung along Seabird Island Road as well, and each has become associated with a particular occupation that the families hold – trucking, artwork and handicrafts, and logging, respectively.⁶¹ Place-making on Seabird Island, then, is closely associated with the families who have established themselves there, and through families' histories of settlement, understandings of the community incorporate diverse backgrounds into common ways of relating to the reserve and the people who have lived there.

The past and present activities of Seabird Island residents have established and linked people to significant places there, and so discussions of place-making tend to make reference to how people have used that space and how their use of it has contained particular interactions and issues. Discussions about important historical events or issues relate closely to discussion about who was involved, and how these people's activities helped to shape Seabird Island as it exists today. Until his retirement, Grand Chief Archie Charles

⁶⁰ Jim Harris, interview with Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C. Notes available at Stó:lō Nation Archives.

⁶¹ Ibid.

ran a dairy farm on Seabird Island, and for him, farming remains a way of establishing a connection to a meaningful place:

My grandchildren are not farmers...we've got Dutch people in here growing flowers...the younger generation aren't even putting in a garden; you have to weed it and so on; not like me, I've got my own garden. Practice what you preach, I don't know if that's right or wrong...We should be growing that stuff, but I'm not chief anymore! I can give them [Seabird Island chief and council] ideas, but they can throw it out the door if they want to.⁶²

Farming was one of the activities for which Seabird Island, as a reserve, was originally designated, and so Archie Charles's desire to retain links to that past reinforces his sense of belonging to personal and communal aspects of Seabird Island's history that mark it as a unique place that is home to particular people and their activities. Further, as Cole Harris has argued for British Columbia reserves more generally, these links have helped to establish Seabird Island as an Aboriginal place.⁶³ In a somewhat paradoxical way, the colonial programs that originally provided the basis for Seabird Island settlement became a marker of response or resistance to those same forces. Because of this history, Archie Charles's roles as chief and farmer have invoked a variety of approaches to place-making, so that this process becomes ensconced in historical processes as well, both in how these take place for insiders and how they are communicated to outsiders.

Among Seabird Island residents, "inside" and "outside" may have multiple meanings, since the reserve is populated by people of both Stó:lō and Nlaka'pamux descent. Anthropologist Wilson Duff categorised the upper Stó:lō, which included the region around Seabird Island, into three groups: the Chilliwack, the Pilalt, and the Tait. The Tait comprised the seven bands to whom Gilbert Malcolm Sproat originally allocated the Seabird Island

⁶² Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁶³ Harris, 274.

reserve.⁶⁴ Soon thereafter, however, with the threat of white squatters encroaching on the land, a group of people from Cheam, in the Pilalt region, moved to Seabird to establish farms and to help protect it from being overtaken, and intermarriage among Stó:lō and Nlaka'pamux people introduced further new ideas of belonging to the Seabird Island reserve. Blair suggests that “over time, patterns of residence were established which accentuated this tribal division – or may even have been an expression of it, whether consciously thought of as such or not.”⁶⁵ Even within what is an Aboriginal space, there have been multiple and shifting definitions of what that entails, and so while place-making on Seabird Island has often been based on interactions with outsiders, such interactions are not always so simple as a Native/non-Native dichotomy. Thus, while Seabird Island residents conceive of their home reserve in terms of family, it is also significant where these families originated,⁶⁶ and how their origins now contribute to understandings of Seabird's history that is rooted on Seabird Island, rather than, or in addition to, other places.

Multiple layers or definitions of belonging to a place illuminate two particular issues in exploring the history of Aboriginal communities: to what extent are local expressions of place-making Aboriginal features, and to what extent are they features of community identity? On one hand, Seabird Island's role as a meeting point for people from various Aboriginal groups make it a place where definitions of Aboriginality mesh, intersect, and emerge in unique ways, yet this also means that in some ways, Aboriginality is assumed or taken for granted, and establishing Seabird Island as an independent and unique place (whether formally, as in the 1958 Commission hearings, or informally, as residents have sought to introduce on-reserve services, economic ventures, and festivals) has meant that

⁶⁴ Blair, 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁶ Jim Harris, interview with Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

residents have focused on ways of community-building. Meanwhile, in Île-à-la-Crosse, the town's origins as an intersection of fur trade and Native interests, its subsequent growth as a primarily Métis population, and resulting government attention for this reason have reinforced residents' understanding of their home as an Aboriginal place. At the same time, place-making, as suggested by place names in the town, refers to experiences with communal life, which may include issues that might be associated with the community by virtue of its Aboriginality, but which are nevertheless unique to the Île-à-la-Crosse community itself. The degree to which the Aboriginality and communality of Aboriginal communities are inextricable is perhaps dependent on situation, person, and interpretation, but the links between the concepts remain embedded in places and their histories, which in turn help to elucidate the meanings of community and Aboriginality in the places where these concepts emerge and take root.

CHAPTER 3 Community in Aboriginal Communities

The Aboriginal component to both Seabird Island's and Île-à-la-Crosse's existence is what has tended to attract outside academic research and attention, yet an Aboriginal community exists as such because of influences that make and sustain a community as well as its Aboriginal components. While each "category" draws on understandings of the other in order to create a cohesive definition of the whole, a community does not become a community simply by being Aboriginal, nor is it Aboriginal simply as a result of Aboriginal people living together. I hope, then, to explicate notions of community in Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse as they have developed both in response to and in parallel with outside ideas of how community should manifest itself in these places. The nature of interactions there has engaged broadly similar themes or concerns, though of course with approaches that are local and indigenous to the place where these interactions occurred. Defining and delineating a space and its significance for insiders and in response to outsiders has, in both places, been a galvanising point around which community members have focused their own histories in that place, establishing themselves there and in turn fostering other focal points of communal significance. Relating collectively, with similar purpose or understanding, to political or institutional bodies from both inside and outside the community, and recalling and interpreting the roles of people, both collectively and as individuals, in shaping a common history have also acted as processes of community definition in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island. In this way, the community dimension of Aboriginal communities is provided by community members' own histories of the development of these places, to offer breadth and depth to historiographical and ethnographic snapshots offered by academics. Through ongoing processes of using, inhabiting, and referring to significant places, residents of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island have emphasised and indeed created their connections

to those places, to foster in turn the formation of and identification with these places as communities.

Exploring Dene understandings and use of space in northwestern Saskatchewan, anthropologist Robert Jarvenpa noted in 1980 that many ethnographic studies lack a temporal perspective that helps to determine “whether or not cultural patterns are genuinely adaptive.”¹ That is, historical context for the actions and values of a particular community illustrates in what ways those actions and values have become significant, or how they have been reinforced by community members over time. In particular, the idea of adaptation raised by Jarvenpa suggests that “cultural patterns” are comprised of mutable activities that respond to their antecedents and environments. Yet while historicising these patterns can illuminate the depth and context that has made them significant areas of consideration in the first place, the very concepts of community, Aboriginality, and Aboriginal communities exist largely as assumptions within Jarvenpa’s study; the concepts themselves are not imbued with a history. Because histories of Aboriginal communities find their greatest significance in those very same places, community and Aboriginality can be historical actors as much as people are. Inhabitants’ own histories of the development of their communities provide breadth and depth to historiographical and ethnographic snapshots. Through ongoing processes of using, inhabiting, and referring to significant places, residents of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island have emphasised their connections to those places, to foster in turn the formation of and identification with these places as communities.

The inextricable link between places and their roles in people’s lives provides the basis for understandings of community that are more complex than definitions of places as simply towns, reserves, or groups of like-minded people. Places can be mnemonic devices

¹ Jarvenpa, 170-71.

as well as sites of history- and place-making, and so Bierwert's goal of understanding place (in her case, a particular fishing site in the Fraser Canyon) as being "layered from the ground up" is a helpful metaphor. Bierwert seeks to "create an ethnography of place, playing the ironies of competing names and uses against the physicality of the place."² Histories of community, then, are also histories of concepts of community, and are dependent on both place and place-making for providing historical context for the significance of these definitions. Exploring ideas of community reveals what people with a stake in a common history hope to emphasise and retain within their communities, amid temporal and physical changes there. Anthropologist Jay Miller uses the Lushootseed shamanic odyssey tradition as a foil against which to display the ongoing vitality of Lushootseed culture and language, as it reveals itself in the "demise and replacement of the shamanic odyssey."³ Thus, activities within communities make reference to what people in that community consider most salient in their lives and interactions, and to some extent, since these interactions involve multiple participants in them, the idea of community is indeed an exercise in creating unity or cohesion amongst a group of people, even amid their individual histories and interpretations thereof. Indeed, these interactions help to shape common understandings and meanings for a particular place. Like Bierwert, Miller invokes images of the physicality of belonging to link place and histories: "The rivers cascading from [Puget Sound's] rim of mountain ranges were dotted with winter towns, villages, hamlets, and seasonal camps (resorts) of a tribal community, which fully interacted with all the others near and far to give order and meaning to Lushootseed culture."⁴ For Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse, too, their location has formed an integral component of their uniqueness as places with a common sense of

² Bierwert, 46.

³ Jay Miller, *Lushootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 9.

⁴ Jay Miller, 15.

identity, and where people maintain a history of referring to their living space to reinforce ideas of its past, present, and future.

Histories of place-making involve community in both its physical and its more abstract senses; that is, a community is not only a definition of a place, but also of who is involved with that place. In an Aboriginal community, this may be particularly significant in emphasising commonality, particularly when colonial markers of space do not provide this definition for either insiders or outsiders. The historiography of Aboriginal communities has sometimes sought to fill this gap, creating definitions for a particular place or suggesting ways of considering the idea of community in relation to a particular historical theme. Considered on their own, these definitions act as “snapshots” of histories and communities at a particular moment. Of particular importance for Île-à-la-Crosse, the historiography of Métis issues has often considered Métis people a “culture in between,” rather than an Aboriginal group with a “cultural ethos that guided decision-making.”⁵ In order to tease out the presence of such an ethos in the history of a community, Native Studies scholar Brenda Macdougall suggests looking inside that community to gain a sense of how people organised themselves in relation to others and the land, established a system of values, and used their local economy to perpetuate those values.⁶ Yet the ways in which these systems refer outward at times have also been important in helping to define Île-à-la-Crosse as a distinctly Aboriginal place: relationships both within and outside of the community have shaped how broader ideas of Aboriginality or Métis-ness have found meaning on a local level. Thus, considering the relatively recent history of vernacular place-naming and –making in Île-à-la-Crosse (a later period than Macdougall’s study of Métis interactions with the Hudson’s Bay

⁵ Brenda Macdougall, “*Wabkootowin*: Family and Cultural Identity in Northwestern Saskatchewan Métis Communities,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 87 (2006): 438-39.

⁶ Macdougall, 439.

Company and the fur trade economy) is a way of referring to what has been established in the community and as community features: assumptions of belonging or cohesion that are shaped through the history of using and inhabiting a place. Community, then, is both a theme in the history of Aboriginal places and a lens through which to consider the significance of those places for the people who have shaped and interpreted their histories.

Discussion of community in Île-à-la-Crosse provides one arena of comparison or elaboration of historiographical snapshots. Provincial government sociologist Victor F. Valentine commented in 1954 that “none of the settlements [in northwestern Saskatchewan] are communities in our sense of the term,” since they lacked services such as garbage collection or mail delivery, and had “no strong political focus that is peculiarly Métis”⁷ – though “Métis locals,” community-based Métis organisations whose work concerned Métis governance, rights, and advocacy, had been in existence in the region for around two decades. While it is not my intent here to superimpose new definitions of community over older instances of these, Valentine’s desire to describe community life in Île-à-la-Crosse draws out an assortment of themes that remain salient in contemporary community members’ discussion of Île-à-la-Crosse’s history and their participation in it. Even while describing the town in assimilative or essentialising language, Valentine recognised the role of culture and of being Métis in shaping the nature of interactions in Île-à-la-Crosse, and questioned to what extent common goals or expectations for the community were necessary in fostering a common sense of belonging there.

Similar discussions have taken place in the context of Seabird Island. Perhaps the most explicit study of community there is an exchange between two anthropologists over the span of two decades. During the summer of 1945, anthropologist Marian Smith supervised

⁷ Valentine, 13.

a group of Columbia University graduate students conducting field work on various topics related to Seabird Island. One of these students, Eleanor Leacock, published a paper based on her research there. In it, Leacock suggested that despite residents' physical proximity to each other, there was little sense of neighbourliness on Seabird Island; instead, people there tended to retain family and social connections to other places in the region, particularly upriver in the Fraser Canyon, where many Seabird families originated.⁸ In other words, according to Leacock, Seabird Island in the 1940s may have required a certain level of interaction and common goals among residents by nature of their shared living space, but she did not consider it a community in the sense that a group has "a sense of collective participation in an indivisible unit."⁹ Nearly twenty years later, anthropologist Wayne Suttles responded to Leacock's assessment of community sentiment on Seabird Island, suggesting that it was "*our* concept of community that is too limited," and that the patterns of "intervillage ceremonialism" to which Leacock had referred were in fact an important form of community in and of themselves.¹⁰ Neither of these perspectives overrides the other, nor do they necessarily contradict each other, although Suttles did feel that Leacock's approach was too closely focused on this fairly anomalous Coast Salish group. Rather, they represent two aspects of community on Seabird Island that are or have been present at different moments throughout its history. These moments form part of a historical whole that is forged through community members' own understandings of their history there, and manifested through their communal interpretations of that history. Cultural, local, and temporal contexts have all shaped community as it is conveyed by the people who claim a

⁸ Eleanor Leacock, "The Seabird Community," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed. Marian W. Smith (New York: AMS Press, 1969 edition of the 1949 printing), 184.

⁹ Leacock, 184.

¹⁰ Wayne Suttles, "The Persistence of Intervillage Ties among the Coast Salish," *Ethnology* 2 (1963): 512.

history there. This interplay among various layers of history and interaction has been termed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz as “the social history of the moral imagination” to refer to

the way in which our sense of ourselves and others – ourselves amidst others – is affected not only by our traffic with our own cultural forms but to a significant extent by the characterization of forms not immediately our own by anthropologists, critics, historians, and so on, who made them, reworked and redirected, derivatively ours.¹¹

Thus, understandings of communities are ultimately shaped by communities (in the various forms that they take over time) themselves, so that interpretations of those places form only a part of the definition of community and its meaning for residents. Discussion of Aboriginal communities, then, is an interpretation of community there, not (or not only) a representation of it, and as a result, community members’ own observations often engage with other aspects of the historiography of these places, even if they do not do so explicitly. Just as Lushootseed families were once anchored at their communal plank house, radiating outward to connect with others,¹² and in turn reinforcing their place at this anchor, Aboriginal communities have established similar roots for themselves. The place itself is perhaps less precise than a single dwelling, but histories of communities refer to the same roots, with the histories themselves acting as the anchor.

For Aboriginal communities, one theme to which histories often secure themselves is that of the nature of interactions with insiders and outsiders to the community. By drawing explicit connections between a place and its history, residents link their own history with membership and belonging. Speaking about physical changes to Seabird Island over time, Chief Clem Seymour juxtaposed insiders and the past with outsiders and the present:

There’s places inside the valley here, inside of Seabird, where they used to go gathering and making some parts of their metal and everything else. Inside of

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, “Introduction,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 8-9.

¹² Jay Miller, 146.

Seabird here, there's old pit houses that are still there. I understand, but I never really went there, there's a place where we used to have our bighouse, longhouse in Seabird here too. We do have a B.C. Hydro transmission line running through Seabird here, kind of takes away from us and building different places. We have a natural gas company that was running through, like it's a double line down through Seabird. We've got the main highway and the railroad track coming through Seabird right now, too.¹³

Recent, outside forays into Seabird Island space provide a contrast to earlier, identifiably Aboriginal uses of the region, and this is a contrast that emerges as something of significance in Seabird Island residents' histories of the place. Associating experiences of the past with ideas of valuable or desirable uses of community space suggests that permanence is one aspect of community, since it draws on both past and present activities to link people to each other in a particular place.

