



History Program
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History Master's Theses completed at UNBC



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**“Come Hell and High Water:
The Relocation of the Cheslatta First Nation”**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the history of the Cheslatta T'en First Nation of Grassy Plains British Columbia in the context of their forced relocation in 1952. The Cheslatta people were once self-reliant and prosperous. They farmed, trapped, hunted and fished in the same territory they had occupied for centuries. The Cheslatta people were a close-knit community who relied only on each other in times of need. All of that changed in April of 1952 when the Department of Indian Affairs informed the people they would have to leave immediately, as their land was about to flood. Shocked and heartbroken, the people packed up the few belongings they could carry and left for Grassy Plains where they lived in tents, shacks and abandoned buildings until they could find or build new homes. Since that time the close-knit community has fallen victim to bitterness and hostility, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and violence.

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