

The Sto:lo's Stolen Children

By Andrew Seal

The Fraser River winds through the valley. The lush, forest-covered mountains tower in the background. This is what some Sto:lo boys saw the last time they were at home with their families.



The view from Telte Yet campsite where the memorial will stand (Andrew Seal).

In 1858, the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush brought the first influx of non-Indigenous people, or *Xwelitem*, to the area around Fort Hope, now known as Hope, B.C. When the rush was over, most of the miners returned to the United States with their bounty. However, at least a few of them took something far more precious than gold back home with them.

No one knows just how many Sto:lo boys were taken. Some were abandoned further downstream, but most of them ended up in California.

The view from what is now Telte Yet campsite on the banks of the Fraser would be their last sight of Hope. On August 19, a memorial pole, currently being carved by Chief Terry Horne of Yakwekwioose First Nation, will be erected there in their honour.



Chief Terry Horne working on the memorial pole on the side of the Fraser River (Diana Bonner Cornell/Bear Image Productions)

“It’s where [some of] the boys last touched Sto:lo territory,” says Chief Horne.

The story is not well known even among the Sto:lo community, but details are surfacing now thanks to the efforts of Dr. Keith Carlson, a history professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

His on-going research is part of the Canada 150-funded ‘Lost Stories’ initiative based at Concordia University, and should be featured as part of a larger work on the history of abducted Coast Salish children.

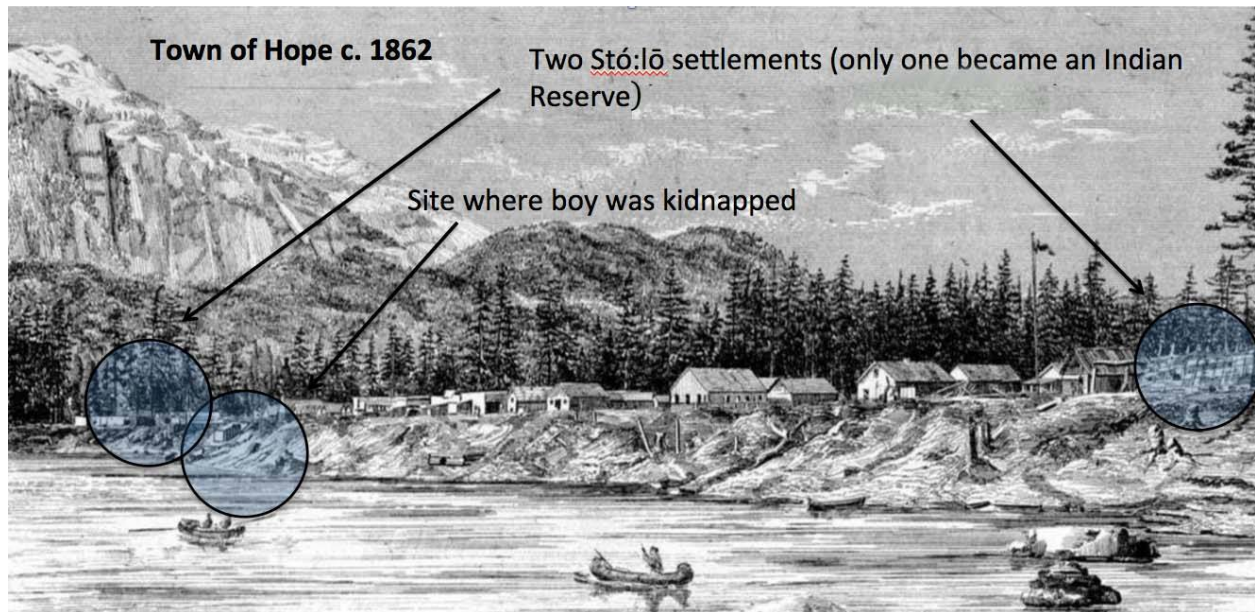
“I didn’t know anything about it until I was told about the memorial project. It was almost hard to believe. Even my grandfather didn’t know about it,” says Chief Horne.

