

# Being On the Land: Histories at the Confluence

## Symposium on the people of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers



Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College  
June 19, 2007

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Dr. Duff Sutherland, History  
Lori Barkley, MA, Anthropology

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*"...understanding and building cultures of peace..."*

*Mir Centre for Peace*



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## Introduction: History as a Rough Terrain



The symposium “Being on the Land: Histories at the Confluence” grew out of a cultural event organized at the Mir Centre for Peace one year previously. Although time had passed, the issues, and questions, remained the same: what will the land itself tell us if we listen carefully, with empathy and commitment to historical truth; in what ways can we understand the stories of the land’s first inhabitants, the Aboriginal peoples, as they joined with the history of later utopian seekers such as the Doukhobors; what points of intersection might exist between historical truth and justice and the demands of reconciliation and cultural healing?

The presenters at this symposium, each in his or her own way contributed to the complex “narratives” of history which have emerged from the lands at the confluence of two rivers—the Kootenay and Columbia. Lori Barkley’s presentation cast light on the deep archeological record of kp’itl’els, or Brilliant, and encouraged people to reflect on the “narrative” of human remains which keeps emerging with its own message from the gravelly bluffs above the Columbia River. Duff Sutherland asked his audience to travel with him back in time to recapture the lived reality of Alexander Christian—White Grizzly as he was known within his own community—and his family, the last Aboriginal inhabitants of kp’itl’els, dignified human beings who left their mark on the history of the Kootenay region. Myler Wilkinson spoke about the transcendental homelessness of the Doukhobors who believed they had found a utopian home of peace and solace at Brilliant but discovered there prior residents with their own age-old claims on this beautiful landscape. Marilyn James spoke for the Sinixt or Lakes People, her own people, whose home was called kp’itl’els, and who today, she said, no longer require apologies but real collective work to redress historical injustices. And lastly, John Verigin spoke out of his own heritage as a Doukhobor—a tradition of peace seekers. He acknowledged past wrongs, and he made clear his own commitment as a Doukhobor to seek truth, justice, and healing between the Doukhobor community and the Sinixt people.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One other presenter should be mentioned for his contribution to the “Being on the Land” Symposium. Bill Trubetskoff presented invaluable historical materials – maps and photographs of the Brilliant Doukhobor villages – as well as leading a



Collectively this talented group of presenters made clear a not-often-discussed “truth” of history: that it changes over time, that what we see in it, what we need from it, what uses we put it to—all are transformed in time, and yet the seeking for “truth” continues as it must. One moment at the “Being on the Land” symposium stands out as emblematic of this shifting historical “truth.” Marilyn James, the spokesperson for the Sinixt people, began her talk at the Symposium with a wrenching account of the history of her peoples in the Kootenays. Sitting beside her beneath the First Nations Arbour at the Mir site was John Verigin Jr. As Marilyn spoke, and as her emotions became clear to the large audience which also sheltered under the arbour, John Verigin reached across the space that separated them and placed his hand on her knee; as Marilyn continued to speak she took John’s hand in her own and did not let go of it until she had finished her presentation.

Perhaps every person in the audience heard Marilyn’s words which recounted the suffering of her people, and many would have seen John Verigin join his hands with hers, but the historical truth of this simple act may not have been so clear—the joining of hands of people who had often misunderstood each other in the past. And this micro-history—that which so often does not get written down, which is not judged official or important enough to be remembered—was the real history between Sinixt and Doukhobors which occurred on that day.

Time passes, and one day some months later Marilyn James was asked how we should read the brief “narrative” of her hand in John Verigin’s. She smiled and said:

People join hands for many reasons, sometimes just to hold hands, other times for stability, to offer a hand up, or to go over rough terrain; rough terrain is easier to come through if there is someone to support you, to lean on, and this is reciprocal, help goes back and forth; sometimes you take someone’s hand, sometimes you give your hand. History is a rough terrain, it’s hard to go through alone.

Marilyn James’ words have the ring of truth: History can be a rough terrain, and it is difficult to go through alone. Out of the gathering which took place on June 19th at the Mir Centre and at the Lower Brilliant Terrace—a collective walking on the land—and in the essays that follow, we have attempted to listen to the truths of history in our place, and in our time.

Myler Wilkinson  
Mir Centre for Peace  
Selkirk College  
October 2007

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“walk-about” on the lower Brilliant Terrace. In addition, José Padillo, Spanish Instructor at Selkirk College, played a significant role in organizing the overall Symposium. Our thanks also go to Dr. Bill Sloan and Dr. Mark Mealing—respected scholars of the history and anthropology of the Kootenay region—for sharing their knowledge and walking the land with us.



## Archaeology and Pre-History of Brilliant, BC<sup>1</sup>

Prepared by: Lori Barkley, Anthropology



There are two key aspects to understanding pre-history, the time before written records. The first is oral histories of the people themselves. However, those coming from long traditions of recorded history all too often regarded oral histories as unreliable, assuming a direct relationship between recorded history and reliability. The other way to uncover pre-history is to dig it out of the land, literally, through archaeological excavations. However, unlike oral histories, what people were thinking and doing is not preserved in the archaeological record; what does remain are some of the material products of their behaviour. The meaning of these objects is open to interpretation and reinterpretation as ideas change. The objects are material facts, but how these are interpreted are just that, interpretations according to prevailing beliefs of the time.