The past contrasted with the present is not limited to a pre-contact history of rustic dwellings and elaborate ceremonial life. Lifestyles that appear more familiar to outsiders can also be ways of reinforcing commonly-held understandings of ownership and belonging. Archie Charles, who farmed on Seabird Island for many years before his retirement, described the physical layout of the reserve in tandem with the names of people who have used that land. The land on the river side of the railway tracks that bisect Seabird Island is uninsurable due to its risk of flooding, so only a few long-term residents have any desire to own property there, and thus as Archie Charles noted: "Yeah, people like myself, I own land on that side, and the Bobbs [a Seabird Island family], they've got land on that side, and a man [another community member] owns the rest on that side, all the way up."¹⁴ Associating places with people is a way of anchoring them there and placing their existence within a context that has made ongoing reference to and re-evaluations of the interactions with others. Seabird Island's uninsurable flood land is one place where insiders and outsiders

¹³ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

¹⁴ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 8 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

have intersected, and where ideas of belonging have been reinforced as a result. This land, as well as being unprotected from flooding, is also eroding rapidly as a result of the Canadian Pacific Railway's building activity around waterways in 1913, with consequences felt most acutely by adjacent land owners like Grand Chief Charles:

Oh by the way, the river, the reason we were fighting CPR, there used to be a trestle here, and the [river's] current [came] right around, and they plugged that off, and in their bible, or whatever they call it, they're supposed to work by the book, and wherever there's water, they're supposed to leave it. And no, they shut that off. And highways come along and they put another one; they took all the bridges out, and they put fill in, all the way through...And we lost, after the plugged that all, I guess the river still tried to go through, and instead of that, it took that line – 1400 acres [lost to erosion]. And that's where we were really fighting them.¹⁵

Transportation corridors that disrupt waterways or people's sense of agency in their lands are not the only outside intrusions into Seabird Island space, and indeed, while residents use and benefit from passing traffic and accessibility afforded by the highway, other thoroughfares, beginning with the railway and continuing with electricity and gas pipelines, offer fewer daily benefits and more concern for those invested in the act of making Seabird Island home: "The tracks cut down, and the highway cut down the middle, and now the hydro is doing the same thing...The gas line done the same thing, they never asked to come through, they just brought their machinery [into the "right of way" afforded by the Department of Indian Affairs] and then when I became chief, I made them dig it back up. That pipeline was right by that school."¹⁶ Themes of intrusion and lack of consultation have helped to galvanise residents' understandings of the space that they inhabit collectively, both following and fostering senses of community and what that should entail, and for reference, community members draw on an ongoing past that can extend to any point in the history of the place.

¹⁵ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 3 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

¹⁶ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 8 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

The historical events and issues to which Seabird Island place-making refers were and remain ones regarding the establishment and maintenance of Seabird Island as a place for Aboriginal people to carry out their goals and desires for the community. Some of these were outlined in an administrative history of Seabird Island written by Simon Fraser University student Hilary Blair as her MA thesis, who noted that other, further directions for exploring Seabird's past might include oral history interviews, social histories, or histories of economic activities there.¹⁷ Indeed, understandings of place on Seabird Island have come into being through diverse interactions that have discussed and affected how people have inhabited that place, and how they have come to understand its significance. Blair argues that the late nineteenth-century "inter-band dispute over Seabird Island was not initiated by the DIA [Department of Indian Affairs], but by the White settlers' hunger for land, which provoked a Native response that brought pre-existing tribal divisions into play."¹⁸

The people of Seabird Island have a lengthy experience of wanting and needing to define themselves, both physically and conceptually, in relation to others, but these have been complex definitions, with divisions and differences being fluid categories that emphasised various issues in various ways. Nevertheless, certain themes have emerged repeatedly. During interviews with community members, I often asked people to introduce me to Seabird Island and its history, and just as often, they recounted conflicts and encounters with non-Native interests. Clem Seymour and Archie Charles spoke about governments, railways, pipelines and power corridors using or encroaching on Seabird Island space,¹⁹ and these concerns mirror those of earlier generations living there. At the 1958

¹⁷ Hilary Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve," M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1999.

¹⁸ Blair, 9.

¹⁹ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 8 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C. Recording available at Stó:lō Nation Archives; Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

Commission that eventually established Seabird Island as its own band, elders who testified cited as evidence of their right to the land a 1918 exchange with DIA timber inspector H.J. Bury, who had obtained a petition signed by eleven Seabird Island residents, which surrendered all timber on the reserve, in exchange for cash and assistance clearing the land. Bury had promised that only the signatories to the petition would receive the resulting money; they would not be required to share it with the Seven Bands.²⁰ Johnny Bobb, who was called upon to provide “the best and oldest oral history”²¹ at the Commission, recounted how Seabird residents felt they had reached common ground with Bury:

We see our Father from Yale, Chief James. We told him that peoples [the chiefs of the Seven Bands] make us get out and Chief James says “I am very glad you come and see me. I go and write it down that you hold Seabird Island. Let us go up to white man and ask white men.” “He write it down” – what he going to say – “for my children,” and that fellow says “Alright.” And Chief James he tells us that white man write it down, what elder men says, or put it in paper, and “I give you my right. You people hold Seabird Island.”

This exchange united two authoritative voices to confirm Native ownership of Seabird Island: the words of a respected leader, and the understood official nature of the written word. The act of establishing the place as a community was predicated on use, ownership, and meaning that Native and non-Native interlocutors alike could refer to. Johnny Bobb’s testimony elaborated on the way that this process occurred:

May Andrews, Jimmy Andrews – six families. He write it down. “You get that nobody can rob you down. No chap can rob you down and kick you out...August [Andrews] took that paper and saw the man down in the hotel. Alright. We see him down in Court House next morning at 9 o’clock. We come back and tell the old-timers down here. They all come together in the Court House and Mr. Bury come and stand up and say “I got letter from Chief James. I am going to read it through now.” And he read that letter to the whole people, and some old-timers stand up and say “It is right.”²²

²⁰ Blair, 75.

²¹ Canada, “Commission on Establishing a New Band of Indians on Seabird Island, British Columbia, 1958,” partial transcript, accessed at Stó:lō Nation Archives, 15-16.

²² Commission, 16.

Negotiations of this nature have been occurring, remembered, and ensconced in Seabird Island's past over the course of multiple generations, and as a result of these ongoing encounters between insiders' and outsiders' views of appropriate physical uses for Seabird Island, residents continue to communicate these histories in reference to ownership and belonging in that space.

At the same time that community relies on contrasts between insiders and outsiders, these definitions do not establish membership in the community simply by linking people there through their ownership of a portion of that space. Shortly before Seabird Island became a demarcated reserve, a white settler named Thomas Hicks took possession of a portion of land across Maria Slough from Seabird Island's northwest end. Next to this land was a cranberry marsh, from which Hicks had forbidden Native people to pick berries or cut rushes, and the Skw'atets people from across the river asked reserve commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat to intervene. Sproat did not reserve the land for Native people at that point, but he did inform Hicks that he had no right to restrict the use of land he did not own.²³ In this scenario, it was not ownership of Seabird Island, or at least not ownership as defined by Euro-Canadian law or practice, that established notions of who was an insider to that space. Rather, since the Skw'atets people used the area towards their livelihood, they identified with that place and considered Hicks' restrictions unwarranted and an intrusion on their rightful activity there. Identification, not ownership or even permanence, was the means that this group of people reinforced their presence on Seabird Island.²⁴

²³ Blair, 26.

²⁴ The Skw'atets did not comprise the people who eventually settled permanently on Seabird Island, but their presence there nevertheless set somewhat of a precedent for the establishment and defence of an Aboriginal community in that space and interactional environment, which settlers of Seabird Island would later cite as evidence and justification for the legitimacy of their use of the reserve.

Furthermore, it was significant that an entire group of people felt this identification, and that their response to Hicks seems to have been fairly cohesive. Community, then, has depended on a continual reinforcing of unity among the Aboriginal people who inhabit or use a space, and northwestern Saskatchewan illustrates some ways in which this has occurred. Valentine described a yearly cycle of living in and away from 1950s northern Saskatchewan settlements comprising social life, trade, and religious functions, but commented that this cycle was changing to include more time spent in the settlement due to the fur block conservation system and new schools being built.²⁵ The aspects of community brought about by physical nearness, then, were based on an use of that space where inhabitants could identify with others with similar lifestyles, and in this way, were able to attend to common understandings of interactions in this environment. Valentine's assessment of the political structure in the north was that "higher class" individuals were selected by government officials as leaders, but that these people were not able to garner much trust or respect from the community. Citing comments from local people that these appointed leaders were "using the people so [they] can act like a big-shot white man," Valentine considered these issues a hindrance to assimilation,²⁶ but their presence also suggests a desire for unity within interactions that paralleled the similar lifestyles in Île-à-la-Crosse. At the same time, though, it is important to note that unity is not uniformity, and that despite broadly similar ways of life, common experiences have taken on very different meanings for different people. Île-à-la-Crosse's mission-run boarding school was a site of unhappiness and even abuse for some,²⁷ yet Dorothy Dubrule, who also attended the school, felt that "they [the clergy presence in the community] had a very positive influence. There

²⁵ Valentine, 10.

²⁶ Valentine, 22.

²⁷ Of the Île-à-la-Crosse residents I interviewed, Don Favel and Tony Laliberte were perhaps the most outspoken on this issue.

was the oddball of course, as in anything, and unfortunately it's those people that make it bad for the rest of them."²⁸ Unity, then, may grow out of similarities, but it does not necessarily imply or engender them, since interpretations and experiences of community histories are ultimately individual affairs.

The community sentiment implied by unity relies, to some degree, on the official nature afforded it by political bodies, both within and from outside the community. Suttles' argument that Coast Salish villages were "not a self-contained social unit," and that individual and family ties to other places engendered co-operation among villagers, but no formal obligation to do so²⁹ describes a group of people that referred outwards from their own locale. To whom they referred was what shaped the nature and definition of their community, with a single physical point of reference of less importance than the interactions of the people who happened to inhabit that place. While Seabird Island might previously have functioned in this way, and in some ways does indeed retain some of these characteristics of Coast Salish community, its points of reference in recent times have been centred on Seabird Island itself, to foster a sense of community focused in that single place, in reference to their broader place within Stó:lō society. Maggie Pettis, a Seabird Island resident, attributed this conception of community to local governance:

I think consistent leadership has probably moulded us to where we are today. The consistent chief and council members over the last, well, I've been living here for thirty years, so there's consistency in that area, there's been hardly any changes...in terms of developing policies and things like that, I think it's probably a good thing... People trust [the families and individuals traditionally involved in governance], respect the things they're going to do.³⁰

²⁸ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

²⁹ Suttles, 513.

³⁰ Maggie Pettis, interview with Katya MacDonald, 9 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C. Recording available at Stó:lō Nation Archives.

With a familiar and, apparently, generally acceptable leadership around which Seabird Island residents have become accustomed to basing their politically-related activities, a structure indigenous to that place has developed, creating one way of establishing communal links to a similarly collective history of governance. Indeed, when invited to respond to Leacock's definition of 1940s community on Seabird Island, Ms. Pettis agreed that Leacock's assessment of the community would likely have been true at the time, since lifestyles were more seasonal, following fishing, hunting and gathering patterns more closely than most do today. She also cited the 1958 establishment of Seabird Island as its own band as a significant factor in centralising residence and community sentiment.³¹

The reserve's administrative history, then, contains an underlying focus on the centrality of Seabird Island for the people who have made homes and livelihoods there, and this focus has been maintained by insiders and outsiders alike. As indicated by 1918 DIA reports, use and habitation of Seabird Island were increasingly permanent activities; DIA listed the names of (male) residents who were currently involved with "developing" the land. Activities to that end included cultivation, pasturing of livestock, clearing timber, planting orchards and root crops, building houses, and living there with a wife and/or family.³² Reminiscent of European settlement on the Canadian prairie and the Fraser Valley during the same era, these markers of permanence, once imposed and encouraged by non-Native governance, have since become ways of emphasising Seabird Island's distinctiveness and its role as a place of belonging. Ivan McIntyre linked his own family history with that of Seabird Island as a whole: "My grandfather was the first settler on Seabird Island. He had a ranch out by the Fraser River out there. There was three families out there – my grandfather's brother, Henry Ewen, and the Joe family. Dan Thomas was across the tracks,

³¹ Maggie Pettis, interview with Katya MacDonald, 9 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

³² Indian Affairs. RG10, Volume 7536, File 26, 165-1. Copy at Seabird Island band office.

and Johnny Bobb, and August Andrew, they were all on the other side of the track.”³³

Similarly, Archie Charles drew connections between the settlement of Seabird Island and

Stó:lō elders’ implorations to care for Stó:lō territory:

As the old timers put it, you own this land, and they said to look after it, because the guy upstairs is not making any more worlds. It’s starting to flood already, people...they’re trying to take this land away from us...Before [the land] was cleared, everybody was living on the outside [perimeter of Seabird Island]. Now they’re all, housing here, all over the place. And the giant cedars in that part of the land, the mill cut it all down.³⁴

In this way, what began as a Euro-Canadian vision for Seabird Island has evolved, through residents’ own interpretations of this place and its history, into an understanding of Seabird Island community that has used some of the same processes encouraged by DIA to establish a group of people on the island, but that has engaged their meanings in entirely separate ways to reflect community members’ own interpretations of Seabird’s role in their past and present.

As a predominantly Métis community, Île-à-la-Crosse has not experienced Canadian federal governments’ delineation of space with the same degree of dedicated involvement as Seabird Island has, but political bodies have nevertheless emerged as parties interested in shaping the connections between place, history, and community. Dorothy Dubrule remembered an explicit attempt in the 1970s on the part of local governance to foster what they viewed as important relationships among community members:

The mayor and council and the local housing board thought that if these families stayed closer to each other, they’d have more of a family unit, and it wouldn’t be more of a breakup of the family unit, and more support for the younger people...Because it was so, when people my age were growing up, we had clusters of

³³ Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C. Recording available at Stó:lō Nation Archives.

³⁴ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 3 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

families, had all the support we needed from great-grandmothers down to great-cousin-aunt.³⁵

Drawing links between the past and the contemporary layout of the town represented an official interpretation of the nature of community in Île-à-la-Crosse as it had been common in previous decades, and remnants of which remain in areas of the town like Bouvierville, where members of the Bouvier family have settled. While in the end it did not come to pass, this venture represented an intersection of past, present, and future ideals for the community, and it illustrated how community members' analysis of their own history translated into an expression of what they viewed as desirably Métis characteristics of Île-à-la-Crosse.

The ways in which institutional officiality shapes community is, naturally, closely tied to the nature of institutions that have been present in a particular community over time. Île-à-la-Crosse's close association with the Roman Catholic mission and its activities there has meant that changes in the town have frequently coincided with changes in the mission, and presumably vice versa as well. Irene Gardiner noted that the town of Île-à-la-Crosse has remained stable and familiar for her, while the church, and later government, and their affiliated institutions have provided the most notable and long-standing contrasts to town life:

Nothing seems to be important; everything seems to be the same, except for the church. Everything else changed, but the only thing is church, and the schools. No convent, no place for the kids to stay...Once every town had its own school and everything, then people don't come here. No, they didn't come after that. But the main thing is the school and the church, that's the main thing that I can think of...That really changed the town.³⁶

³⁵ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

³⁶ Irene Gardiner, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell, and Katya MacDonald, 27 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

Church and schools acted as centralising agents for northern residents, and whether these were entirely desirable forces or not, they helped to focus a community of people in a single, identifiable, delineated space, and changed the nature of that space once the institutions themselves changed or left the region. This was not only a physical phenomenon, but a historiographical one as well, with some community members' interpretations of the church's influence in Île-à-la-Crosse sometimes at odds with others', as Don Favel noted regarding the transfer of the Île-à-la-Crosse school from the mission to local governance:

They [outside authorities or institutions] don't like people that speak out, that's one thing they don't like. They don't like us being vocal and standing up for our rights. And they don't like that. And they always seem to find a way, it's either turning half of the people on us, or, you know, there's always something going on. No different than when we took over the school, they had a standoff. They had a standoff, they stood, they said, "All church people stand on this side, because these are the devils over here."...And that old wound is still there. It's still there, and most of it has healed, but every once in a while somebody will open that wound again. It's not completely healed or completely forgotten.³⁷

The church and school, then, have provided points of reference for community members that highlight the diverse nature of changes in the town's social, physical, and historical makeup. For Île-à-la-Crosse residents, evaluating their own experiences with these institutions is a way of reconsidering significant aspects of the community as the community itself has changed.

