

ISLAND CACHE RECOVERY PROJECT



Report

Submitted by

Dr. Mike Evans, Principal Investigator
Lisa Krebs, Project Coordinator

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	3
	1) Background of the Island Cache	3
II.	Research Methodology	4
	Phase 1	5
	1) Community Conference	5
	2) Interviews With Former Residents	6
	Phase 2	7
	1) Interviews With Officials	7
	2) Archive	7
III.	Community Employment and Education	8
IV.	Future Work and Recommendations	9
	1) Community Publication	9
	2) Academic Publication	9

I. INTRODUCTION

The Island Cache Recovery Project is a joint venture between the University of Northern British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the PGMES, which has received support from the Northern Land Use Institute, North Central Métis Management Society, Support for the Advancement of Scholarship Fund of the University of Alberta, BC Heritage Trust, and Canadian Heritage.

Using a community research model, the purpose of the project is to recover the history of a community, called the Island Cache that no longer exists. The buildings and roads of the community are gone. By means of interviews and the compilation of an extensive archive, the project attempts to revisit the community, both from the perspective of the residents and from outside City officials and policy makers. The Island Cache existed as a residential community for over seven decades and the replacement of the residential community with industry in the late 1970's, is a land use decision that needs to be revisited.

1. Background of the Island Cache

Geographically, the Island Cache was located at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, North of the City of Prince George and the Canadian National Railway lines. This area is Lheidli T'enneh Traditional Territory and was part of the former site of The Fort George Indian Band, Reserve #1. However, in 1913, Indian Reserve #1 was sold to the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway for \$125,000 and the Fort George Indian Band was relocated to a new Reserve at Shelley.

The Island Cache was previously known as Foley's Cache; named for the company Foley, Welch and Stewart. In the spring of 1913, "District Lot 343" was registered and Foley, Welch and Stewart built their headquarters for the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in the Island Cache. At this time, the Cache was mainly large warehouses and docks; a place to "cache" equipment, but it soon grew into a small town. Residences were erected as far as George St. and there was a hospital, store, bank, tennis courts and a baseball field. At this time, the residents of Foley's Cache were generally employed by Grand Trunk Pacific Railway.

In 1926, Alfred Alexander and his brother purchased the land just west of the Fraser River and built their first sawmill. This sawmill and the many to follow attracted new residents to the area. Most of the families that lived there were low-income families, mostly because the community had such a low tax assessment. Eventually, in 1970 the Island Cache became incorporated into the City of Prince George, however City services such as water, paved roads and sewer were not provided until the late 1970's.

Because the Island Cache is in close proximity to both the Fraser and Nechako rivers, flooding was always a major concern to its residents. In 1921

there was a massive flood that swamped not only the Island Cache, but moved all the way up to First Avenue, across the railway tracks. There were major floods in 1914, 1918, 1921, 1936, 1939, 1948, and 1972.

In June 1972, there was a large flood that caused the residents of the Island Cache to evacuate. Upon their evacuation, City Health and Building inspectors examined the residences and other structures in the Cache and deemed them unsuitable for occupation. It was determined that the area should no longer be used for residential purposes. The City set aside 1.5 million dollars to buy out property owners and using a formula of two and one-half times the post-flood property assessment made offers to the property owners.

In October 1973 the Island Residents Association requested that their settlement be upgraded from \$1.5 million to \$3.1 million for expropriation and relocation of residents. They also suggested that the Lamb property be set aside for a wilderness park.

In December 1974, there were 39 housing units left. The flooding continued periodically through the mid-1970s, when the remaining residents were removed from the area of the Cache and the land was reconstructed for industry.

Though incorporated into the City in 1970, the Cache was clearly identified as a distinct and somewhat closed community. Perceptions of the community of the Island Cache differ, for City officials it was a community with no City services, substandard housing and social ills. For the members of the Island Cache community it was a place where people relied on each other, and for people who were working poor as a starting point into Prince George. For outsiders, the Island Cache was often viewed as a place where bootleggers, prostitutes and other marginal people resided.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Island Cache Recovery Project is a community participatory research endeavor. The project has been guided by a advisory committee consisting of former residents of the Island Cache, members of the Métis Elders Society, Aboriginal educators, representatives from the University of Northern BC, the University of Alberta, and numerous community and UNBC volunteers. The project has been broken down into three phases. The first two phases of the project attempt to recreate the community of the Island Cache. Specifically, the first phase is focused on the representation of the Cache through the oral testimony and personal memorabilia of former Island Cache community members. Phase one began with a community conference to bring together the past residents of the Cache spanning the 70 years that it remained residential. The second phase of the project represents the Cache through the oral testimony of City officials and policy makers as well as an extensive archive of data including, City documents, demographics, and newspaper and museum sources.

The final and third phase of the project entails the analysis of the first and second phases with regards to policy and planning processes in place at the time of the Cache.

PHASE 1

1. Community Conference



The first night of the Island Cache Community Conference.

Throughout April and May 1999, an initial period of research commenced in order to identify past community members and to invite them to a conference to share their experiences and stories about their lives in the Cache. This conference was organized with participants from the Métis Elders Society, UNBC students and former residents of the Island Cache. The Island Cache Community Conference took place on June 12th and 13th, 1999. The conference was designed to meet two purposes, to bring together past residents to contemplate the significance of the Cache and to begin the interview process.

