

Memorandum

To: Alex Hawley
From: Tracy Summerville
Date: 12/19/2002
Re: The Upper Fraser Oral History Project

We are pleased to provide this Final Report on our Upper Fraser Oral History Project. This Final Report is being provided as part of the NLUI grant we received to carry out four Open Houses (in Prince George, McBride, Dunster and Sinclair Mills) as well as to finish transcribing a number of oral histories.

The arch of the Upper Fraser River has witnessed the rise, consolidation and demise of a series of forestry related settlements as British Columbia's forest industry has passed through different industrial phases. These communities have represented a spectrum of settlement types at different stages in their histories: nodes for small scale logging operations, base camps for larger scale operations, hamlets adapting to the closure of a sawmill. Changes in time-space relations, related to the introduction of new technologies of forest harvesting and transport, changing policies and regulations, and changing economic imperatives for forestry firms, have shaped the Upper Fraser settlements. These communities in many respects mirror a pattern of community development, and related land use shifts, throughout UNBC's service region.

The rapid social, economic, and environmental changes that have challenged community persistence in the Upper Fraser are intimately tied to the changing pattern of resource access and utilization. In the words of Ray Williston, long time Minister of Lands and Forests, "no other valley in the province has witnessed the kind of revolutionary change that has occurred within this valley". A larger umbrella project, the Upper Fraser Historical Geography project, has been engaged for the past three years in rebuilding the historical record of social, cultural, economic and public policy change within the Upper Fraser region. Our argument is that the Upper Fraser serves as a microcosm for the province as a whole and that lessons on the interaction between a wide range of subject areas must be better understood in order to plan future resource utilization policies and plans. This project allowed us to complete and supplement the collection of invaluable oral history data, forms one integral component of the larger project. We are pleased to summarize our project

outcomes under two important topic areas: outreach programs and the development of an extensive historical database, including over 70 oral history interviews with more than 100 people

Outreach Activities:

A critical facet of our research work has been connected with community outreach. The five Open Houses we conducted are considered to have been a key part of this outreach activity and proved very successful by improving the visibility of our work and encouraging people with information, records, or photographs to contact us and donate materials (see description of Open Houses below as well as photographs). This outreach component has helped to break down barriers between long time northern BC residents and our research project.

A series of Open Houses were conducted in the spring and early summer of 2001. The Open Houses were held at:

The University of Northern British Columbia, May 3-5, 2001

Dunster Community Hall, Dunster, BC, June 7-9, 2001

McBride Elks Hall, McBride, BC, June 14-16, 2001

Giscome Elementary School, Giscome, BC, June 21, 2001

Sinclair Mills Community Hall, Sinclair Mills, BC, June 22-23, 2001

Each of these Open Houses were a tremendous success. Approximately 155 adults and 65 children attended the events. We included the University of Northern British Columbia because many former residents of communities along the Upper Fraser now live in Prince George.

At each Open House, we included 6 large displays of the data we have collected to date. This included newspaper articles, various types of landuse and settlement reports, a range of maps and aerial photographs, oral histories and community photographs. We also presented our website through a laptop and digital projector. This allowed us to move through the maps and photographs on the website with our guests. This proved to be very popular. We also included a television and VCR on which we showed two historical videos made in the regions of the Upper Fraser communities.

We also invited a number of partners to participate with us at these Open Houses. The two most important are the Prince George Retired Teachers' Association of Northern BC and the Prince George Railway and Forestry Museum. In both cases, these partners sent people to attend the Open Houses at UNBC while we carried their promotional brochures and materials to the Open Houses in other communities.

We also received in-kind support from a number of groups within UNBC. This included the loan of electronic equipment such as laptops, digital projectors, TVs and VCRs as well as professional display boards.

We were very pleased with the Open House attendance and the feedback we received. We think that this was a very good method of maintaining visibility for our work, sharing information that we had collected to date, and prompting people to think about information that they might wish to contribute in the future.

As a direct result of our Open House events, a partnership has been formed with the Robson Valley Archives which is seeking to extend some of our website ideas to their community database of historical photographs. In addition, we have formed a working relationship with the Exploration Place (Fraser-Fort George Regional) Museum.

Historical Database

The most important product from this Upper Fraser Historical Geography Project is the creation of a rich historical database on an important region of northern BC. The sawmill communities along the Upper Fraser have mostly been lost to time but through our project we were able to transcribe 36 oral history interviews that will help us to tell the story of this region. These additional oral histories are to be added to the oral history database we initially created with funding assistance with BC Heritage Trust. They will be available on our website once they receive approval from the interviewees. We will also be depositing the entire collection of transcripts with the Northern BC Archives and Special Collections.

This database also includes maps, bibliographic material, photographs, company archives and government records. Fitting the UNBC's motto as a "University in the North, for the North", the database will be available to students and researchers in northern BC and we fully expect it to become the foundation for graduate student research work for many years to come. The investment made by the NLUI has helped create a research tool through which our historical understanding of northern BC's transformation can be explored.

Our research plan involved two components: a series of Open Houses and the transcription of oral history interviews. Both of these components have been completed according to our research outline and timetable. We are very pleased with the success of this project and very excited about its continuing value as we explore the historical geography of the Upper Fraser region.

We hope and trust that the information contained in this report meets with your satisfaction. Should you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

December 19, 2002

Sincerely,

Tracy Summerville (Political Science Program)

Aileen Espiritu (History Program)

Gail Fondahl (Geography Program)

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