It follows, then, that people (both as individuals and collectives), in addition to institutions and places, comprise a significant component of community, as it exists and is interpreted in both the past and the present. Echoing the experiences of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, Miller comments (though in specific reference to the Lushootseed) that "the transformations of the epic age continue to be relevant in the present, after the influences of Catholic and other missionaries have become grafted onto native traditions. Changes in

³⁷ Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

history become changes in narrative, but the native voice remains strong.”³⁸ In the context of this thesis, the “epic age” that Miller mentions could just as easily refer to moments of historical significance that are more specific to Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, indicating that there is no single “native voice,” since changes in historical narrative imply changes among individuals as well. Place-making is a process of establishing oneself within a place and community, which includes, in the places I discuss here, aspects of individual interpretation of broader community and Native histories.

The narratives that community members have conveyed about their own roles in that place provide, when read historiographically, an indication of how individuals and communities rely on each other for their interpretations of the implications of their histories. When anthropologist Marian Smith spoke with Seabird Island residents in 1945 about their life and community there, she recorded aspects of both their contemporary and pre-contact experience, and the notes Smith took during these interviews now offer some insight into how Seabird Islanders’ understandings of their community and past have changed alongside the place itself. One of Smith’s informants, Mrs. Vincent Peters, mentioned that the Halq’eméylem name for Seabird Island, *sk’aukel*,³⁹ had originally referred to the bend in the river at the top of the island, but had now come to refer to the whole of Seabird Island, though a few places on the island were still known by more specific names.⁴⁰ This linguistic generalisation was perhaps aligned with a growing sense of Seabird Island as a place containing cohesive, permanent community that corresponded with sense of a communal

³⁸ Jay Miller, 53.

³⁹ This is the phonetic transcription given by Smith; when used in written discourse today it is typically rendered as Sq’ewqel. It is not to be confused with the Stó:lō reserve of Skowkale, near Chilliwack, whose name is derived from the same Halq’eméylem word (meaning “going around a bend” or “turn in the river”), though in reference to a different place. See Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “Halq’eméylem Place Names in Stó:lō Territory,” in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001): 134-153.

⁴⁰ Marian W. Smith Collection. Unpublished (summer 1945), Royal Anthropological Institute (London), 268:2:13, 32.

history as residents of that place and the activities that occurred there, and that was fostered by an increasing desire to define the place in relation to others, and to delineate its space explicitly.

Indeed, in direct contrast to Smith's student Leacock's evaluation of community sentiment on Seabird Island, some of Smith's informants tended to speak about the reserve's history not in terms of individuals' or families' associations with the place, but in reference to their common association with it. Mary Charles, mother of current Grand Chief Archie Charles, was one such person. While she delineated the Nlaka'pamux and Stó:lō migratory origins of Seabird Island residents, and named the families who belonged to each tribe, she spoke about all of them in reference to their relationships with Seabird Island itself, noting how the island had been used to dry salmon at one time, and mentioning the presence of pit houses nearby.⁴¹ Leacock, too, reported Seabird Islanders' ways of linking themselves to that place. She described the summer activities and locations of Seabird children, some of whom were, for example, with their extended family "across the line, berrying" (that is, picking berries commercially in the United States) with their father, who worked at the mill at Harrison Hot Springs; with parents at Ruby Creek, where the father was working on the section; or with parents at Wahleach (which is located on Seabird Island, but was referred to as a separate location).⁴² These families were mobile, but retained their connection to Seabird Island by referring to other places by what drew them, rather than rooted them there. Ultimately, they were centred on Seabird Island itself, and their individual activities away from there helped to define where they considered home, and illustrated how individual experience could contribute to the nature of a broader whole, the Seabird Island community.

⁴¹ Marian W. Smith Collection, 268:4:1, 1.

⁴² Eleanor Leacock fieldnotes, Marian W. Smith Collection, 268:2:32, 3.

The mobility of individuals and families can thus be alternately a fragmenting and a unifying force in communities, and in Île-à-la-Crosse, this phenomenon has explicit cultural as well as lifestyle roots, raising questions of whether community relies on a specific place for its existence, or whether it can travel alongside its potential members. A view of community that Macdougall has termed a “Cree cultural concept,” *wabkootowin* refers to “the expression of a world view that laid out a system of social obligation and mutual responsibility between related individuals...as the foundational relationship within communities.”⁴³ For Île-à-la-Crosse, a predominantly Métis place, *wabkootowin* is descriptive not only through the ways it creates links to Cree history in the region, but also because of the emphasis it places on the relationships between families and places. Family and ancestry are thus links to a community and the common expectations that belonging to such a community entails, and as Île-à-la-Crosse has evolved into a largely centralised town, *wabkootowin* has settled there as well, as suggested by the way that place names within the town have taken on the role of segmenting ostensibly community space into familial regions. However, particularly since the advent of official colonial involvement in Île-à-la-Crosse, people in the town have also needed to look beyond *wabkootowin*, which emphasised markedly indigenous relationships. Such relationships provided roots for definitions of Île-à-la-Crosse as an Aboriginal community, but that also considered that community in light of its interactions with colonial agents.

For Seabird Island, too, invoking ancestry has been an important way of establishing an identifiable community there. The reserve’s origins as a hybrid of cultures and family histories is different from most Stó:lō reserves, which tended to house, at least initially, those

⁴³ Macdougall, 433.

with ancestral connections to the villages around which reserves were generally allotted.⁴⁴ In Suttles' view, Seabird's exceptionality in this regard was not a hindrance to fostering community to the extent that Leacock had suggested. He commented: "In the more usual situation, where the reserve has continuity with a single aboriginal village, the ties among neighbours may be somewhat closer than at Seabird, but only because the kin ties are more numerous and closer."⁴⁵ Yet in some ways, Seabird Island has also become somewhat of a metaphorical family in and of itself. Maggie Pettis highlighted Seabird Island's uniqueness in terms of its independent health, social and education services housed on the reserve, and the connections that these had with the past, so that Seabird Islanders are "carrying on our parents' and grandparents' vision of what was important years ago, carrying on with what they thought was important, like ensuring that we had phones, and ensuring that we had teacher funding."⁴⁶ Thus, while families no longer cluster their dwellings with other relatives to the extent that they once did, residents maintain a familial element to their community, emphasising that they are carrying out their grandparents' vision for a place that was able to prosper and look after itself by maintaining links to language and history.

It was not always so straightforward to connect histories to a unified understanding of community, however. In 1958, during the hearings held to determine whether Seabird should be established as its own band, Chief Oscar D. Peters of Hope drafted a letter to the Governor General, advocating that Seabird Island should become its own band, but that the Seven Bands who held it in common should retain a common interest on the reserve, which Peters called "Our Great Inheritance." He argued that the Inquiry's findings should be ignored due to "too many omissions and alterations," and that the broader, common

⁴⁴ Suttles, 517.

⁴⁵ Suttles, 517.

⁴⁶ Maggie Pettis, interview with Katya MacDonald, 9 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

ownership of the land was closest to the uses for it which he argued had been established by “Our Ancestors.”⁴⁷ The process of invoking ancestry to shape community can thus have various results, though in the end, it was Chief Vincent Harris of Seabird Island’s argument that seems to have retained its resonance. He stated to the Commission that Seabird should become a place to which future generations could link their ancestry:

We came to our good friends here, the Chief[s] of the Seven Bands, who owned us in common, we came to them in good hearts and asked them to relinquish their rights to us so that we may get on and bring up some of this land for our younger generation and for our livelihoods. They are well aware from back to 1918 we have been requesting them, in a good manner. We never went there as, what you might call, a war party. We requested them, like gentlemen, to favour us. We do not wish to throw them out altogether and make enemies of them. The idea is that the 43 children now going to school on this island, these are the ones we are looking forward for to a better living. In the condition we are in to-day we cannot do anything for the children. The people on the Island now have to get out to logging camps, some to the U.S.A., instead of living right at home. That is the reason why, when my friends elected me as Chief, my first step was to go to the Chief[s] of the Seven Tribes and ask them to relinquish their rights so that we might set up modern homes. I cannot see why the Seven Bands have so much to fear if they release the rights to us people.⁴⁸

Seabird Island’s current governance, as represented here by Clem Seymour, frequently refers to Chief Harris’s understanding of the ancestors’ intended usage of Seabird Island:

Back in 1958, they had a vision of where they wanted to see Seabird at – they wanted to see Seabird take care of their own education, they wanted to see Seabird looking after their own housing, they wanted Seabird to look after all their different social programs, and that’s the basis of their vision that we still walk with here today... That’s the basis of why we’re here today, understanding why we take care of things.⁴⁹

Chief Harris’s version of and vision for Seabird Island’s history has thus become ensconced in his political descendants’ goals for the community, and thus invoking ancestry to link people and places is a twofold process. It refers not only to common origins, but also to the

⁴⁷ Canada, “Report of Commission to Inquire into the Desirability of Establishing a New Band of Indians on Seabird Island, British Columbia,” 26 August 1958. B.C. Archives (copy held at Stó:lō Nation Archives).

⁴⁸ Canada, “Commission on Establishing a New Band of Indians on Seabird Island, British Columbia, 1958,” partial transcript, accessed at Stó:lō Nation Archives, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

ways that residents' predecessors, in their role as historical sources for contemporary Seabird Islanders, previously envisioned the community.

Ancestry is also able to provide another way of establishing a physical basis for a community. From 1995-1998, Stó:lō Nation, one of the two political bodies representing Stó:lō people and communities, conducted a traditional use study of a portion of *S'ólh Téméxcw* (Stó:lō territory) based on the memories of living elders and on ethnographic information. This research pointed to Seabird's history not only as a hunting ground and site of material gathering, but also as a host for a number of hereditary fishing sites, located mainly on the slough behind the island, but also on the main channel of the river.⁵⁰ The Stó:lō practice of handing down valuable fishing sites through families provides a traceable link to places, ensuring (so long as ownership of the site is not disputed) a historically-supported claim to a physical space, and helping to define the function of that space in a communally accepted way. Like place-making itself, this is a process that is ongoing and that responds and adapts to changes in the community. In the 1970s, Seabird resident June Harris compiled an extensive list of objectives for historical research on the reserve that she felt should be undertaken. One of her projects was a map of fishing sites on Seabird Island, on which she marked Maria Slough, which, along with the Fraser River, serves to surround Seabird Island with water, as the fish route and main channel of the river;⁵¹ she also pinpointed a number of fishing spots along the slough, along with their owners (see Figure 2). She also provided a list of people who habitually fished with a drift net along the Fraser

⁵⁰ David M. Schaepe, "Activities on the Land: Continuing Traditions in a Shifting Legal World," in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001): 122-123.

⁵¹ Archie Charles and Clem Seymour both attributed the decline in the salmon population in the slough in recent years to a lack of water flow caused by erosion and by earlier building interference by the CPR and highway.

River side of the island.⁵² Fishing had remained, then, a noteworthy occupation for Seabird Island residents, both for its historical roots and its contemporary significance, and while physical changes to fishing conditions have altered fishing practices around Seabird Island itself, it remains an important activity for some residents today. Most fishing by Seabird residents takes place upriver in the more lucrative and easily exploited Fraser Canyon, a link to their families' origins there prior to moving to Seabird Island,⁵³ but the fact that some people eke out fishing sites for themselves on Seabird Island itself suggests a sense of place that is rooted there as well. Indeed, some people have constructed fishing spots for themselves using logs, soil, and gravel to create eddies where salmon will rest.⁵⁴ These and other sites, just like ones further upriver, have also housed familial and inter-familial conflicts over ownership,⁵⁵ which, by extension, are also conflicts over the legitimacy of the family histories that link people to a site. Connecting these histories to Seabird Island itself represents an identification with histories that have established families and their activities there, where a community is able to interpret and evaluate their function in daily life.

⁵² June Harris, "Objectives for Seabird Island Research (1970s)," binder 2.

⁵³ Of the people I interviewed, Archie Charles and Ivan McIntyre in particular belong to prominent Canyon fishing families; I address this further in Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Jim Harris, interview with Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

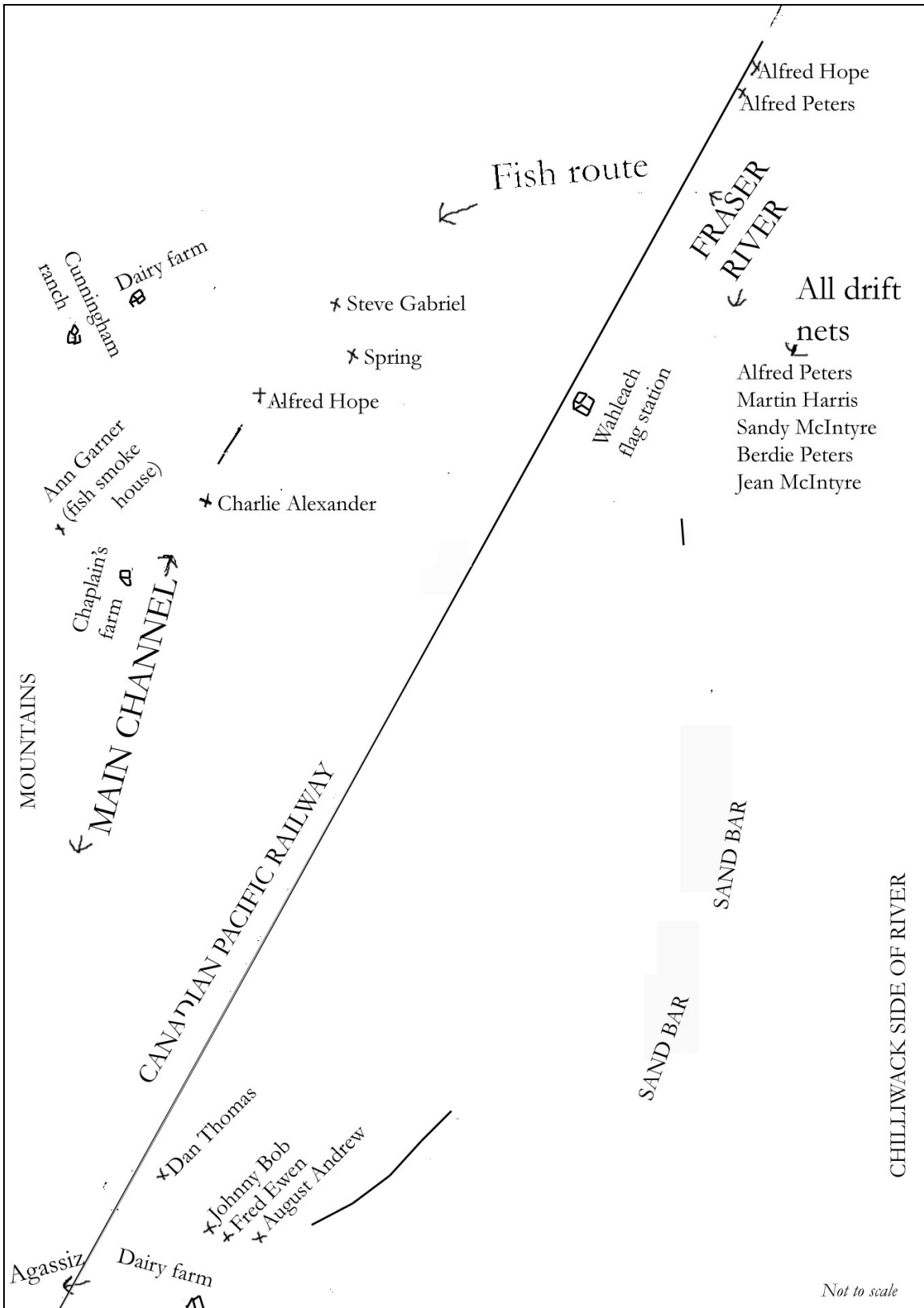


Fig. 4: Copy of June Harris's map of Seabird Island fishing sites. Text has been digitised for readability, but all markings and spellings are original.