It is also important to remember the archaeological mantra “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”. In other words, just because something hasn’t been found, doesn’t imply that it didn’t exist. Specific conditions are required for preservation, and being at the right place at the right time, in addition to knowing what to look for, is surprisingly important to the discovery of an archaeological site. Over time, as archaeology confirmed oral histories the two have merged, but this has been a long process. The prevailing attitude to this day is to confirm oral history with archaeological finds, despite long and rich oral traditions.

The vast majority of archaeology in this area is, and has been, “salvage archaeology”— excavating in advance of development, or recovering materials eroding out of river banks. Although some ethnographic work had been conducted<sup>2</sup>, no archaeological excavations occurred in this area prior to interest in hydroelectric development of the Columbia River.<sup>3</sup> As Marilyn James has argued, the extinction status of the Sinixt was caused by the desire to develop the Columbia River, an area under Sinixt control prior to colonization. Herein lies an irony: archaeological excavations have been driven by assessments required prior to development or extraction of natural resources, all activities which destroy markers of Sinixt presence. However, were it not for this development, it is likely that little would be known of their pre-history in this area apart from oral history. Moreover, another mantra of archaeology is “excavation is destruction”. Development, natural erosion, and

<sup>1</sup> This presentation benefited from many discussions and sharing of information with Elizabeth Lund, Myler Wilkinson, and Duff Sutherland, as well as Marilyn James, Bill Sloan, and Mark Mealing all Selkirk College colleagues.

<sup>2</sup> For example, ethnographic work conducted by James A. Teit, under the direction of Franz Boas, Verne F. Ray, and William Elmendorf.

<sup>3</sup> Turnbull, Christopher J. (1977) *Archaeology and Ethnohistory in the Arrow Lakes, Southeastern British Columbia*. National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Paper No. 65. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada. p.12. Turnbull later writes: “ Few studies were complete before 1940, when hydroelectric development of the Columbia River Basin began in earnest. The need for salvage studies in the dam reservoirs continues to the present day as the main impetus for archaeological research in the Plateau.” pp.17-18.



archaeological excavations have all contributed to both the recording and obliteration of Sinixt pre-history.

That said, what can be known from digging up the past around Brilliant?<sup>4</sup> The area was largely free from glaciers 7,000 – 8,000 BCE,<sup>5</sup> with evidence of occupation for at least 10,000 years.<sup>6</sup> As early as the 1780s the smallpox epidemic had “touched the Arrow Lakes area”, but its effects were “difficult to determine” from the archaeological and ethnological records.<sup>7</sup> In 1927, ethnographer James Teit wrote of Qepi’tles, often transcribed as kp’itl’els and now known as Brilliant, that “a great many people lived here formerly, most of them on the north bank of the Kootenai, within sight of the Columbia. Some old and modern burial grounds may be seen in the neighbourhood.”<sup>8</sup> As the Sinixt have distinct burial practices, “buried in a flexed . . . position with the feet drawn up to the hips and the chin on the chest”,<sup>9</sup> remains with these characteristics are attributed to them. The repeated occurrences of these distinct burials and other Aboriginal artefacts have served as a constant reminder of the presence of Sinixt peoples in this area long before the arrival of settlers. A fuller discussion of how non-aboriginals chose to respond to these reminders is another matter, for another day.

*The Castlegar Historical Review* of 1952 reported that “Indian settlements must have existed for centuries” at Brilliant. Included in this report are accounts of artefacts unearthed by the ploughs of Doukhobor farmers, in addition to the “many graves dug up and despoiled of their contents as late as 1939”.<sup>10</sup> Grave goods—items buried with the body: spears, chisels, arrowheads, grinders, adornments, among other items—were taken from the graves in addition to the human remains.<sup>11</sup> The report went on to state: “Many more graves still lie there undiscovered with this rich treasure trove from the past, and some attempt should be made to discover and collect them.”<sup>12</sup> That same year, 1952, children playing at Brilliant found human bones eroding from the river bank. The burial, identified as aboriginal in origin, contained an adult male, an adolescent female, and other grave goods.<sup>13</sup> It seemed the Sinixt were not about to be forgotten.

In 1977 an archaeologist conducted several test excavations around Brilliant and Selkirk College. A Brilliant site produced a “rare representation” of a group of stone artefacts not found elsewhere in the vicinity and, based on a similar collection from Kettle Falls, was dated at approximately 7000

<sup>4</sup> I was asked to focus on burials, specifically.

<sup>5</sup> Fulton cited in Sanger, David (1967) “Prehistory of the Pacific Northwest Plateau as Seen from the Interior of British Columbia” *American Antiquity* 32(2) April. pp.186-197, p.195. Sanger uses the older “BC” designation, now replaced with “BCE”. Both correspond to the same date; all “BC” dates from sources used in this paper have been changed to “BCE”.