Leaving Hope

Records from the era are scant, but Dr. Carlson discovered some correspondence between colonial officials and a distraught Sto:lo man named Sokolowicz. He was seeking assistance in getting his son back from a Californian miner named George Crum.

“Crum got on a steamboat and left [Fort Hope], and an hour or so later, Sokolowicz couldn’t find his son,” says Dr. Carlson.

“Someone told him, ‘he got on the boat with that white guy.’ So the family jumped in their canoes, paddling downriver to try and catch up but they couldn’t make it.”



Sokolowicz approached the Hudson’s Bay Company and colonial officials for help. For the next four years, he kept coming back, desperate for any information about his son. The post officer at the mouth of the Harrison River began corresponding with Crum, who claimed to be insulted by the kidnapping charge, instead reporting that Sokolowicz had repeatedly asked him to take the boy even though he did not wish to.

Crum wrote that he had since come to love the boy, adopting him as his own and giving him the name Charles.

The correspondence continued. Sokolowicz informed officials that not only had he been beaten by Crum, but that Crum previously had another Indigenous boy with him who died “in his service.”

Then, in a letter to the Harrison River post officer dated January 31, 1863, Crum wrote “I must inform you that Charley died about the 29th of April last year and was buried decently in the Sacramento City Cemetery on my own family lot... his name is recorded on the register of that cemetery as Charles Crum. I consider him my son by adoption.”

The death was confirmed by the British Council in San Francisco. On behalf of Sokolowicz, they tried to have “Charley’s” remains repatriated but Crum would not allow it.

Almost 150 years later, Dr. Carlson was in California and attempted to locate the Crum family plot in Sacramento’s old pioneer cemetery.



The Crum family plot at the pioneer cemetery in Sacramento, California (Dr. Keith Carlson)

He found 'Charley Crum, Indian Boy, Washington Territory' listed as buried in an unmarked grave within the Crum family plot.

This discovery has ignited a drive to have the boy's remains returned to B.C.

"My hope for the project is that by spreading knowledge of this the boy will be repatriated back to our territory," says Chief Horne.

Why Kidnap Indigenous Boys?

A recent discovery by Dr. Carlson has now revealed a possible motivation behind the kidnappings.

"Most of the miners who came to B.C. at that time were veterans of the California Gold Rush about ten years earlier," he explains. "Down there they actually passed a law that gave miners

the right to take young Indigenous boys from their families and employ them as indentured servants. I'm just getting into these records now and it's creepy."

Dr. Carlson believes that the miners continued this practice when they came to Canada. It could explain why Crum was reported to have another Indigenous boy with him before 'Charles'.

Dr. Carlson is now continuing to work with the Sto:lo community with the goal of finding the boys' relatives. So far, only one mention of them has been found since the last correspondence in 1863.

An article in the *Chilliwack Progress* dating back to 1904 mentions "A great many boys were stolen away by these vicious white men" and that two of them were remarkably able to return to the Fraser Valley decades later as adults. At the time of the article, one of them was reported to still be alive and living at Chilliwack Landing.

Working with the community

Community leaders, with the help of Dr. Carlson, are hoping to determine the identity of this man and his family.

"We're hoping that the memorial will get the community talking and someone will remember something about an old great-uncle or something like that," says Dr. Carlson.



The memorial pole – A work in progress (Diana Bonner Cornell/Bear Image Productions)

The memorial is a red cedar, Coast-Salish style house-post. “It has two figures on it, a father and a son, and their hands are reaching into the middle, kind of holding on to each other but at the same time letting go,” explains Chief Horne, who has done some of the carving at Chilliwack Secondary School and Hope Secondary School.

“The hands in the middle represent them coming apart when the son was kidnapped, but they’re also not touching so it represents them coming back together at the same time.”