Perhaps the most obvious way of marking physical links to notions of community is through place names. While names in Île-à-la-Crosse are largely descriptive rather than prescriptive of the place's function in the community, they invite on an ongoing basis evaluation of the roles of the families and individuals associated with those names. Yet the fact that places in Île-à-la-Crosse have acquired their names as a result of interactions with people rather than the land does not preclude their physicality; their diverse origins are simply indicators of a variety of ways of understanding the community, and of specifying details of where that community is located. This is particularly significant for Île-à-la-Crosse, which, despite its long history of community (in one form or another) in the same location where it is now, this physical link to its history has not always been certain. The town's location at the end of a flat peninsula has left it susceptible to flooding, and there have been efforts to mitigate this risk, as Don Favel recounted:

I know in the seventies we were going to move to Canoe River [across a bay from Île-à-la-Crosse] – it's all surveyed over there. We were going to move the community over there...because of the floods...They had surveyed all that part, really high land there, and that's where they were going to move the community, they were going to build houses there. But then people didn't want to leave the church, and the church had a good argument, saying that they wouldn't build again if they moved.⁵⁶

While there were likely a number of hindrances to this proposal, presumably both practical and nostalgic, the church acted as one tangible representation of the physical component of community, and indeed performed a similar function to place names, since its presence formed a place of interaction that was understood by the community to inhabit a particular space.

As an intentional act, naming places reflects not only what has been significant about interactions in that place, but also what those who use the names seek to emphasise about

⁵⁶ Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

places and their histories. Place names, then, are not only representations of community, but also shapers of it, sometimes in ways that do not immediately seem to fit with what might otherwise seem to be important to community members. Clem Seymour's explanation of Seabird Island's name provides an illustration of how notions of community reside not only in names, but in ideas about what names should convey:

Up in this area here, there was a paddlewheeler got stuck here named Seabird...it got hung up there for six months, they got hung up there twice. So when they wanted to travel to it, they started calling it Seabird Island, and that name just stuck. And the elders said no, when they were asking to change, some of them here on Seabird, they said no, Seabird's the one that everybody wants to name it by, so we'll let that there. I know there was some interest in changing the name back to Sq'ewqel, but the elders back then said no, it's Seabird now, you leave it as Seabird because everybody knows it as Seabird.⁵⁷

Despite Seabird Island's official efforts to incorporate Halq'eméylem street and building names into their community, applying this policy to the name of the island itself seems to remain out of the question. While names within the community are in some ways references inwards, to a common history of origins, language, and/or interactions, the name of Seabird Island itself has origins that are largely unrelated to these factors, not unlike the history of the creation of the reserve itself, as Clem Seymour noted:

They come and ask me, "Well, where's Seabird's territory?" Seabird never had a territory. Seabird never put those lines around us, we never did that. I tried to educate the other people and say no, this is why we're failing all the time, this is why things don't work – we accept their law and understanding of what is territory. Because I know, to me, we're supposed to look after it; to me, we look after it because it looks after us.⁵⁸

Since the community's history has its origins in artificial boundary-making, applying a Halq'eméylem name to the island would also be an artificial act of community-making. Since the name of Seabird Island became associated in an organic fashion with the island and, eventually, its inhabitants, it parallels the way that Seabird Island has become a focal

⁵⁷ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

point of community among its residents, drawing broad individual and familial histories into a single place where they interact.

While place names are often a particularly public or official way of describing a community's use of its space, place-making also manifests itself through community members' activities there, since these, in turn, are manifestations of residents' ties to the place and to each other. Thus, when June Harris set out to outline her objectives for Seabird Island historical research, she enumerated a series of evidence of activities that she viewed as significant to Seabird Islanders' collective history there: physical occupation of the island from year to year, place names, ownership of houses and land, archaeological sites, and ownership of fishing grounds and traplines.⁵⁹ These categories represented not only a variety of activities, but also a wide temporal range of when these activities took place most frequently, thereby imbuing Seabird Island with similarly deep roots. At the same time, though, she also reported on contemporary events in 1970s Seabird Island, including a walkathon in 1977 to raise money for an elders' trip, regular bingos, organised sports events, and the Seabird Island Festival, a large annual event that continues today.⁶⁰ These events drew not only on residents' physical proximity to each other, but also on a collective interest in community activities and their outcomes. They represented the latest occurrences in a shared history that had helped to transform Seabird Islanders' adjacency to each other into a sense of community able to build on their location in that place.

The intersection of physical proximity and shared activities has created community space where similar pasts and their implications encourage ongoing interpretation of these community features. Since community histories are based on individual interpretation of more collective experiences, noteworthy individuals can hold a galvanising role in the

⁵⁹ June Harris, "Objectives for Seabird Island Research (1970s)," binder 2, accessed at Seabird Island Archives.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

formation of ideas about community in a particular place. One of June Harris's research projects was to compile profiles of Seabird Island elders detailing their achievements, contributions, and biographical details. In these short sketches, Harris tied the individuals' significance to a broader communal history: Vincent Harris Sr.'s profile cited his role as the first elected chief of Seabird Island, serving from 1958 to 1971.⁶¹ Harry Joseph's biography, meanwhile, contained mention not only of his role as the present chief of Seabird Island at the time, but also detailed his family history. Joseph himself was from Yale, while his father's family came from canyon villages above Yale, and his mother was originally from Ruby Creek. Joseph's wife was Chehalis, and her mother's grandmother had been from Douglas.⁶² Chief Joseph's role in Seabird Island's history, then, was perhaps most noteworthy because of his time in governance of the reserve, but it also suggests one way that a history of individuals converging on Seabird Island was able to foster a sense of community around those individuals.

With an established and familiar practice of understanding the town based on social spaces and interactions, residents of Île-à-la-Crosse have recently sought to ensconce this form of community in official ways that refer explicitly to the role of individuals in the town. Alluding to changes in the town's conception of what is important to acknowledge about the community, Norma Malboeuf commented that "I think they've done that [named streets after community members] to a point; and I think, like the Lajeunesse [Avenue] is still the same, some of the French names, but some of the newer, like Peter Crescent and all of those places, I think they're developing that now...more reflective of people from the community."⁶³ Another Île-à-la-Crosse resident, Tony Durocher, felt that vernacular place

⁶¹ June Harris, "Objectives for Seabird Island Research (1970s)," binder 1, accessed at Seabird Island Archives.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Norma Malboeuf, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

names were not sufficiently explicit or indicative of what was important in the town; that is, he felt they did not make clear the Aboriginal aspect of the community's history:

That came about from people decided to make that, the town didn't make that. They had good names for them, for different areas, but the people that said those things, and like Chinatown and Snob Hill, it wasn't the right thing. So I went up one day, one day I went to the town hall, and they had a meeting, and I told them we should have these signs in our area with the names, good names for – we have a new hospital, we should start having good names. I mentioned this about two years ago... They've got to keep some of the people that have passed on, some of the people that have done so much for the community.⁶⁴

Citing the contributions of individuals in community histories reveals parallels between those individuals' activities and those that their broader community considers valuable in a communal context, and serves to illustrate how individuals internalise and interpret their community histories within their own interactions.

The way that these histories have shaped both physical and historical spaces where ideas of community emerge has taken on a variety of forms in Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse, in response to the very circumstances that have encouraged that retrospection in the first place. Invoking and interpreting events and interactions both at the time they occur and later, as their long-term importance emerges, community members have used these occurrences to anchor themselves to a particular place. With this place as a focal point of a shared past, any subsequent analyses of related histories must then consider the significance of that place, as revealed through the way that inhabitants of it have lived there and by the way that they have invoked their common history to reinforce its, and their, ongoing relevance. As residents of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island have considered the insiders, outsiders, institutions, politics, and individuals that have moved through these places and their histories, they highlight the centrality of a particular space that sits at the intersection of diverse individual pasts. It is here that ideas of community have emerged as members of

⁶⁴ Tony Durocher, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

communities provide rooted, nuanced accounts of Aboriginal people creating a space for their histories.

CHAPTER 4 The Aboriginality of Aboriginal Communities

Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, like a variety of other places, have at times attracted outside attention not only because they are distinct communities, but also because they are Aboriginal places, and while outsiders have acknowledged and analysed this history, the locally specific ways that Aboriginality has originated, developed, functioned, and been defined in these places tend to exist implicitly in historical analyses by community members and newcomers alike. Since place-making in these communities is an ongoing process of historical creation and interpretation, it follows that their Aboriginal past, in whatever forms it has taken over time, would contribute to and grow out of a sense of community. Indeed, many of the features of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island that distinguish them as communities distinct from others in their physical surroundings – interactions with insiders and outsiders, specific local activities, and invoking histories to reinforce links to places – are also, though perhaps in different ways, evidence of ways that these communities have come to consider themselves (and be considered by outsiders) Aboriginal communities. Community histories can suggest what roles physical proximity to others of similar cultural background, local understandings of belonging, identification with a shared history, and relationships to colonial agents have had in reinforcing the Aboriginality¹ of these communities; since newcomers and community members alike have recognised, in one way or another, how these themes are linked to cultural aspects shaping definitions of place and belonging, it is not only significant that these are communities, but also that they have become specifically Aboriginal places.

¹ That is, the ways in which people in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island consider themselves Aboriginal people, in reference to broad political definitions as well as more local, specific, or individual understandings of what marks (or should mark) belonging and participation in an Aboriginal community.

While Seabird Island is a First Nations community and Île-à-la-Crosse is Métis, they share basic traits that, in the absence of governments' and communities' definitions of belonging, make these fundamental (if at times arbitrary or superficial) distinctions blurry. At Seabird Island (and in other surrounding Aboriginal communities) Aboriginal languages are nearly extinct, while in Île-à-la-Crosse, Cree and Michif are widely spoken, at least by the older generations. Some if not most residents of both communities have non-Native ancestors (European in Île-à-la-Crosse; Chinese, Hawaiian, or European at Seabird Island), and both of these Aboriginal groups, if not always the communities themselves, have a history of involvement in the fur trade and related economic enterprises. Colonial definitions of Aboriginality are thus significant but not the exclusive means of expressing membership in a community. Indeed, notions of community and Aboriginality in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island sometimes challenge assumptions about what it means to be Métis or First Nations. Île-à-la-Crosse, a municipality with a population of people descended by definition from Europeans, sees Aboriginal languages spoken with far greater frequency than the First Nations inhabitants of Seabird Island. Furthermore, while a reserve, Seabird Island residents rely on and take advantage of perhaps more community services (such as local higher education programs, well-rounded health care, and diverse community groups) than exist in the town of Île-à-la-Crosse. These realities can seem unexpected or paradoxical,² and they suggest ways of defining Aboriginality that go beyond “authenticity” or adherence to a set of defined traits. While such things may at times be important, the ability to accommodate flexible and changing notions of indigeneity is equally significant in these places.

² Philip J. Deloria has suggested that these sorts of expectations of Native people from non-Native observers have contributed to ongoing “social, political, legal, and economic relations that are asymmetrical.” See Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 4.

Considering the Aboriginality of a community entails not only narrating the history of indigenous people in that place, but also exploring how they have initiated and maintained their own notions of what it means to be Aboriginal within a particular space and time. Anthropologist Bruce Granville Miller has challenged the idea that indigeneity is “transmitted genetically...rather than by socialization and participation in a community,”³ suggesting that for Aboriginal communities, the facets of community discussed in Chapter 3 both contribute to and grow out of their inhabitants’ historiography of Aboriginality and interpretations of how it functions in that place. Thus, for the complex ethnic, cultural, and historical compositions of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, categories of Native, non-Native, and other definitions of group membership are fluid definitions that change in reference to their ethnic, cultural, and historical environments. It follows, then, that reading community histories (and community members’ histories) would offer ways to illustrate how conceptions of these places as Aboriginal places have evolved based on particular historical themes, events, and actors and in response to the functionality of contemporary delineations of indigeneity at various points in the community’s past.

The interplay between ideas of community and Aboriginality are perhaps particularly significant given anthropologist Julie Cruikshank’s assertion that “the aftermaths of colonialism are always local,”⁴ and that indigeneity is often framed, at least in part, in terms of a history of colonisation. Furthermore, the implication of the meaningfulness for a community of a particular locale suggests that, as Cruikshank states, “overlapping stories emerge from early colonial encounters provide a trap door to a history of local knowledge.”⁵

³ Bruce Granville Miller, *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 40.

⁴ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

While local knowledge itself does not necessarily represent an automatic correlation with indigenous knowledge, it can offer insight into ways that local people understand themselves as Native and as different or separate from non-Native people with whom they have interacted, not only in their early history of encounters, but on an ongoing basis. In other words, it is interactions among people and peoples that produce local understandings of Aboriginality, as well as what being Aboriginal does or should entail, and to what histories such definitions refer.

Local or community histories, then, are a point of entry into similarly local interpretations and implications of their history of being Aboriginal in that place. Indeed, in some ways, it is the presence of this history itself – not only the events and interactions it comprises – that links communities with a past. As anthropologist Thomas F. Thornton has noted, “in distilling events of the past into a geographic present, places...reach *across* time, making elements of the past accessible to those who have not experienced them directly.”⁶ Imbuing places with a communally-accessible history does not only serve to provide a basis for community members’ presence there, but also links this existence with understandings of a homeland or territory, where, alongside the “aftermaths of colonialism” to which Cruikshank has referred, there have developed interpretations of that place that are based on a history of usage that in some ways comprises a historiography of the place as Aboriginal. Taking a leaf from Chadwick Allen’s reading of the 1975 World Conference of Indigenous Peoples’ (WCIP) definition of indigeneity as narrative rather than a list of criteria to be met,⁷ I hope to consider the Aboriginal aspects of Seabird Island’s and Île-à-la-Crosse’s respective community histories as interpretive and situational, so that community members’ past and

⁶ Thomas F. Thornton, *Being and Place among the Tlingit* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 16.

⁷ Chadwick Allen, “Blood as Narrative/Narrative as Blood: Declaring a Fourth World,” in *Narrative* 6 (1998): 237.

present definitions of indigeneity are paired with changes in the community as well. In this way, indigeneity can act as an embodiment of local, communal histories.