<sup>6</sup> Based on radiocarbon dating. Earth Matters and Kootenay Coop Radio (n.d.) “Keeping the Lakes Way: The Past and Future of the Sinixt” *Sinixt Nation: The People of the Arrow Lakes* <http://sinixt.kics.bc.ca/radio.html>, retrieved June 15, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Sumpter, Ian D. (1982) *Analysis of Human Skeletal Remains Associated with Cultural Material from Site DjQj 1*, Vallican, BC. p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Teit, James A. (1927-28) “The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus” Franz Boas ed. *The 44th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology 1927-1928*, pp. 23-396. p. 209. See also Teit, James A. (1930) in Bouchard, Randy and Dorothy Kennedy (2001) *First Nations’ Ethnography and Ethnohistory in British Columbia’s Lower Kootenay/Columbia Hydropower Region* Castlegar, BC: Columbia Power Corporation. p.136.

<sup>9</sup> Skinner, Mark (1981) “Summary Analysis of Archaeological Skeletal Remains” FRC 81-26, p.2. See also Sumpter.

<sup>10</sup> Castlegar Historical Review (1952) “Arrowheads to Industry” *Castlegar Historical Review* 1(1): November 15. pp. 1-2. This was not unique to this site; Sumpter writes of similar grave disturbances at the Vallican site by “pothunting activity”.

<sup>11</sup> Sinixt believe/d that the spirits continue on this land; therefore burials contained necessary items. Marilyn James *Being on the Land: Histories at the Confluence*, June 19, 2007. Thus, removing grave goods is taking essential items from the spirits. Desecration of graves would therefore include removing artifacts in addition to the human remains.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> J.A. Charters (1952) “Indian Skeletons Found At Brilliant Village” *Castle News*, Castlegar, British Columbia, vol. n.a., No. 39, July 24, p.1.



BCE.<sup>14</sup> Again, there was a call for excavation and protection of this potentially important site,<sup>15</sup> which as late as 1986 was experiencing “continued activity by ATV and bulldozers”.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1970s Selkirk College anthropologist Mark Mealing was contacted when a grandfather and his son saw bones eroding out of the river bank at Brilliant, while fishing. Based on the evidence of a shell pendant – which Mark Mealing said “looked exactly like a peppermint lifesaver”— found with the human remains, this too was an aboriginal burial. He later repatriated those remains to the Sinixt.<sup>17</sup>

The most complete archaeological report from the Brilliant area is from a salvaged burial found along the banks of the Columbia River at Goloff Point in 1981. Located in a backyard, just over ten metres from an existing residence, was an intentional double burial eroding from the bank.<sup>18</sup> The RCMP, the local coroner, and a forensic archaeologist from Simon Fraser University were called in to investigate. The grave contained a woman of about twenty, looking up river, with a foetus of approximately seven months. Strings of shells were found on her chest, and residue on her bones suggests copper as well. “The absence of any trade goods suggests a pre-contact time period”,<sup>19</sup> and once again the unique placement of the burial indicate Sinixt origins. At the same site, “highly weathered” fragments of another burial were found on the river bank below.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these repeated and undeniable reminders of Sinixt in this area, when I came to Castlegar in 1999 and asked about the region’s Aboriginal peoples, I was told there were none. Impossible, I thought, looking at the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia rivers and the surrounding flood plains and terraces. Perhaps I was talking to the wrong people? Yet anthropologist Paula Pryce, in her book *Keeping the Lakes’ Way*, writes of being immersed in the same historical amnesia concerning aboriginal peoples in the area.<sup>21</sup> She later described the West Kootenays as “a region whose residents have no living memory and little historical consciousness of a First Nations presence there”.<sup>22</sup> Their presence has been here for at least 10,000 years based on archaeological evidence, longer if the validity of oral history is accepted. Over 120 archaeological sites had been recorded in the Arrow Lakes area in 1977,<sup>23</sup> not including any of the sites discussed here. The history of settlers’ treatment of these remains over the generations has been fraught with missed opportunities for recognition of Sinixt peoples and their past, and this continues into the present. It is up to us to honour the remains that have called to us from the past to remember them. Perhaps their legacy is with us today, as we gather to discuss the interruption of their cultural law to be returned to the earth and remain there. Having poured over their woefully incomplete stories in archaeological reports, I now ask you to take a moment with me to remember them and other Sinixt peoples buried on this land and to celebrate their descendants who walk this land with us today. Perhaps this will allow us to all take steps to truly being on this land—together.

<sup>14</sup> Choquette W. (1977) British Columbia Archaeological Site Survey Form DhQj 14. observed 15/8/77, recorded 20/8/77.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Sloan, personal notes on Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Mealing, personal communication.

<sup>18</sup> Double burials of aboriginal remains were not uncommon in the area, see Sumpter.

<sup>19</sup> Skinner, Mark (1981) “Summary Analysis of Archaeological Skeletal Remains” FRC 81-26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Pryce, Paula (1999) *‘Keeping the Lakes’ Way: Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. pp.3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Pryce, Paula (2001) Letter to the editors, *BC Studies*, personal correspondence.