Concurrently with the Island Cache Community Conference, the fourth level of Métis studies, FNST 272 was offered at UNBC. The class was designed to define and apply research skills and competencies in a participatory framework, specifically with Aboriginal Communities. The students of this class, many of whom were drawn from the Aboriginal community in Prince George, played full and active roles in the research.



Four of the FNST 272 students at the Island Cache Community Conference.



Interview with a former Cache resident on the second day of the Community Conference.

The conference, called the Island Cache Reunion was split into two days; the first evening was a potluck dinner and social, the second day was an opportunity for people to meet at Cottonwood Island, the former site of the Island Cache and remember the Cache in the context of the geographical space. More than 80 people attended the first day of the conference, at this time several interviews were conducted.

Those who attended the conference added significantly to the contact list of past residents, almost all of whom still resided in Prince George, and to the image of the Cache in general. The second day brought several past residents to Cottonwood Island to walk through the space that once was the Island Cache. It was through this conference that the local media advertised the purpose of the Island Cache Recovery Project, which in turn brought forward many former residents wanting to be interviewed.

2. Interviews With Former Residents

The interview process with former residents of the Island Cache began intensively in June 1999 and carried on through December 1999. The interview process follows the UNBC ethical guidelines for community research and procedurally consisted of an informed consent for audio and video, the interview, a transcript review by the participant and a final book or film consent form. Throughout the entire process, participants had the option to withdraw their participation.

Since the project began we have conducted 44 interviews with 76 people. It should be noted that average length of an interview is about 45 minutes, making for a lengthy transcription process. People participating in the interviews came from diverse ethnicities including European immigrants, Canadians from the Prairie Provinces and Aboriginal people. These interviews have given us a framework to reflect on life in the Cache over a period of 50 years, to capture the community of the Cache and its role and place within Prince George. Sadly, like all communities, some people viewed their experience in the Cache as a time of poverty and social marginality, and thus felt a profound stigma living in the

Cache. However, for most people the Cache was a time of freedom, of neighbors and of a sense of community they have not been able to recapture.

In addition to interviews, personal photos and newspaper and memorabilia collections donated to the project have added the landscape features that are now missing. In short, the interviews with former residents have given us an amazing opportunity to revisit the community of the Island Cache.

PHASE 2

1. Interviews with Officials

Much like the interviews with former residents, the interviews with City officials help to frame the perception of the Island Cache. More specifically, they reveal the policy and planning surrounding the development of infrastructure in the Island Cache (and its lack), reactions to the floods, and of course the perception of the Cache to outsiders. In total we have interviewed 10 City officials, including the former City Planner and Mayor of Prince George, who held office during the most controversial years of the Cache, the 1970's.

2. Archive

Through the efforts of student researchers and volunteers, an extensive archive of data has been collected. The documents contained in the archive consist of the following sources:

- City documents, such as health inspections, offers to purchase, subdivision plans, planning consultant reports to Council, planning documents, site maps slides and photos of the area, survey maps and air photo interpretation, public announcements, expropriation notices, official City correspondence, historical photos, special interest and private correspondence with Council, City tax assessments, internal City documents, reports, etc.¹
- All newspaper articles relating to the Island Cache, both from the library archives and the museum archives, both of which span 6 decades and include several Prince George newspapers.
- Canadian National Railway historical documentation, maps and site plans.
- British Columbia housing records.

¹ We would like to recognize the contribution of Kent Sedgwick for much of the City documentation.

- British Columbia historical legislation and regulations with regards to the *Housing Act*.
- Demographic information including property tax assessment comparisons throughout the communities of Prince George, population statistics and social welfare recipients.

III. COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Consistent with our research proposal, the Island Cache Recovery Project has provided training, employment and research opportunities for several university students, and a number of people from the Metis community.

IV. FUTURE WORK & RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the progression of first two phases of the Island Cache Recovery Project a comprehensive archive has been created. This archive consists of oral testimony from former residents and City officials, museum and library data sources, as well as personal memorabilia, CNR maps and site plans, BC housing records and scores of City of Prince George documentation.

This archive provides the structure for the third phase of the project, that of analysis and publication. Our intention is to use the archive compiled out of phase one and two and examine the planning and land use policy and political processes at work with regards to the community of the Cache. Since the Cache was largely Aboriginal, we also seek to examine the roots of Aboriginal activism and Urban Aboriginal agency that grew out of the Cache.

From this analysis we intend to produce two publications for two audiences, the first audience being the community, the second being the academy. In addition to this we would like to organize a second community conference for the former residents of the Island Cache.

1. Community Publication

Consistent with our methodology, the Island Cache Recovery Project is a community research endeavor. As such, it is imperative to give to the community participants a publication that recognizes their experiences in the Cache, and a publication that informs the community at large, of the now-defunct community of the Island Cache.

2. Academic Publication

The history of the Island Cache is a direct result of the conflicts over land use, and the results of these conflicts on an Aboriginal community. While the actions taken were consistent with urban planning policy of the day, such as the dispersal of ghetto populations, exclusionary decision making processes further marginalized the residents. However, this is not only a part of the past, for areas of Prince George, such as the VLA are increasingly experiencing the same problems that marked the Cache. By reflecting on the past, our research can offer insights on how urban Aboriginal communities might be empowered rather than destroyed. As well, our research will add to the inadequate volume of knowledge that exists on urban Aboriginal communities and experiences outside of the criminal justice system.