As a result, concepts of indigeneity also rely on local anchors for their specific significance in communities. For Stó:lō people, physical, historical, and ancestral connections intersect at particular places to link people to their heritage there. Sometimes, these take the form of Transformer sites, where the mythical figure Xá:ls turned living things to stone. These beings retained their histories and personalities as they were ensconced in the landscape, and Stó:lō people often trace their line of descent back to these ancestors,⁸ thereby maintaining familial connections to the landscape even when living relatives are mobile. This also means that people's histories of indigeneity are closely tied to the synonymy of family and specific local features. These features remain constant reminders and expressions of indigeneity even as other outward markers – perhaps most notably, the use of Aboriginal languages – become less visible. In Île-à-la-Crosse, meanwhile, concerns about language loss among younger generations sometimes refer to the loss of ways to refer to one's surroundings in a meaningful way. Vince Ahenakew, for instance, commented that there are inherent links between the Cree or Michif⁹ language and traditional activities of those language speakers. He argued that one reason why there has not been great interest among young people in learning the language is the disconnect between the environment in which Cree was historically spoken, and the much more town-centred lifestyles of Île-à-la-Crosse youth today.¹⁰ Thus, at least for older Île-à-la-Crosse residents, as in Seabird Island, local, physical features remain important ways of expressing and experiencing particular

⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, "A Legacy of Broken Promises: The *Xwelitem* Exploration and Settlement of *Solh Temexw* (Our Land)," in *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997), 56.

⁹ People in Île-à-la-Crosse refer to these languages somewhat interchangeably, since in this region, they are indeed largely indistinguishable from one another. See Bakker later in this chapter.

¹⁰ Vince Ahenakew, interview with Katya MacDonald, 18 June 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

aspects of Aboriginality. For these places, indigeneity is a concept with potentially widespread implications or definitions, but in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, these find their meaning through the maintenance of connections to local environments and histories.

Like ideas of community, the concept of Aboriginality or indigeneity has been defined and interpreted in a multitude of academic and non-academic fora, not least by residents of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island themselves, and these understandings represent both conscious and unconscious incorporations of broader considerations of indigeneity into the specifics of local life, where community often serves as a basis for the ways that the local connects with themes or studies of a larger scope. Speaking about global definitions of indigeneity, Allen suggests that “the narrative [the WCIP declaration of indigeneity] harnesses the forces of both contradiction and opposition as creative ambiguity, allowing for a high level of inclusion under the rubric Indigenous Peoples without going over authority for making claims of inclusivity to non-indigenous outsiders.”¹¹ For communities, this flexibility allows the community historical narrative to act as a way of both including and excluding people or historical interpretations. Thus, even within larger definitions of Aboriginality that might be at work, communities themselves are able to tailor these interpretations to suit their own understandings of their histories.

For Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, the histories of these communities in relation to rapid changes in the physical environment have close connections to community members’ assumptions of what being Aboriginal entails or requires there. Whether because of mobility or population changes or some combination of these and other factors, residents have reinterpreted these places as each change has occurred, and, as Miller suggests, “it is this very accommodation [to physical changes] that engenders a new relationship to the new

¹¹ Ibid., 250.

cultural landscape that is critical to indigenous peoples; simply put, they have carved out relationships [with space and entities in the landscape] as they encounter [that space].”¹² These are relationships that are anchored to histories of a common past, but they are not frozen in time. As both physical and social spaces, then, communities provide historical contexts for their own notions of indigeneity. In her exploration of ethnic and cultural identities in Native communities around Puget Sound, Alexandra Harmon has commented that in light of broad-reaching family ties, “local communities therefore incorporated outsiders and dispersed some members to other communities, with the consequence that most settlements had culturally and linguistically diverse populations.”¹³ In this particular instance, ideas of community were not necessarily predicated or dependent on Aboriginal identity, but all the same, Harmon notes that whether these people defined themselves based on ancestry, as “heirs to a common tribal name,” or associated themselves with a “geographically defined community under government protection...all define themselves as Indians and distinguish themselves from people who are not Indians largely on the basis of history.”¹⁴ This invocation of history serves to link identities with community historiographies; identifying oneself as an Aboriginal community member here also implies affiliation with (though of course not necessarily complete adherence to) particular historical backgrounds and interpretations.

Linking Aboriginality and its community contexts naturally means that, as with the communities themselves, there are often differences in understandings of what Aboriginality entails and how it has developed among the multitude of perspectives contained within the sometimes-fluid categories of “community member” and “outsider.” These differences are

¹² Bruce Granville Miller, 55.

¹³ Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 248-49.

most apparent in historical and contemporary interactions where Native and non-Native invoke their respective interpretations of and visions for Aboriginal communities. Significant in definitions of indigeneity is the role of colonialism, and Bonita Lawrence has explained how “these [colonial] systems forcibly supplanted traditional Indigenous ways of anchoring relationships among individuals, their communities, and the land – erasing knowledge of self, culture, and history in the process.”¹⁵ These are certainly significant themes in Aboriginal histories, and they have inspired and engendered ongoing ways of responding or adapting in these new environments, often by emphasising what is and remains Aboriginal about a community. At times, as Miller suggests, “indigenous peoples...make their claims to distinctiveness primarily based on culture rather than on political grounds...[which] forces them into a backward-looking primordialist stance that is at odds with the specificity of the historical conditions that created indigenesness in the first place.”¹⁶ An essentialist delineation of Aboriginality may thus serve to specify these salient historical moments, but not to contextualise them within an ongoing, not terminal, historiography of space, place, time, and culture.

Many “historical conditions” in Aboriginal communities have indeed centred around varying notions of what makes (or should make) these places Aboriginal. Perhaps most apparent have been governmental or legal statements of criteria for Native people in Canada, which have shaped the ways that people have considered and spoken about their ways of belonging to an Aboriginal community. One of Marian Smith’s main informants on Seabird Island, Fred Ewen, discussed with Smith his oldest daughter Ethel, who was considered to be from Seabird Island, despite being born elsewhere, because her father, Fred Ewen, was a

¹⁵ Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview,” in *Hyppatia* 18 (2003): 24.

¹⁶ Bruce Granville Miller, 61.

Seabird Islander.¹⁷ While it is difficult to know if Ethel found this legal ascription of community membership accurate, it was certainly significant enough to be mentioned to, or asked about by a visiting anthropologist, thus suggesting that, accurate or not, government definitions of Aboriginality were relevant and meaningful to the community. Indeed, this type of outside attribution of traits remains at the forefront of Seabird Island residents' consciousness today, both because of its historical impact and its ongoing presence. Archie Charles commented that to live in an Aboriginal community implies certain conditions of living, particularly in terms of services that Seabird Island's idea of community incorporates into its vision for itself: "The only thing is, we're still under the thumb of Indian Affairs. And we want to be on our own out here [be responsible for our own health care]. Because you get sick here, you've got to go there [Chilliwack] and wait, wait, wait, wait, wait."¹⁸ When considered in tandem or in reference to one another, Fred Ewen's and Archie Charles' conveyances of their experiences with government definitions of relationship to Aboriginality on Seabird Island provide a common thematic thread, indicating that their comments represent not only fairly continuous (though not unchanging) European intervention in the community as a result of its Aboriginality, but also that community members have a history of explaining, at least to outsiders, their belonging to an Aboriginal community in reference to the consequences of non-Native governments' interpretations of the same themes.

Closer to home than governments, however, have also been less official non-Native activities on or in relation to Seabird Island, and just as these have shaped residents' notions of community in terms of its shared space and history, they have also considered this history as one that has often invoked their understandings of themselves as Aboriginal in order to

¹⁷ Marian W. Smith Collection, 268:2:5, 9.

¹⁸ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 3 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

assert the legitimacy of their presence and nature of their activities in a particular place. Ivan McIntyre, who is Fred Ewen's grandson, contrasted Native permanence around Seabird Island with newcomers' lack of recognition of these histories of use, habitation, and meaning:

We've lost quite a bit of land because of that [non-Native settlers' encroachment on Seabird Island land]. Not only just because of that, but the army...just across – you see that little mountain over there – just across from the ball diamond and everything in the community, that whole mountain there, on this end of the mountain where it turns out to be the bigger mountain, that used to be our fishing grounds, hey; that was a regular spawning grounds for the salmon a long time ago. And when that Second World War happened, the army went in there and said let us use this land, and they never did give it back.¹⁹

In this case, place-making has been an activity that, as historical circumstances changed, took on new meanings and roles as community members drew on their histories of place to redefine their existence in reference or in opposition to unsolicited outside interest in the space they considered distinctly Aboriginal. As chief of Seabird Island, for twenty-five years, Archie Charles had the opportunity to enact actively his understanding of Native space. Recounting noteworthy aspects of Seabird Island's history, he discussed his struggle to communicate to the neighbouring town of Agassiz the specifics of Seabird Island's control of land:

Oh, did we talk about that highway? That road that goes through? There's farmers everywhere on that side...I was in the army with Wes Johnson, and he was the mayor. And he says, "Well, we're going to pave the road, fifty-fifty." So I said to go ahead, pave it – I didn't say anything about the fifty-fifty! They were all dairy farmers, eh...And they had to use that road to get to the train, take the milk to Mission. And that was the only part of the road they paved! [Archie Charles went on to explain that Agassiz refused to pave their full share, or to pay for it to be done, so the Seabird Island governance refused likewise.] They were mad for a while, but they got over it...We paid taxes to Agassiz. I said we don't belong to Agassiz – this is ours! And a fight started. I said, "Well, I've got my supply of dynamite up at the top end [of Seabird Island] – you don't pay, I'm going to blow that thing right out of there." And Agassiz says, "Well, then give them their cash." I didn't have the powder, either. It was a bluff, and it worked.²⁰

¹⁹ Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

²⁰ Archie Charles, interview with Katya MacDonald, 3 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

This colourful account is also an illustration of a conflict that Archie Charles, and perhaps the mayor of Agassiz as well, conceptualised as a disagreement between Native and non-Native interests, rather than between two communities. Aboriginality, being both shaped by, and a reason for community on Seabird Island was in this instance a feature of residents' identity that was defined in clear contrast to their neighbours'.

At the same time that, as an Aboriginal community, Seabird Island has negotiated the components of this term in relation to non-Native neighbours, they have also brought nuance to their status as indigenous people, since although Seabird Island is both Aboriginal and a community, the two do not necessarily correlate directly with each other; rather, notions of Aboriginality and community are at times significant as separate entities, and at other times they exist as two sides of the same coin. As the site of changing understandings of community sentiment, Seabird Island has also been home to notions of Aboriginality that are fluid and changing, depending on the historical actors involved. In reference to a map of the community, Clem Seymour spoke about previous uses and roles of Seabird Island in terms of a general history of Aboriginal activity:

Right back here, our people used to come in and do all our drying here... We used to smoke all our salmon back in here... And up inside here is some old pictographs area... If you're really looking, there's a lot of burial mounds right inside of Seabird... Because back in 1760, there's a burial mound and there's probably around ninety people in it, the old [smallpox] epidemic.²¹

Yet while such histories make reference to formative aspects of the past that retain a strong role in conveying the community to others, within and among Aboriginal communities themselves, relationships often exist in more complex ways, as a result of close, long-standing historical ties. In these instances, it may not be necessary to make Aboriginality explicit; instead, what is significant is the way that an individual Aboriginal communities or

²¹ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

community members consider themselves within the context of a broader Aboriginal group or identity. For Seabird Island and its inhabitants, being Aboriginal is not only a matter of distinguishing their space and identity from that of their non-Native neighbours; it also involves carving out a particular place for identification within a broader Aboriginal group. For Ivan McIntyre, some actions of Seabird Island's governance have not matched his expectations of how Aboriginal communities should relate to each other:

Like right now what's happening is our communities are fighting. The reserves, our younger people in power. I imagine you've heard that the nation split, Stó:lō Nation split...and Seabird is one of them that walked away, my reserve eh. And I was sitting in the House of Elders for the nation, for everybody, and when we were all there, one nation, all the twenty-four bands, we all took an oath at Stó:lō Nation there that we were elected to look after *all* the people. And eleven bands walked away.²²

A definition of Aboriginality, then, is not necessarily restricted to a particular, geographically- and socially-defined community; it may expand and contract in accordance with the particular political issues at hand. In the case of Ivan McIntyre's relationship with Stó:lō Nation governance, it was less significant that Seabird Island was an Aboriginal community in and of itself; its affiliation with a larger body with ostensibly similar values was what gave it its significance and perhaps also its distinctiveness.²³

Indeed, the particular history of a community in relation to others can be a tool in highlighting, in the face of assimilative pressures, Aboriginal aspects of the community's existence. Referring to Métis identity in northern Saskatchewan, Victor F. Valentine argued that would be more accurate to consider the Aboriginal population in the region in terms of Treaty and non-Treaty Indians than to define the Métis by virtue of their partially European ancestry, adding that in many ways, there was a "duality" in citizenship between Treaty

²² Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

²³ It is important to note that Ivan McIntyre was closely involved with the people and events surrounding the Stó:lō Nation split: at the time, he was acting as chief advisor to Bob Hall, the elder who controversially removed Yewal Siyam (leader of the House of Elders) Lester Ned from this post and took on the role himself. Ivan McIntyre's analysis of Stó:lō governance is thus also an analysis of changes in the ways that he, as an individual, is able to communicate politically.

Indian and white, with the Métis, who “have never made effective adjustments to encroaching civilization” occupying a social space somewhere in the middle.²⁴ This was a space that, Valentine suggested, led to a development of “group characteristics which can be described only as being Métis.”²⁵ Similarly, other commentary from this time period given in response to Valentine’s analysis did not critique “Métis” as an ethnic or cultural category, but did not acknowledge northern Saskatchewan Métis people as Aboriginal except by way of their social and familial ties to their Treaty Indian neighbours. Anthropologist P.T. Spaulding, whose PhD dissertation was a study of Île-à-la-Crosse, wrote in an undated article that after the Hudson’s Bay Company had left its trading monopoly by selling Rupert’s Land and introducing a money and credit system at the same time, “socially consequential ethnic distinctions” in Île-à-la-Crosse had become “grossly exaggerated,” with the store manager having “absolute authority” in the town.²⁶ In this analysis, Aboriginality was a social trait (though based on race) that grew out of a history of Native-newcomer interactions more than it was a product of a distinct history that had encountered another. In a related vein, E.N. Shannon, a conservation officer in Île-à-la-Crosse in the 1950s, the same time that Valentine was conducting his work, viewed the distinctions between Aboriginal and white (considering Métis and Treaty people as one part of that Native/newcomer binary that Valentine suggested) as largely socioeconomic ones, stating: “It is our belief that the ultimate aim is to bring about the eventual integration of the metis [sic], Indian and white with equal rights and responsibilities, [and] that these rights and responsibilities will apply the same to Northern Region as they now do to the white people in the southern portion of the

²⁴ Valentine, 2-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶ P.T. Spaulding, “From the Colonial Pan into the Fire of Native Self-Determination: A Northern Saskatchewan Case,” Robert Doucette fonds, Saskatchewan Archives Board, n.d. (S-A 1035, #2966), 2-3.

province.”²⁷ This push for equality did not consider the role of culture beyond its effects on northerners’ lifestyles, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that Métis histories of Île-à-la-Crosse and the region would seek to emphasise this space as a distinctly Aboriginal and specifically Métis one. Emphasis on the predominantly Métis component of Île-à-la-Crosse, both past and present, is a way of highlighting local specificity in histories and identities, as was communicated to Colin Mann, who moved to Île-à-la-Crosse in recent years with his wife, Bea, who grew up in the town. He commented: “When I first came here, I was stunned, and one of the first things I said was, ‘Well, don’t you guys have any powwows?’ ...I mean, I just naturally took Métis as being Aboriginal. But they don’t look at that at all. It was an insult to them to be called an Indian.”²⁸ Métis versions of Aboriginality in Île-à-la-Crosse have thus grown out of a sense of uniqueness, not only in terms of the local, regional, or community, but also in relation to other adjacent approaches to indigeneity, from other Aboriginal people and non-Natives alike. In northwestern Saskatchewan, affiliation with a specific Aboriginal group is often a particularly conscious act, since families and communities have often straddled the (often-blurred) boundary between Métis and First Nations. Prior to the 1982 constitutional recognition of the Métis as one of the three Aboriginal groups in Canada (the other two being First Nations and Inuit), Métis people in the north not only had to define themselves against federally-recognised Aboriginal people, while at the same time asserting themselves as Aboriginal, though in fundamentally different ways.