<sup>23</sup> Turnbull.



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## The Christian Family

Prepared by: Duff Sutherland, History  
June 5, 2007 – revised August 2007



The beautiful land at the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia rivers was long used by First Nations people, particularly the Sinixt or Lakes First Nation. Probably the most important piece of land to First Nations people at the confluence was on the north side of the Kootenay river. This land became known to the Euro-Canadian settlers as Brilliant; the Sinixt called it kp'itl'els. In the 19th century, we have references to continuous human activity at the confluence: first peoples had a large and elaborate weir to catch salmon, they farmed the land, they pastured horses, they maintained graveyards, and they used kp'itl'els as their home base from which to engage in wide ranging hunting and gathering activities throughout the region.<sup>1</sup> Over time, for a number of reasons, the Sinixt nation became more centred south of the border in the United States. However, one Sinixt extended family, the Christian family, remained at kp'itl'els well into the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> My purpose today is talk a little about the history and experiences of the Christian family on their land at the confluence.

In 1914, Alexander Christian stated to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia about his land at the confluence that, “. . . I was born there, and have made the place my headquarters during my entire life. Also my ancestors have belonged to there as far back as I can trace. Both my parents were born there and three of my grandparents.”<sup>3</sup> I have not been able to discover the names of Alexander Christian's grandparents. His mother's name was Antoinette and his father's name was Christian. Antoinette and Christian had four children: Baptiste, who became the leader of the family at kp'itl'els, St. Peter, Alexander, and Marianne. In 1909, the anthropologist James Teit spent four days with the Christian family at kp'itl'els. Antoinette was still alive. Christian had died about 1897 and was buried at kp'itl'els. Baptiste was there with his wife, Sophie, and their two children; Alexander was there with his wife, Teresa—the younger sister of James Bernard who became an important Sinixt chief—and their, at that time, two children; and, Marianne was there with her husband, Frank Abbott. Altogether it was a family grouping of 11 people. From his discussions and observations, Teit noted that kp'itl'els was a “an important old headquarters” of the people. He noted some very old pithouse locations and old and modern burial grounds. At that time, the Christians had two houses made of lumber and two or three sheds. They also had a small fenced garden.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, *First Nations' Ethnography and Ethnohistory in British Columbia's Lower Kootenay/Columbia Hydropower Region* (Castlegar: Columbia Power Corporation, 2000), 108-22.

<sup>2</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 57-61; Paula Pryce, *'Keeping the Lakes' Way: Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 36-69. Pryce has a different interpretation of these events than Bouchard and Kennedy.

<sup>3</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 115-119; Lawney Reyes, *White Grizzly Bear's Legacy: Learning To Be Indian* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), ch.3.



The members of the Christian family were clearly trying to adapt as best they could to the changes and losses brought by European settlement. Like many of the European settlers of the early 20th century in this area, the Christians had cleared land and laid out fruit trees and kept horses at kp'itl'els. Accounts from the time also note that the Christians made income through the sale of meat, berries, fish, and birds to local settlers and merchants. Owen Wheeler, who ran a store at Westley in the early 1900s, recalled a friendly Lakes family, which was probably the Christians, who regularly called at his store to sell bear meat, birds and fish.<sup>5</sup> In 1912, Teit returned to the confluence and noted that the people were earning a living by selling goods to European settlers, by trapping, and also by working for wages in the woods and in railway construction.<sup>6</sup> The Christians were also following their traditional round of fishing, hunting and gathering although this was becoming more difficult as European settlers began to take control of the land and resources of the region. There are many references to Alexander Christian hunting in the region: he was known to have cabins and smokehouses at locations such as Waterloo Eddy, Blueberry creek, Syringa creek, the north end of Castlegar near where the Robson bridge is today, and on the Columbia across from Birchbank.<sup>7</sup> Among the Sinixt, Alexander Christian was known and respected as White Grizzly Bear (Pic Ah Kelowna) due to his skill as a bear hunter and affinity with the rare white grizzly bear.<sup>8</sup> Frank Webster, a Robson pioneer who knew Alexander Christian well, remembered him hunting Canada geese on a sandbar just above where the Keenleyside dam is today, and fishing with a hand line from a sturgeon-nosed canoe. And, even when Christian was an old man with only one eye in the 1920s, Webster remembered him being able to hunt and kill two deer with ease in the woods near Syringa creek.<sup>9</sup> In all of these accounts, Alexander Christian is described as friendly and generous with whatever he caught or killed.