²⁷ E.N. Shannon, “Métis problem in Northern Saskatchewan,” Robert Doucette fonds, SAB, 1957 (S-A 1035, #2737).

²⁸ Colin Mann, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 8 August 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

In a circular way, attending to the Métis history that many Île-à-la-Crosse residents feel roots them there also serves to link this Métis Aboriginality to a broader context of Native history and experience in the region. Bea Mann observed that

when I was growing up, we identified with white people...now our kids identify with the African-Americans – the way they speak, even the gestures, the way they walk and talk; it just blows my mind...It's difficult to understand why they don't want to be themselves – what is wrong with our culture that you can't take pride in being Métis?²⁹

These remarks point to a long-standing interpretation of a Métis presence in Île-à-la-Crosse in relation to non-Native and perhaps remote influences that have proven engaging to Île-à-la-Crosse inhabitants, and in this environment, some regard any recognition of Aboriginal history in the community as significant. Bea Mann described

a family of Daigneaults [a Métis family] in the community that embraced the traditional dress and powwow music – they've taught some of the kids in their families to dance. One of the girls came in to school and she had a jingle dress and a shawl...they've embraced more the traditional Native way rather than the Métis. But at least somebody's going back and showing some pride.³⁰

Taking pride in Aboriginal traditions that are outside of activities considered Métis³¹ suggests an interpretation of Métis history that acknowledges the role of First Nations people and cultures in the ethnogenesis of the Métis and in their collective relationships with non-Native institutions. Indeed, Valentine's approach to defining northwestern Saskatchewan Aboriginal populations in terms of Treaty and Non-Treaty-takers is partially reflected in Bea Mann's remarks that "it's almost as if it's an identity crisis. You don't really know who you are, so you imitate others to try and create yourself, instead of going back and trying to find out what was important to our ancestors."³² Particularly in a relatively isolated community

²⁹ Bea Mann, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 8 August 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Indeed, the activities Bea Mann mentions here also originated outside the cultural heritage of First Nations groups in the region; they developed as plains traditions that have been adopted by others as well, including some Stó:lō people.

³² Bea Mann, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 8 August 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

like Île-à-la-Crosse, common ancestors abound between Métis and First Nations inhabitants of the town and region, and thus on a familial level, a more generalised Aboriginal identity may be just as referential to family members' indigeneity as subscribing uniformly to a single category of Aboriginality. In this way, Métis families adopting pan-Indian First Nations customs (of which jingle dancing has become an example) is not necessarily "imitating others to try and create yourself," but is instead an acknowledgement of a generic or widespread Aboriginal history where being Aboriginal takes on greater significance than the particular details of a specific cultural history. These practices represent instances where Bruce Miller's argument that indigenous people sometimes distinguish themselves on "primordialist" cultural grounds,³³ yet they also complicate and expand the ways that Métis people consider themselves both Métis and Aboriginal: powwows and the paraphernalia associated with them represent a mixing of traditions across cultures that mirrors the very origins of the Métis, but that is instead a recent facet of Métis definitions of their own Aboriginality.

Therefore, in an environment where Aboriginality is fluid and contains multiple meanings, it is significant how these notions are conveyed; that is, in what ways the activities of Aboriginal people and communities are tied to histories with which these people identify and that they invoke to reinforce Native space and place-making. Often, the most readily apparent embodiments of histories are physical ones, either actions or objects. When these are placed in a foreign environment such as a museum, argues Andrea Laforet, the attempt to rebuild context around them is a way of documenting and "affirming" the museum's role in preserving the object and thus also the knowledge – both Native and non-Native – that

³³ Bruce Granville Miller, 61.

surrounds it, placing the museum in a position of authority.³⁴ How interpretations of Aboriginality are shared help to define what it entails, and when these interpretations lend themselves to physical representations, they also take on additional meanings that reflect their environment. Thus, the physical forms that Aboriginality takes within an Aboriginal community grow out of community members' own notions of what are important Aboriginal activities to maintain and to emphasise to outsiders. Material culture acts not only as a symbol of a place, but also as a way of extending human experience in and into that place, so that objects also acquire "emplaced biographies" in communities.³⁵ Indeed, by extension, the same can apply to activities in these communities that are or have been considered as integral to the history of that place as the objects associated with them. In this way, concepts become woven into physical spaces, objects, and activities, so that all of these can communicate with and about each other.

Objects and activities sometimes intersect in the course of practices that have served to link Aboriginal people to (and within) their communities. In both Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse, these connections among people act as features of these communities and symbols of these places' Aboriginality, and one way this is conveyed is through the practice of sharing. Sharing of food, property, and hospitality strengthens links among individuals and families within a single community, but also with other communities, as people interact with their own webs of social connections and indebtedness to one another.³⁶ More broadly, then, sharing is an act of placing oneself physically and socially in relation to others in ways that acknowledge commonality while establishing uniqueness of place. Fred Ewen

³⁴ Andrea Laforet, "Narratives of the Treaty Table: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of Tradition," in *Questions of Tradition*, ed. Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 44.

³⁵ Thornton, *Being and Place*, 33.

³⁶ Jay Miller, 26.

commented to Marian Smith that he had no desire to be chief, since a chief received no salary and “works hard for nothing.” He went on to note, though, that it was customary to give salmon to *siya:m* (respected leaders), as “that shows you like him.”³⁷ Ewen’s comments suggest a difference in significance between monetary compensation for good work, and social recognition of the same; for him, being a chief represented a way of making a living while serving a community leadership role, while a *siya:m* had a respected position that implied and engendered economic benefit from others who demonstrated their respect in that way. The sharing of salmon had become an action that drew on Aboriginal practices of a community to reinforce the ongoing yet changing (as the reserve became a place of more permanent settlement) role of leadership on Seabird Island.

While it took on a less formalised social role in Île-à-la-Crosse than on Seabird Island, the sharing of food and resources in the community reflected the ways in which people sought to bring definition to the town and its communal identity in a time of flux. As people in – not only from – this place, residents’ activities and interactions were interconnected, to provide structure to a rapidly changing environment. Valentine commented on the practice of sharing food and resources for survival, suggesting that “the practice of sharing is a vital part of the economic system and, for the same reason, so is credit.”³⁸ Making a living, whether directly from the land or more indirectly in conjunction with the credit system introduced by the HBC, was indeed an economic venture, but the ways in which people integrated change into their lives was a way of making economic systems indigenous to that place. In other words, modernity became indigenous, a process that exists, in one way or another, in Métis histories of Aboriginality and the ways that these are conveyed. Place-making through physical acts represented, and continues to represent

³⁷ Marian W. Smith Collection, 268:2:9, 14.

³⁸ Valentine, 12.

an “insistent invocation of family that is at the heart of Métis culture and identity in northwestern Saskatchewan, while direct references to fur companies and specific places link the people’s history to their economic past and the geography of that region.”³⁹ In other words, actively acknowledging and making use of links among people, customs, and place was also a vehicle for conveying local meanings of lifestyle as a marker of Aboriginality there.

Sometimes, communities have sought to exhibit their Aboriginal history in explicit ways, both for their own celebrations and for the interest or education of outsiders. Though discussing Native people in the Puget Sound region, Harmon’s argument that “exhibiting local pride was a central function of their multicomunity ceremonies”⁴⁰ also points to more widely applicable ways that Native people have found to integrate local notions of Aboriginality into those of a broader, collective group. Sharing local foods, songs, dances, and other tangible items unique to that place were historically, as Harmon suggests, “the bases of these villagers’ self-concepts and self-respect,”⁴¹ and indeed, even as notions of place and belonging have changed, celebrations of local identity have retained the significance that Harmon points out. Further, Thornton has highlighted the way that ritual can act as an “emplacement structure,” a participatory process in which “the ordinary existential constraints of time and space and corporeal existence are superseded, transcended, and reordered – literally re-placed – to mark and achieve important transformations in society and nature.”⁴² In the context of a specific community, ritual that is unique to that particular place may be considerably less formal than Thornton describes it, but it nevertheless serves to incorporate concepts of a broad, collective sense of

³⁹ Macdougall, 432.

⁴⁰ Harmon, 73.

⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

⁴² Thornton, *Being and Place*, 174.

Aboriginality into a local context. Each year, Seabird Island hosts a large festival that combines soccer and baseball tournaments, slahal (a gambling game of Coast Salish origin), canoe races, salmon barbeques, bingos, dances, and various forms of entertainment. The festival attracts Native and non-Native visitors alike, and as June Harris noted regarding the nature of the festival in the 1970s, “there is [sic] always a lot of Indians selling their beadwork, Indian sweaters, etc.”⁴³ The festival has thus not only been an exhibition of local pride for the benefit of other Aboriginal visitors; it also publicises aspects of Seabird Island culture that local people deem important to demonstrate to non-Native observers. At the same time, though, for Seabird Island residents, the festival represents an expression of Aboriginality that is indigenous to the island even as it acts as a form of “outreach” of sorts to non-Natives. Clem Seymour described the festival in these terms: “We hold onto a lot of different things inside of our culture, like we have our festival, they’ve got canoe races, soccer tournaments, drawing in five thousand to ten thousand people in a weekend.”⁴⁴ Seen in this light, the Seabird Island Festival is a way of emplacing and ensconcing an Aboriginal history there in a way that conveys the indigenoussness of Seabird Island to visitors, while celebrating the uniqueness of the place within a broader Stó:lō group⁴⁵ and affirming its significance for local residents.

Processes of marking and asserting the Aboriginality of a community have occurred in more general ways as well. Native people and places often emphasise the integral nature of Aboriginal languages in conveying history in a manner that is most accurate to the places where this history occurred, and Île-à-la-Crosse’s linguistic past is once such instance. In his study of the Michif language, linguist Peter Bakker observed of the language spoken in Île-à-

⁴³ June Harris, “Objectives for Seabird Island Research (1970s),” binder 2.

⁴⁴ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁴⁵ This includes a “circuit” of other Stó:lō festivals, such as the Cultus Lake festival, the Scowlitz canoe races, and others.

la-Crosse that, unlike varieties of Michif spoken further south, which are well-blended mixtures of Aboriginal languages and French, Île-à-la-Crosse residents speak mainly Cree with some borrowings from French. Bakker attributed the presence of French to the influence of the Oblate mission in the community.⁴⁶ A speech variety specific to Île-à-la-Crosse highlights two levels of uniqueness, then: it is an Aboriginal language, but furthermore, it is also associated with a particular community, aspects of whose history are reflected in the language itself. Use of the language in Île-à-la-Crosse is therefore significant as well, since community members' relationships with the language have changed alongside changes in its usage. For many Cree/Michif speakers in Île-à-la-Crosse, of particular significance and concern is the infrequency with which younger generations speak the language. Dorothy Dubrule commented that this is

probably because parents like Louis [her husband] and I didn't teach our kids to speak – I didn't teach my children to speak the Michif language and Louis didn't teach them to speak French, so they lost out on both languages. We chose to converse with our children in English, so that's all they heard from us...we chose to speak in English; it was easier for both of us. So I'm thinking it's much the same with everybody else.⁴⁷

For the Dubrule family, the choice of language spoken at home was largely a matter of convenience, where languages other than English were not necessary to communicate with others in the community, and instead were more representative of family and community histories than contemporary reality. Vince Ahenakew, a teacher of Michif and principal of the high school in Île-à-la-Crosse attributed the shift to English to a corresponding shift in values:

Probably all the time [high school students are] talking English...they don't understand Cree or Michif when we speak to them; it's here and there, eh...but the

⁴⁶ Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147.

⁴⁷ Dorothy Dubrule, interview with Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

ones that do know, they're kind of reluctant to speak...Something's out of whack, is what I'm going to say, what I'm trying to say, but I still try to speak to them in Cree or Michif. Hopefully that will change, once people start accepting the fact, start being proud of their language, I think they'll start bringing it back.⁴⁸

For older and younger generations alike, Michif exists as a historical entity, representing aspects of the past that, depending on the person or relationship at hand, may be distant and irrelevant, or meaningful and tangible. In this way, even when there is not agreement within a community on how its Aboriginality should continue to manifest itself, acknowledgement of a common history, whatever its meaning, helps to bind accompanying recognition of indigeneity to the place where it originated and developed.

In the face of outside intervention in the community, actions on the part of Île-à-la-Crosse residents have at times highlighted the Aboriginality of the town simply because outsiders approached the community with attention to its Aboriginal aspects at the forefront of their intentions. In the early 1950s, part of the anthropologist Valentine's government-set mandate in Île-à-la-Crosse was to facilitate the establishment of a co-op store there, and his written report on his experiences reveals some of the perceptions that Natives and newcomers had of themselves and for the Aboriginal community in question. Valentine felt that as an outsider, he was viewed with some trepidation by most community members, both Métis and white. Non-Native residents saw him as a threat to how they carried out their work as government, religious, or business officials, while many of the Métis were concerned that he had come to take away their means of making a living or to "entice" them to vote CCF.⁴⁹ This initial assessment suggests an encounter with the "other" that was focused on the community rather than the fact that it was an Aboriginal place, but Valentine's purpose was more specific: "The method I adopted was to get the Métis together in groups to

⁴⁸ Vince Ahenakew, interview with Katya MacDonald, 18 June 2006, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁴⁹ Victor F. Valentine, "The Fort Black Co-operative Store: A Social Experiment Among the Ile A La Crosse Métis," Robert Doucette fonds, SAB, 1957 (S-A 1035, #500), 1.

appoint their own leaders, and make suggestions concerning what should be done about the things *they* felt were impeding their development.”⁵⁰ Despite non-Native habitation, presence, and influence in Île-à-la-Crosse, Valentine saw the town as a Métis place whose concerns were specific to Métis needs. In fact, Valentine attributed the co-op’s successes to having addressed these concerns; once a capable manager had been hired and trained, and the co-op began to be run independently, without Valentine’s direct input, he reported: “I think the Métis at Île-à-la-Crosse have already proven they can run their own affairs. The Co-op at Île-à-la-Crosse I believe was successful because it was organized around the satisfaction of a very pressing need.”⁵¹ The co-op store, then, represented a Métis presence in the community not because the concept was native to the town, but because Native involvement in it illustrated or confirmed outside perceptions of the role of Aboriginality in community affairs.

This is particularly noteworthy in the case of the Île-à-la-Crosse co-op, since not all outside analyses took Valentine’s confident perspective. Spaulding took the eventual failure of the store as an indication that “natives were not ready for this kind of responsibility,” and that government efforts had failed because they threatened the status quo: “the authority of whites to decide what was best for the natives and because they ran counter to conservative native practices.”⁵² While Valentine saw a Métis desire for change in the community, Spaulding instead understood a resistance to change on the part of the community as a whole, Native and non-Native alike. It is perhaps significant that, more than being simply an economic venture, the co-op was also a political statement, since it was instigated and encouraged by the provincial government, as represented by Valentine. For community

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

⁵² Spaulding, 5-6.

members, then, relationships with the store were a way of communicating with a provincial government that was taking an increased interest in northern affairs, and so what both Valentine and Spaulding interpreted as inherently Aboriginal responses to the co-op may instead – or also – have been manifestations of more general community interactions with local economic change.

In light of impositions of particular notions of indigeneity, Île-à-la-Crosse residents have also reciprocated, highlighting the community's own vision of self-sufficient Aboriginality and in so doing, depicting outsiders' interests in the town as distinct from local (or more specifically, locally Métis) ones. The transfer of the Île-à-la-Crosse school from the Roman Catholic church to local governance remains a memorable event around which community members galvanised their identity as Métis people inhabiting an Aboriginal place. The process involved an assortment of organisations from outside the community, including representatives from the Associated Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMSIS), who, according to Spaulding, created the initial push in 1972 for local direction of the school.⁵³ Their presence added a concrete and official statement that this was an issue of Aboriginal concern. Meanwhile, Reverend Joseph Chaput, the head of the mission at the time, accused the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) of “influencing the native people with DNS biases” when they sent a letter to the Métis Society of Saskatchewan suggesting local control and inviting the MSS to participate.⁵⁴ The DNS commented to *The StarPhoenix* that “we want them to have local governance.”⁵⁵ This was thus both, or alternately, a community and an Aboriginal issue, where debate did not exist within a strictly Native/non-Native binary, but instead included a variety of voices that all sought to foster

⁵³ Spaulding, 7.

⁵⁴ Vernon Greenshields, “Racial Overtones in Native School Board Issue,” reprinted from the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* (16 February 1973), in *The Northian* 10 (1974): 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

their own ideas for the role of Aboriginality in the town. Despite the involvement of outside interests, in Île-à-la-Crosse today, memories, interpretations, and significance of the school transfer are expressions of local, Aboriginal autonomy. These are notions that do not necessarily preclude adherence to or respect for the ongoing presence of Catholicism in the town, but that do acknowledge the church's beginnings there as an outside institution.

The Île-à-la-Crosse school transfer also serves as an example of how Aboriginal communities highlight traditions and customs as evidence of the community's ongoing connection to that history. Once a new school board had been established, the committee instituted a stipulation that all teachers must speak Cree, in order to be able to be "truly involved with the community," and residents of the town were confident that the community would be "rejuvenated" by the construction of a new school building, a physical reminder of something that had been initiated by and for Native people.⁵⁶ The school system in Île-à-la-Crosse had become a way of establishing place through Aboriginal ties and identity, by establishing what about Aboriginality should be made visible and public. It also fostered the town's role as a place with an Aboriginal place with a relevant and meaningful contemporary as well as fur trade or "mythical" history.

The visibility of customs that an Aboriginal community emphasises serves the dual purpose of embedding a long history in that place, while also communicating ways that community members define their indigeneity. Of Seabird Island, Eleanor Leacock observed: "The Indians may be living in modern (but unpainted) houses around a church, wearing modern clothes, and earning a living as loggers and railroad workers, but the unconscious patterns of their former, interpersonal life apparently remain dominant."⁵⁷ Leacock was

⁵⁶ Vernon Greenshields, "Natives Optimistic about Northern School Board," reprinted from the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* (23 April 1973), in *The Northian* 10 (1974): 20-21.

⁵⁷ Leacock, 188.

referring to the way that Seabird Islanders' social life seemed to focus more on their relatives upriver than it did on other people on Seabird Island itself, but her remarks also point to the significance for Native and non-Native people alike of outward manifestations of features considered by individuals and communities to be Aboriginal. In a 1979 interview, Edna Bobb of Seabird Island noted that she would like to see children learning "Native works" – that is, aspects of Aboriginal language and culture – in an independent school on the reserve.⁵⁸ Considering, however, that Mrs. Bobb, like many other Seabird Island residents of her generation, spoke both Nlaka'pamux (her family originated in Nlaka'pamux territory) as well as Halq'eméylem, her notion of what "Native works" might entail would not have been easily defined by anthropological taxonomies. "Reading" community members' activities for their continued presence even in a new place and cultural environment, as well as for the ways these activities are emphasised to outsiders, can offer insight into ways of making Aboriginal places that community members have found most valuable. There is an extensive history along of the Fraser River of Native individuals and communities considering fishing essential to an existence as Stó:lō and more broadly Aboriginal people, and Clem Seymour has drawn this concept, and a related theme of hunting, into the specific context of Seabird Island:

We take care of a lot of our fishing; it's become more difficult over the years. We don't have any more hunting here inside of our territory the way it used to be twenty or thirty years ago, like there's outside impacts...A lot of [people] keep moving into the valley and moving the wildlife out.⁵⁹

Drawing these activities into a local history of Seabird Island thus lends their Aboriginality to Seabird Island space, while their physical and narrative presence reflects a slightly ambiguous

⁵⁸ Edna Bobb, interview with Betty Peters, 23 February 1979, summary at Seabird Island band office.

⁵⁹ Clem Seymour, interview with Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

definition of the tribal origin or belonging of these “Native works,” in keeping with the history of Seabird Island’s population itself.

Fishing, and discussions of fishing, are significant in a more abstract or distanced sense as well: particular fishing sites are owned by individuals, who hand them down through families, and while the mechanisms and conduits for this custom have changed over the years, their significance has not. At Seabird Island, where people do not necessarily live near their families’ – and thus fishing sites’ – place of origin, processes of place-making at Seabird Island and at upriver fishing sites become mirrors of or metaphors for each other, expanding the geographical scope of Seabird Island Aboriginality while simultaneously contributing to a local understanding of it that is unique to that place.⁶⁰ Suttles’ discussion of Coast Salish community highlights threads of continuity in customs like winter dances and canoe races: historically, the hereditary rights and status associated with those who distributed food and wealth were tied to economic and professional roles; today, the “moral aspect” remains, and Suttles suggests that “this must be found in identity as an Indian.”⁶¹ Fishing, too, can act as a symbol of an Aboriginal identity, which runs parallel to fishing’s specific significance to Seabird Island over time. Fred Ewen spoke about the state of fishing around Seabird Island when he was interviewed by Marian Smith. One of the problems he discussed was that of seals swimming into the nets and entangling them, noting that “that’s in the net of today, not the old style dip net used here,” and going on to describe the contemporary method used

⁶⁰ In a 1996 interview conducted as part of a Traditional Use Study by Stó:lō Nation, Birdie Peters, a Seabird Island resident, described the location of her fishing site in relation to other Seabird Islanders’, revealing that several of these families owned spots in the Fraser Canyon, near Yale. These Canyon social connections are reflected on Seabird Island, so that habitation there comes to represent other Aboriginal activities – in this case, fishing. See Birdie Peters, interview with Pat John and Ernest Victor, 5 September 1996, Stó:lō Nation Traditional Use Study Transcript, Seabird Island band office, 14.

⁶¹ Suttles, 522.

around Seabird Island in the 1940s of setting a drift net between two canoes.⁶² Place-making here occurred through a recognisably Aboriginal activity, and by chronicling the changes in fishing methods and conditions, Fred Ewen historicised not only the practical aspects of fishing, but also its “moral aspects” – that is, the way it continued to root people to a place and an identity in spite of changes that took place there.

Since fishing and particular notions of belonging and identity often mirror each other in relation to Seabird Island, acts of place-making around fishing sites have represented the sometimes flexible and changing ways that people link themselves with places and their meanings. In another 1979 discussion in the same series of interviews in which Edna Bobb’s remarks were recorded, Lena Hope, whose family originated around Spuzzum and Yale, described how her family would fish at Seabird Bluffs (the upriver end of Seabird Island), and “everybody used to dip net at Hooked Nose,” which was located near Seabird Island where a ferry once took passengers across the river to Chilliwack.⁶³ These fishing sites suggest the establishment of family and community connections to Seabird Island not only as a site of sustenance activities, but also of the significance of these activities in establishing this place as Aboriginal. At the same time, however, it is noteworthy that members of the Hope family at Yale have in recent years been at the forefront of land claims and leadership for the Yale First Nation, which is not recognised by the Stó:lō as a non-Stó:lō First Nation. Stó:lō people argue that as a group, the Yale band is comprised of people with either Stó:lō or Nlaka’pamux familial ties that link them instead to these larger groups, citing as evidence Yale Chief Robert Hope’s birth and formative years on Seabird Island.⁶⁴ This an issue of considerable controversy and tension that is beyond the scope of this thesis, but that is an

⁶² Marian W. Smith Collection, 268:2:18, 5. Ivan McIntyre also remembers his mother and grandfather fishing in this way. See Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁶³ Lena Hope, interview with Betty Peters, 15 March 1979, summary at Seabird Island band office.

⁶⁴ Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

influential negotiation of identity that is closely linked to certain Seabird Island family histories and that likely informs these families' understandings of their own identities.

These mixed notions of similarly mixed Aboriginal groups illustrate how similar family and community histories can result in diverse interpretations and implications. Rather than complicating or weakening Seabird Island's place in a broader Stó:lō identity, Clem Seymour cited the community's diverse origins as evidence for the way that identity can galvanise in a place: "We can't just say we are from a single Indian Act band. Look at where our grandparents lived and moved to. We are all connected. We are Stó:lō."⁶⁵ At the same time, though, Seabird Island represents for some a physical embodiment of the diverse histories that exist there and in reference to it. Jay Hope, the current research director for Seabird Island and relative of the Hope family at Yale, commented that Seabird Island's history is underpinned by colonialism, but also by people's choice to move downriver from the Canyon,⁶⁶ so that even within a colonial context, senses of place and belonging are shaped by Aboriginal people themselves. As a result, tensions in the Canyon are felt on Seabird Island as well, given family loyalties that exist to and within both places; Jay Hope, for example, considers himself Nlaka'pamux because of his ancestry and family history, but recognises his Stó:lō connections through his residence, employment, and personal history at Seabird Island.⁶⁷ For some, then, individual pasts may not necessarily result in the same understandings of Aboriginality as a community history might entail; at every level and sub-level of affiliation and identity emerge different emphases about what is significant in community and individual histories.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of Nation," in *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 32.

⁶⁶ Jay Hope, personal communication with author, 20 May 2009.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Amid these differences, however, are also arguments for general Aboriginal presence and activity since time immemorial. The Fraser Canyon was historically a hub for wind-drying salmon during the summer months, a practice that continues today, though much diminished. Since many Seabird Island residents retain their familial connections to Canyon fishing sites, wind-drying also exists as a component of Seabird Island Aboriginality, despite the activity's geographical distance from residents. Ivan McIntyre linked wind-drying and Seabird Island identity with a sense of protectiveness for that past:

Seabird's one of the few reserves that the people know how to preserve that fish... That fish camp that we got now was handed down from an elder, an elderly couple that used to be there. He was chief here, he was the first chief. He was called Chief Harry Joseph, and he was hereditary – not elected. But I think there's six families on Seabird that know how to preserve that dried salmon properly. And we're the ones that saved it, along with another family up at Chawathil, and that's it. And all the rest of them, they think they know, but they don't. We offered to teach them, but they don't want to know.⁶⁸

While wind-drying families from other Stó:lō reserves would likely dispute the restrictiveness of this analysis, these remarks nevertheless encapsulate connections among the uniqueness of Seabird Island's political and social history and activities that are practiced by and associated with a broader Aboriginal population. Indeed, for Ivan McIntyre, Seabird Island wind-drying practices, as legitimised by association with a respected historical figure and supported by community members' expertise (gained, in turn, through connections with family histories), are an important marker of personal and community identity, and this identity gains the most currency when set against the backdrop of what wind-drying families see as an essential, more broadly Fraser Canyon Aboriginal activity.

Histories of place-making through references and responses to outsiders, through uniquely local activities, and through outward representations of Aboriginality all combine to establish a history of a particular community as an Aboriginal one. Places take on and

⁶⁸ Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

reassess cultural as well as physical characteristics, so that activities like wind-drying become just one component of a lexicon of Aboriginal identities and symbols that community members have developed, encouraged, and invoked. In turn, the Aboriginality of the place and its people is conveyed in various ways through narratives, in which people tie historical events and features to their Aboriginal communities and their interpretations of its role in local and broader environments. In this way, stories about a place, used to reinforce its indigenosity – implying both that the tellers of the stories are the original inhabitants of the place, and that they remain associated with political definitions of Aboriginality – play a similar role as wind-drying does for the McIntyre family and others: linking local experiences of being Aboriginal with broader ones. Ivan McIntyre described a lake near Seabird Island that, apparently inexplicably and contrary to expectations, never drains:

There's no snow up there anymore; a little bit of rain. But that lake is still there...And that mountain over that way, that's called Bear Mountain because of the hump. But there's a deep hole right over here in the slough [across from Ivan McIntyre's house on Seabird Island], and it's bottomless. And that's where the creek comes from the top there...That's what's feeding that lake.⁶⁹

Stories like these fall into Suttles' description of "private knowledge" that in Coast Salish history represented high-class people's "knowledge of their own heritage...and of good conduct."⁷⁰ Making reference to this knowledge is thus not only a way of asserting individual status, but also of reinforcing community among people who relate (and relate to) stories. Furthermore, for Seabird Island, which has seen permanent habitation only relatively recently, stories about its constancy and long-term noteworthiness provide roots for residents who also cite other, further afield places as formative ones. These narratives create a basis for negotiating an identity that responds to and grows out of a Seabird Island

⁶⁹ Ivan McIntyre, interview with Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008, Seabird Island, B.C.

⁷⁰ Wayne Suttles, "Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish," in *Coast Salish Essays* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 8.

history of Aboriginal community that is distinct, as Jay Hope described, from other people and places.

In Île-à-la-Crosse, establishing an Aboriginal history of place, or of a place as Aboriginal, has sometimes gone hand in hand with heavily political and legal issues associated with land claims. While place-making through naming and other channels represent a history of Métis culture, activity, and homeland, many Métis people in northwestern Saskatchewan desire more formalised ways as well of describing and taking charge of their space and history. Don Favel listed a series of places in Île-à-la-Crosse that have become known by their English names, but that community members once “knew all these places like that by different names, original [Cree] names that they had.”⁷¹ This historiography of place links and roots people to Île-à-la-Crosse’s Métis past, but does not necessarily stand alone as the only source or provider of identity. The notion of a regional Aboriginal – and specifically Métis – identity is central to the official recognition by the Canadian legal system of Métis traditional lands around Île-à-la-Crosse, but at the same time that this component of Métis history is articulated within the courts, the process of filing a land claim also represents an act of place-making. The 1994 northwest Saskatchewan Métis land claim stated that “the great majority” of the plaintiffs were descendents “of the citizens of the Métis Nation who resided in the Plaintiffs’ Homeland prior to 1870,” while others had moved to the region more recently “and have been accepted as members of that distinct cultural and political community.”⁷² This explicit delineation of Aboriginal space and history sought to reinforce common or collective ways of place-making there in ways that would be symbolic of a broadly recognisably Métis culture. The claim went on to argue that the Métis in northwestern Saskatchewan had been marginalised, despite persisting in a “distinct Métis

⁷¹ Don Favel, interview with Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008, Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

⁷² “Northwest Saskatchewan Métis Land Claim,” Robert Doucette fonds, SAB, 1994 (S-A 1035, #247), 14.

culture, collective aspirations and political organisations,” as well as continuing to rely on “traditional use of resources.”⁷³ Defining Métis-ness in this structured way was in part a legal convention and necessity for arguing the case in court, but it also represents a more general emphasis on the communal nature of place-making and identity for northwestern Saskatchewan Métis.

At the same time, though, the collectiveness described, implied, and perhaps ascribed by the land claim did not and does not convey the complex nature of navigating between local and collective identities, even within a relatively small region. The social and geographic nearness of northern Métis communities to each other has at times entailed both overlap and tension among municipal and Métis political governing bodies. In response, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan Locals of Northwestern Saskatchewan, and the North West Saskatchewan Municipalities Association signed a Partnership Agreement in 1996 that emphasised the organisations’ common goals of Métis rights and self-determination; as elder Louis Morin commented in a press release, “We have long known that we serve the same people so we have to work together.”⁷⁴ The agreement also described how communities could act as “a building block for the implementation of Métis self-governance.”⁷⁵ In this case, communities represent a smaller “unit” within a Métis whole, where, at least in the context of other, larger political bodies, local definitions of Aboriginality are shaped by these communities’ affiliation with official statements of what this Aboriginality entails. An identifiably Métis history of place ensures the community’s membership within these larger groups, while this more universal detailing of Métis traits affirms the legitimacy of local history through its broader roles and functions.