Although many Sinixt, including the Christian family, established lasting relations with traders, missionaries, government officials and settlers, the European presence had a devastating impact on the people. From the 18th century on, the Europeans brought new diseases, increased violence, and a strong desire for native land into the region.<sup>10</sup> Anthropologist Mark Mealing speculates that the large burial grounds at Brilliant and Vallican had their origins in early European-introduced epidemics.<sup>11</sup> The 1894 killing of the Sinixt man, "Cultus" Jim, by miner Sam Hill in a conflict over land at Galena Bay reflects the negative impact of the developing resource frontier on the Sinixt.<sup>12</sup> Into the 20th century, the Christian family at the confluence suffered from poverty and disease as European settlement expanded. In Alexander Christian's family, his wife, Teresa, died young of pneumonia. At the same time, only one of Alexander's and Teresa's four children, Mary, survived into adulthood.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Alexander Christian's sister, Marianne, also died tragically. In March 1911, Alexander found Marianne dead in a snow bank near the Christian family home in kp'itl'els. Alexander suspected that his sister had been murdered but the police and coroner concluded that she had died from exposure after falling down the bank while suffering from a high fever. The newspapers did not report the Christian family response to this finding but Sinixt today reject the

<sup>5</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 115-119.

<sup>6</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Reyes, 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 107-8.

<sup>10</sup> Pryce, 40-1. See also, Cole Harris, "Voices of Smallpox around the Strait of Georgia", in his *Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonization and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 3-30.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Mealing, Personal Communication, Selkirk College, April, 2007. Dr. Mealing taught Anthropology for many years at Selkirk College.

<sup>12</sup> Eileen Delehanty Pearkes, *The Geography of Memory: Recovering Stories of a Landscape's First People* (Nelson: Kutenai House, 2002), 26-31.

<sup>13</sup> Reyes, 36.



conclusions of the police and coroner.<sup>14</sup> Lawney Reyes, Alexander Christian's grandson, reports that Marianne Christian, Teresa Bernard Christian, and her three children who died young, Louis, George, and Julia, were all buried in the Christian family burial plot at kp'itl'els.<sup>15</sup> Along with all the other Sinixt graves at the confluence, the Christian family plot is unmarked, neglected, and practically unknown in Castlegar today.

As Euro-Canadian settlement expanded in this area, a fundamental problem for the Christian family was to obtain legal protection for their home at kp'itl'els. Going back to 1861, W.G. Cox, the Magistrate and Gold Commissioner for the region, set aside the land at the north point of the mouth of the Kootenay River as an Indian Reserve. He posted notices on the ground declaring it was Indian land but, unfortunately, never legally registered the site with the provincial government.<sup>16</sup> As a result, in the early 1880s, John Carmichael Haynes was able to purchase District Lot 9, Group 1, of the Kootenay Land District which included kp'itl'els. Haynes intended to create the town of "Haynesville" on the site but died in 1888 before any development took place.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, the Christian family continued to live at kp'itl'els and began a long struggle to have the land officially designated as an Indian Reserve.<sup>18</sup> In 1902, a reserve was finally established at Oatscott on the Arrow Lakes across from the town of Burton. The local Indian Agent, R.L.T. Galbraith knew Baptiste Christian and expected him to move the family to the reserve at Oatscott. Baptiste Christian refused to go to Oatscott where he had no strong connections and, in the long run, moved with his wife and children to Marcus, Washington, where his wife was from and his family could obtain some land.<sup>19</sup> Alexander Christian stayed on with the rest of his family and continued the struggle to gain legal recognition for his home at kp'itl'els. Galbraith told the 1914 Royal Commission on Indian Affairs that he tried to get the Haynes estate to sell 10 acres for an Indian Reserve. However, before he was able to complete the deal, he found that the provincial government had allowed the Haynes estate to sell the land to the leader of the Doukhobors, Peter Verigin, in 1912.<sup>20</sup> Lawney Reyes, noted that the Christian family were shocked when they learned this had happened. As Reyes puts it, "[t]he Christian family could not understand how the land they had occupied for generations could be bought from under them without their knowledge or consent."<sup>21</sup>

This leads us to the difficult relationship between the Christian family and the Doukhobors. In 1912, Alexander Christian contacted James Teit to seek his help because J.W. Sherbinin, the agent for the Doukhobors, had told the Christian family that they had three weeks to move off the land.<sup>22</sup> Teit wrote to Indian Affairs in Ottawa on behalf of the Christians stating that "this sacred ground . . . should be made secure" [for the Christian family]. In response, Indian Affairs instructed Galbraith to

<sup>14</sup> Nelson Daily News, 3 & 4 March, 1911; The Trail News, 4 March, 1911. Alexander Christian's suspicions came from his belief that there were footprints of a man wearing rubber boots along with Marianne's footprints at the top of the bank where he found her partially-dressed body in the snow. According to Christian, the man's footprints came as far as the top of the bank and then headed back towards Castlegar. Provincial police officer, J.D. Wrightman, who investigated Marianne's death, followed her tracks from Castlegar and reported that he found no sign of tracks other than those of Alexander and Marianne. Alexander Christian was also not subsequently able to find the tracks that he had seen earlier. John T. Peck, the chief provincial constable, Constable Wrightman and the coroner, Dr. Gilbert Hartin, agreed that Marianne likely fell backwards down the bank as a result of her fevered condition. The government officials concluded that she had also taken off some of her clothes as a result of the fever. They noted that her clothes were not torn and Dr. Harkin found no "mark or blood [on her body] which would lead to a theory that death was a result of foul play." See Marilyn James's article in this publication for a current Sinixt view of the death of Marianne Christian.

<sup>15</sup> Reyes, 36. Reyes reports that Antoinette and Christian along with one of their sons, St. Peter Christian, were also buried in the Christian family plot at Brilliant.

<sup>16</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 122-3.

<sup>17</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 122-3.

<sup>18</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 124, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 127.

<sup>20</sup> Reyes, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 127.



make sure that the Christian family were not disturbed on their land and to approach the Doukhobors to purchase land from them for a small Indian reserve.<sup>22</sup> In September 1912, Sherbinin responded that the Doukhobors did not want to sell any land but that the Christian family could stay and have a few acres "as long as they behave themselves and for our side we will be good neighbours to them."<sup>23</sup> Despite this assurance, the Christians came to feel that the Doukhobors were harassing them so that they would leave. Alexander Christian informed Teit that the Doukhobors told him to leave, took his possessions when he was away, ploughed up his cleared land and the land over grave sites.<sup>24</sup> Christian's 1914 statement to the Royal Commission also expresses his anger at what he sees as harassment by the Doukhobors and their ploughing up of burial grounds. He noted that there were several graveyards near the family houses which had wooden sticks and crosses, and stones to mark the graves. He alleged that some of these graveyards had been ploughed over by the Doukhobors. He stated that,

A woman who is a native of the mouth of the Kootenay River came up from Eastern Washington two years ago [and] erected new sticks and laid new stones around one of the graveyards and some of the graves. These and the other graves are now plowed over and no trace of the sticks and stones remain. Billy Hughes, an Englishman from Trail, BC, who comes up the Kootenay river to fish and whom I have known for eighteen years was very sorry when he saw the graves of my people plowed over. He said this is a bad business. There is a law against the despoiling of graves—the Doukhobors ought to be prosecuted.<sup>25</sup>

Galbraith himself noted that by 1914 the Doukhobors had fenced in the Christians on about two acres of land. It appears that the fencing around the Christian plot was so tight that the family could only access their home from the water.<sup>26</sup> Lawney Reyes reports that the fencing took place in August 1913 when the family was away picking huckleberries on Red Mountain.<sup>27</sup> In his 1914 statement, Alexander Christian expressed his disappointment at all that had happened to his family:

[the Doukhobours] offered to pay me small sums for our houses and improvements but I refused to sell. Our Indian Agent...advised me to settle with the Doukhobors and leave the place. He said I should go to Burton City and settle there...I refused...I want to stay in the home that I have always been and want...a piece of land made secure for me there.<sup>28</sup>

In 1915, the Royal Commission decided that it had no power over the land that had been legally sold to the Doukhobors. The Commission did believe that the Christian family had been wronged and sent information to the federal government for action. Federal officials considered legal action based on a prior native claim to the land to force the Doukhobors to sell some land for the Christian family. However, the Indian Agency Inspector, A. Megraw, who investigated the issue was not sympathetic to the Christian family. Megraw thought that the Christians were American interlopers looking for money and told Alexander Christian to go live at Oatscott. At the same time, Megraw disputed Christian's allegations that the Doukhobors had despoiled burial grounds and recommended that Indian Affairs take no further action to obtain land for an Indian Reserve at the

<sup>22</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 128-9.

<sup>23</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 130-1.

<sup>25</sup> Canada. National Archives of Canada. "Statement of Alexander Christie to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia, 25 June, 1914. RG10, vol. 4047. file 356, 200-1. See also Pryce, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 130-1.

<sup>27</sup> Reyes, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 131.



mouth of the Kootenay river. Indian Affairs agreed that the Christian family should continue to use the land with the permission of the Doukhobors and that the Christians should be good neighbours to them.<sup>29</sup>

Lawney Reyes notes that there was little the Christian family could do about their land after this decision by Indian Affairs. It appears that Alexander Christian and his family stayed on at kp'itl'els until 1919.<sup>30</sup> During this period Christian's wife, Theresa, died of pneumonia, and the family buried her with her children in the graveyard at the confluence. Alexander brought up Mary, his surviving daughter, largely away from kp'itl'els after 1919. It appears that Alexander and Mary moved back and forth from Washington State and Christian's hunting cabins in this area. Lawney Reyes reports that his mother Mary remembered these close years with her father fondly although he notes that his grandfather had a lonely life. In this period, he was commonly known in the area as "Indian Alex" or "Alex the Indian."<sup>31</sup> According to Reyes, Alexander Christian died of tuberculosis in 1924 and was buried at the St. Mary's mission near Omak Lake on the Colville reservation in Washington State.<sup>32</sup> Lawney Reyes's remarkable and moving memoir, *White Grizzly Bear's Legacy*, examines the lives of the descendents of Alexander Christian's family after their exile from kp'itl'els and is well worth reading.

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<sup>29</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 131-36.