⁷³ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁴ “MNS & North West Municipalities protocol agreement (1995),” Robert Doucette fonds, SAB, 1995-1996 (S-A 1035, #226).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Just as individual histories intersect at particular places to create communities and communal histories, individuals' and families' understandings of their Aboriginal pasts interact with each other, thereby expanding the scope of what Aboriginality entails, as well as its meaning on a local level. Further, interactions with outsiders have prompted definitions of what has made, or should make a community Aboriginal, as community members have responded to outside stipulations and emphasised their own, and through conduits of local histories, have drawn diverse histories in a common place into a contemporary Aboriginal community where notions of the indigenosity of the place and its people reflect the fluidity of historical interpretation. It is these diverse community histories that have narrated mutable definitions of indigenosity, as community members have interacted and conveyed these interactions. Thus, since place-making is a process of imbuing places with histories, the ways that these interpretations have originated and been employed by Aboriginal people to highlight the Aboriginality of their communities to other community members, other Aboriginal groups, or non-Native interests mirror and sometimes serve as acts of place-making that have occurred in response to changing historical circumstances. That definitions of Aboriginality and its significance are flexible is particularly important to consider, given that, especially when considering two very different communities in tandem, it can be easy to essentialise Aboriginal customs, histories, or traditions, rendering them ahistorical and "incapable of change without loss of authenticity."⁷⁶ It follows, then, that when linked to specific communities, Aboriginal histories of (and in) Aboriginal places remain authentic for the people who identify with and invoke them, since changing and ongoing interactions there require that community members continually re-evaluate the ability of these histories to communicate identities in ways that are meaningful and

⁷⁶ Laforet, 36.

productive for community members and outsiders alike. Notions of community and Aboriginality have played against and grown alongside each other, drawing on similar historical sources to convey a unique local experience that both draws meaning from and adds nuance to broader, more expansive or inclusive notions of the role of Aboriginality on a larger temporal and geographical scale.

CHAPTER 5 Conclusion

Exploring histories of and in Aboriginal communities begs consideration of how these places exist as the sum of their communal and Aboriginal parts, and how they also go beyond that through ongoing negotiations of events, issues, and historical interpretations that grow out of, reinforce, and redefine both Aboriginality and communities. Examined in tandem, the community and Aboriginal histories of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island highlight and at times magnify some of the ethnohistorical and historiographical challenges that researchers can encounter in these places: how to avoid essentialising or trivialising their identities while still elucidating themes that emerge in, or in relation to both communities. As Basso comments, ultimately “people, not cultures, sense places,”¹ and so individual, local renditions of histories not only reveal how people consider Île-à-la-Crosse or Seabird Island to be communities or Aboriginal places; they also emphasise ways that histories – and the ideas that these histories address – are individually meaningful, specific, and mutable depending on the context of their delivery.

Read in relation to one another, then, these individual perspectives – whether from academics, community members, or others – historicise each other, helping to provide definitions of Aboriginality and community that are rooted in the places they originated and in ongoing processes of history-making and interpretation. Seeking out the differences as well as the connections between the community and the Aboriginal aspects of a place’s history substantiates Cruikshank’s local focus for the impact of larger colonial involvement in Aboriginal people’s lives, since in both Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse, physical and historical links to a defined community have shaped the ways in which residents and outsiders have related to each other. At the same time, though, separating – even if

¹ Basso, xvi.

somewhat artificially – the community from the Aboriginal of Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island establishes meanings of events and issues that remain significant in community members’ historical narratives not necessarily because their perspectives represent one side of an Aboriginal/colonial binary, but because they make reference to varied and changing ways that these places have existed in people’s pasts and experiences.

In these Aboriginal communities, where insiders and outsiders alike have often invoked historical events and interactions in order to convey a particular image of community life or definition of Aboriginal identity, the mutability of people’s narratives becomes particularly significant. Depictions of histories are delivered with the details and emphases that appear to be most relevant to the present situation; the past becomes a current event. Stories about community features that can be tempting to describe simply as static traditions, like Seabird Island’s role as the site of subsistence activities, Île-à-la-Crosse’s Cree place names, or simply these places’ predominantly Aboriginal populations, are only, as Laforet notes in another indigenous context, “monolithic and incapable of change without loss of authenticity”² without their local, communal, ongoing significance, either as physical places or as historical actors. Thus, while notions of tradition and indigeneity often go hand in hand³ for community members and outsiders alike, individual historical narratives and interpretations are just as often filtered through understandings of the history as it relates to the community. Community histories conveyed by Aboriginal people are not necessarily or inherently explicit assertions of Aboriginality or of the place as Aboriginal. Instead, the two concepts refer to and complicate each other, inviting more intentional explanations of their significance to each other: intentionally, through conveying what is important about a

² Laforet, 36.

³ Ibid., 36.

community or being Aboriginal; or implicitly, in ways of relating to Native as well as non-Native people outside the community.

Just as there is no single notion of Aboriginality or community in Île-à-la-Crosse and Seabird Island, newcomer interests in these places have also been diverse. While governments put forth their own parameters for Indian and Métis identities and activities, these definitions were not always applicable on a local level (or at least not in the same ways), as suggested in one instance by the different views on Île-à-la-Crosse's co-op store between Valentine and Spaulding. Governments and other forms of colonial or non-Native influence are thus not necessarily synonymous, particularly in the ways that they have informed aspects of Aboriginal people's own local understandings of community and Aboriginality. Colonial delineations among First Nations and between Indian and Métis have situated inhabitants of Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse in particular physical places and helped to define their Aboriginality in these categorical terms. However, the permanent communities that evolved there did not grow out of a vacuum; rather, the people who have lived there have always enfolded earlier histories into their own contemporary ones. In other words, community members locate themselves within the history of that place, particulars of which may be shaped in response to colonial inscriptions of place and past.

Large-scale outside involvement in the form of governments or institutions corresponds with community members' broad definitions of their community and Aboriginality; interactions with non-Native people and interests closer to home have created a need for more nuanced, specific uses of community histories. While interactions between Aboriginal communities and others are what have shaped historical events and issues, it is communities and the individuals within them that have created and re-created histories that convey the immediate and lasting significance of these events. Local experiences of

colonialism at times created or emphasised particular conduits of relating to one another, and these relationships have acted as links between national or global issues of Aboriginality and their more immediate, specific relevance to communities. Île-à-la-Crosse had its beginnings as a hybrid of peoples and cultures, and while the community's past reveals diverse reasons for and ways of communicating the town's Aboriginality, this has often occurred in reference to government agents' ways of casting the idigeneity of community members. Community members' histories of the town have drawn these themes into their interpretations, rooting them around Île-à-la-Crosse to reinforce an Aboriginal history of that place. Similarly, through its long history as a place of resource-harvesting and habitation by various peoples, Seabird Island has been an identifiably Aboriginal place, though the meaning and definition of "Aboriginal" has, as this thesis has argued, changed and been flexible over time. Paradoxically, its role as a place for the mixture of cultures was solidified by government initiative, yet today, despite community members' ties to other Aboriginal groups and places, Seabird Island is officially Stó:lō. Thus, the ways that community members emphasise both its cultural diversity and its uniform Aboriginality, they rely on historical context for how these situational definitions of identity are significant in a given environment. It is in communities, however these might be defined, that Aboriginal histories of these places are created and reinforced: colonial delineations of space and belonging have served at times to place people in a particular locale, but community members have situated themselves within their own histories of that place.

The histories of Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse detailed in this thesis are not comprehensive in their scope of events, themes, or temporal range. Instead, they are based on various notions of community and Aboriginality as focal points – like the places themselves – for exploring uses, meanings, and interpretations of histories of interactions.

Place-making acts as a link between community specificity and the broader affiliations that the community maintains; absolute definitions of community or indigeneity have been less relevant in these places than the way these concepts have become actors in memorable, communally significant events and issues. Thus, the community and Aboriginality of these Aboriginal communities are fluid across time and situations, yet remain linked to a particular historical context. This flexibility mirrors the multifaceted nature of community membership and belonging in Seabird Island and Île-à-la-Crosse: as places of cultural mixing, mutability of identity has meant that historical interpretations of and within the communities have played a central role in the way that their inhabitants have related to other individuals, peoples, and places. There exists, then, a historiography in these communities that, while sometimes unintentional or implicit, links community members' accounts of their community and its Aboriginal features with outside observations. This connection places these interpretations of historical events into a historiographical context of ways these Aboriginal communities have been both, and alternately, communities and Aboriginal places. It is at this intersection where histories evolve that are indigenous to the places and communities where they find ongoing reinterpretations, their most meaningful uses, and their greatest significance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

- SAB Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, SK
SIB Seabird Island Band Office, Seabird Island, B.C.
SNA Stó:lō Nation Archives, Chilliwack, B.C.

Oral Interviews

- Ahenakew, Vince. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 18 June 2006. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Bobb, Edna. Interviewed by Betty Peters, 23 February 1979. Summary at SIB.
- Charles, Archie. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008. Seabird Island, B.C.
Recording at SNA.
- . Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 8 October 2008. Seabird Island, B.C. Recording at SNA.
- Dubrulle, Dorothy. Interviewed by Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Durocher, Liz. Interviewed by MacKinley Darlington and Katya MacDonald, 19 June 2006. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Durocher, Tony. Interviewed by Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Favel, Don. Interviewed by Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 25 May 2008. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Gardiner, Irene. Interviewed by Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 27 May 2008. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Harris, Jim. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 4 July 2008. Seabird Island, B.C. Notes at SNA.
- Hope, Jay. Personal communication with Katya MacDonald, 20 May 2009.
- Hope, Lena. Interviewed by Betty Peters, 15 March 1979. Summary at SIB.
- Hope, Richard. Interviewed by Albert (Sonny) McHalsie and Richard Daly, 1988.
Transcript at SNA.
- Malboeuf, Norma. Interviewed by Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald., 27 May 2008. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.

- Mann, Bea. Interviewed by Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 8 August 2006. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Mann, Colin. Interviewed by Kevin Gambell and Katya MacDonald, 8 August 2006. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- McIntyre, Ivan. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 10 October 2008. Seabird Island, B.C. Recording at SNA.
- Morin, Spud (Allen). Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 6 July 2006. Île-à-la-Crosse, SK.
- Peters, Bertie. Interviewed by Pat John and Ernest Victor, 5 September 1996, for Stó:lō Nation Traditional Use Study. Transcript at SIB.
- Pettis, Maggie. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 9 October 2008. Seabird Island, B.C. Recording at SNA.
- Seymour, Clem. Interviewed by Katya MacDonald, 2 July 2008. Recording at SNA.

Primary Documents

- Canada. "Commission on Establishing a New Band of Indians on Seabird Island, British Columbia, 1958." Partial transcript. SNA.
- Canada. "Report of Commission to Inquire into the Desirability of Establishing a New Band of Indians on Seabird Island, British Columbia," 1958. Original at B.C. Archives; copy accessed at SNA.
- Canada, Department of Indian Affairs. Record Group 10, Volume 7536, File 26, 165-1. Copy accessed at SIB.
- Harris, June. "Objectives for Seabird Island Research (1970s)," binders 1 & 2. n.d. SIB.
- "MNS and North West Municipalities protocol agreement (1995)." SAB (Robert Doucette Fonds), S-A 1035, #226. 1995-1996.
- "Northwest Saskatchewan Métis Land Claim." SAB (Robert Doucette fonds), S-A 1035, #247. 1994.
- Shannon, E.N. "Métis problem in Northern Saskatchewan." SAB (Robert Doucette Fonds), S-A 1035, #2737. 1957.
- Smith, Marian. Fieldnotes. Unpublished, Summer 1945. Royal Anthropological Institute, London, MS #268:2 and 268:4. Copies at SNA.
- Spaulding, P.T. "From the Colonial Pan into the Fire of Native Self-Determination: A

Northern Saskatchewan Case.” SAB (Robert Doucette fonds), S-A 1035, # 2966.
n.d.

Valentine, Victor F. “The Fort Black Co-operative Store: A Social Experiment Among the Ile A La Crosse Métis.” SAB (Robert Doucette fonds), S-A 1035, #500. 1957.

Newspaper Articles

Greenshields, Vern. “Natives Optimistic about Northern School Board.” *The Northian* 10 (1974): 20-21. Reprinted from the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 23 April 1973.

---. “Racial Overtones in Native School Board Issue.” *The Northian* 10 (1974): 18-19. Reprinted from the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 16 February 1973.

Unpublished Secondary Sources

Blair, Hilary Kathleen. “Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve.” Unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1999.

Published Secondary Sources

Ahenakew, Vince. *Michif/Cree Dictionary (Nēhīyanēwin Masinabīkan)*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1997.

Allen, Chadwick. “Blood as Narrative/Narrative as Blood: Declaring a Fourth World.” *Narrative* 6 (1998): 236-255.

Bakker, Peter. *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Basso, Keith H. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Biersack, Aletta. “Introduction: History and Theory in Anthropology.” In *Clio in Oceania: Toward a Historical Anthropology*, edited by Aletta Biersack. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. 1-36.

Bierwert, Crisca. *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999.

Boas, Franz. *Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1934.

- Buckley, Helen, J.E.M. Kew, and John B. Hawley. *The Indians and Métis of Northern Saskatchewan: A Report on Economic and Social Development*. Saskatoon: Centre for Community Studies, 1963.
- Carlson, Keith Thor. "A Legacy of Broken Promises: The *Xwelitem* Exploration and Settlement of *Solb Temexw* (Our Land)." In *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997. 53-86.
- Cruikshank, Julie. *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.
- Deloria, Philip J. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Introduction." In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1983. 3-18.
- Harmon, Alexandra. *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Harris, Cole. *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.
- Jahner, Elaine A. *Spaces of the Mind: Narrative and Community in the American West*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Jarvenpa, Robert. *The Trappers of Patuanak: Toward a Spatial Ecology of Modern Hunters*. Ottawa: Canadian Ethnology Service, 1980.
- Laforet, Andrea. "Narratives of the Treaty Table: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of Tradition." In *Questions of Tradition*, edited by Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. 33-55.
- Lawrence, Bonita. "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview." *Hypatia* 18 (2003): 3-31.
- Leacock, Eleanor B. "The Seabird Community." In *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, edited by Marian W. Smith. New York: AMS Press, 1969 edition of the 1949 printing. 184-194.
- Maaka, Roger C.A. and Chris Andersen. "Introduction." In *The Indigenous Experience: Global Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006. 10-15.
- Macdougall, Brenda. "*Wabkootowin*: Family and Cultural Identity in Northwestern Saskatchewan Métis Communities." *The Canadian Historical Review* 87 (2006): 431-462.
- McHalsie, Albert (Sonny). "Halq'eméylem Place Names in Stó:lō Territory." In *A Stó:lō*

- Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001. 134-153.
- . "Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of Nation." In *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001. 32-33.
- Metz, Brent E. *Cb'orti'-Maya Survival in Eastern Guatemala: Indigeneity in Transition*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.
- Miller, Bruce Granville. *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.
- Miller, Jay. *Lusbootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.
- Phillips, Mark Salber. "What is Tradition When it is Not 'Invented'? A Historiographical Introduction." In *Questions of Tradition*, edited by Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. 3-29.
- Sahlins, Marshall. *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Schaepe, David M. "Activities on the Land: Continuing Traditions in a Shifting Legal World." In *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001. 122-123.
- Suttles, Wayne. "The Persistence of Intervillage Ties among the Coast Salish." In *Ethnology* 2 (1963): 512-525.
- Thornton, Thomas F. "Anthropological Studies of Native American Place Naming." *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (1997): 209-228.
- . *Being and Place among the Tlingit*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.
- Valentine, V.F. *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*. Ottawa: Department of Natural Resources, 1955.
- Winkel, James D. "Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation." Online paper published by Saskatchewan Northern Affairs, August 2002.
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=22747> Accessed August 2006.