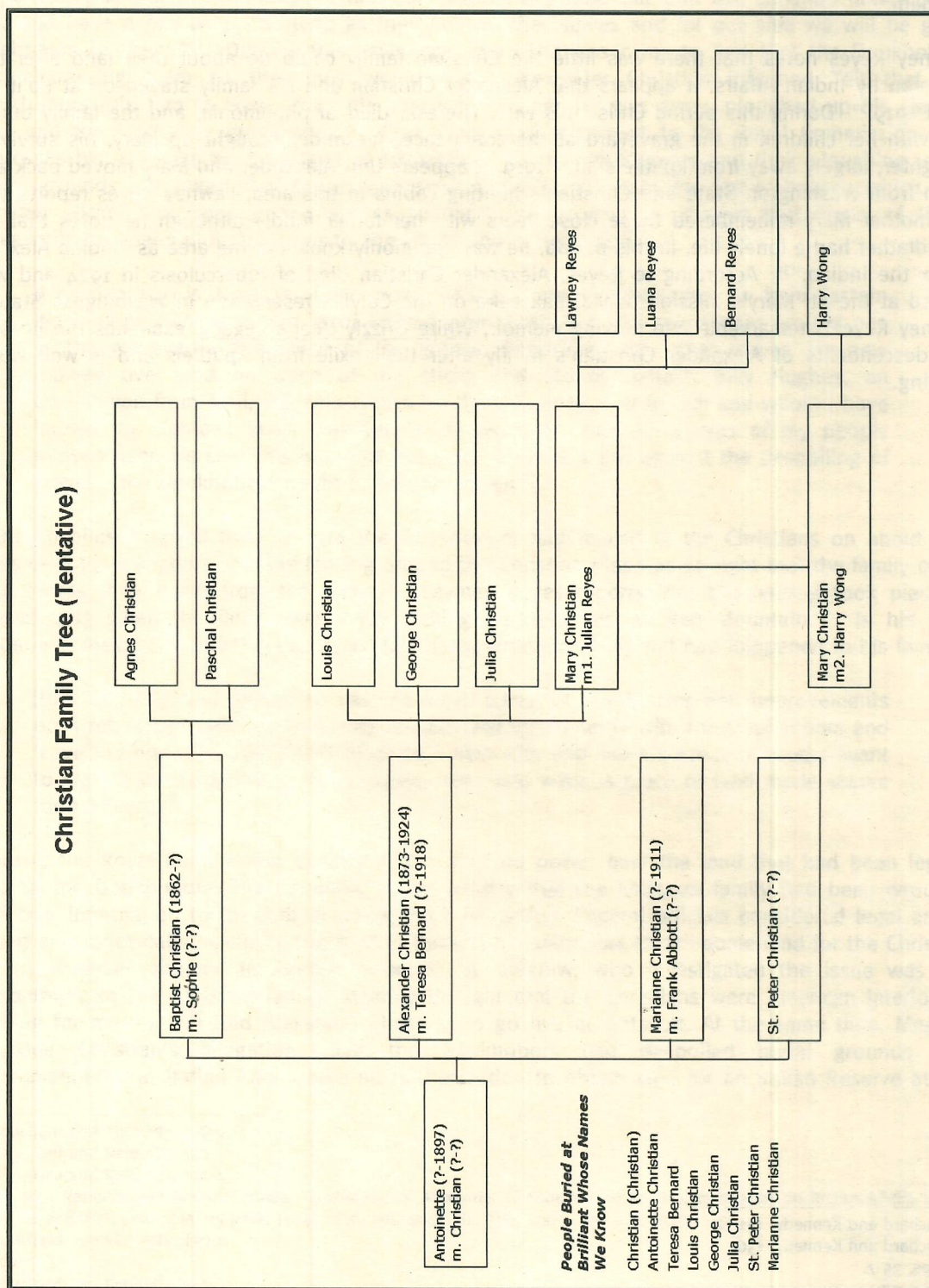
<sup>30</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, 136.

<sup>31</sup> Reyes, 35-7.

<sup>32</sup> Reyes, 37.



## Appendix A





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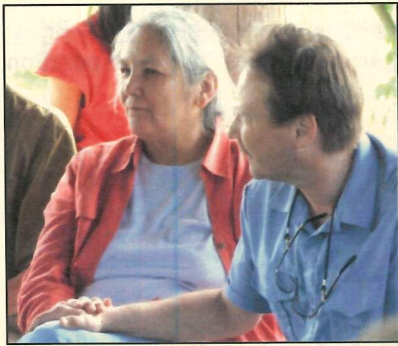
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## Symposium Photo Gallery



Marilyn James &amp; John J. Verigin



Myler Wilkinson &amp; Bill Trubetskoff

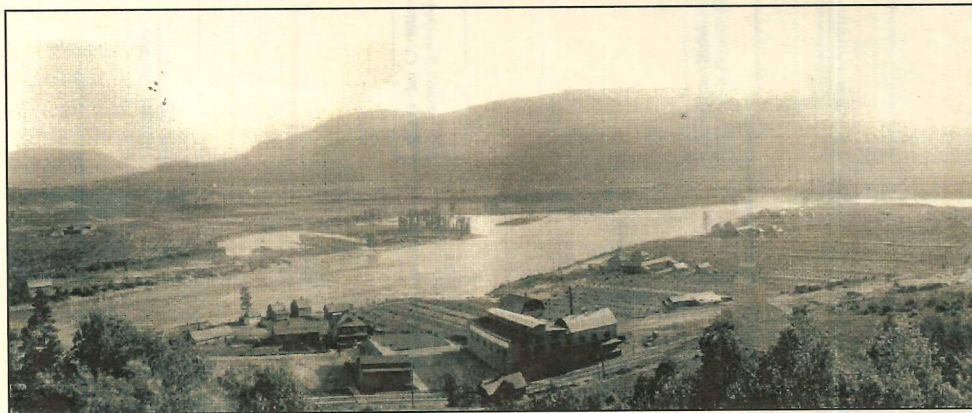


Left – Alexander Christian, 1914



Above – Remnants of Doukhobor home in Brilliant

Settlements in Brilliant, 1924

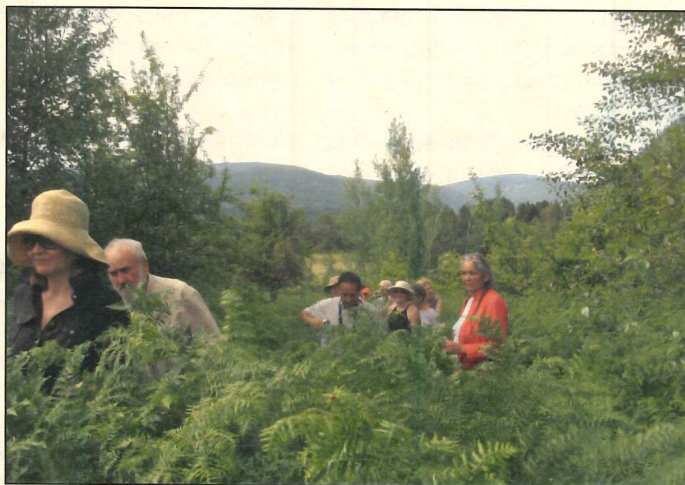




## Symposium Photo Gallery



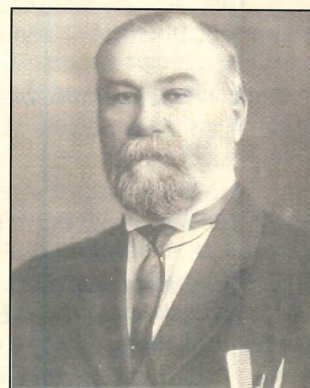
Christian House & Trubetskoff Village – Brilliant / kp'itl'els



Original Site of Christian Home – Brilliant / kp'itl'els



Symposium Participants – Brilliant / kp'itl'els



Peter Lordly Verigin

Lola Campbell, Sinixt mother, and her baby, Agnice, at Symposium



Symposium Participants





## The Doukhobors: Exile and Consolation

Prepared by: Dr. Myler Wilkinson, Humanities  
Mir Centre for Peace  
June 2007



*I have been asked to speak about the Doukhobors and their particular historical presence in the Kootenays at the ancient site of the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers. Into deep time this site has been, and remains today, one of the most beautiful and geographically significant points of earth and water in the entire Kootenay region.*

An ancient Doukhobor psalm defines a people's belief in asking the following questions:<sup>1</sup>

1. *What manner of person art thou?*  
I am a person of God.
51. *Do you have a temple of God in your midst?*  
We have. Our human body is a temple of God, and our soul is a reflection of God.
52. *Do you have a church in your midst?*  
We have. Our church is built not in mountainous regions nor in valleys below, not in settlements of villages or cities so great; it is not confined within the walls of buildings, be they of log or of stone: but our church is built within the souls and the hearts of people.
12. *Why are you a people of a wandering, pilgrim nature?*  
We class ourselves as a people of a wandering, pilgrim nature because we are always moving from a symbolic land . . . of oppression.—from a state of confusion.—towards attainment of the promised land, a land of enlightenment and truth, or that is, a state of . . . peaceful living.

These words, collected orally as the psalm "What Manner of Person Art Thou?", were spoken by Ilarion Pobirokhin—an early leader of the Doukhobors—in the last quarter of the 18th century. His words in another context, and from another psalm, form the motto of Selkirk College—you can see the words written in stone tiles in the front lobby of the main building.<sup>2</sup> These idea(l)s reveal the Doukhobors, their history and their culture, in a most noble way. They are a people—utopian,

<sup>1</sup> Ilarion Pobirokhin early Doukhobor leader credited with seminal psalms, spiritual philosophy and this catechism which form the foundations of Doukhobor belief to this day. See Popoff, *Historical Exposition On Doukhobor Beliefs*, pp. 21–25.

<sup>2</sup> "Best of All Inquire" from the Psalm: "Be Devout". See Popoff, pp. 20–21.



communal, pacifist—who have taken seriously the idea that one might create a “kingdom of God on earth”—a human community of equality, fairness, justice, love, and spiritual fulfilment.<sup>3</sup> These high ideals have not always been lived up to—though even people as influential as Leo Tolstoy were deeply influenced by their experience of the Doukhobors. Tolstoy saw in them a living example of the highest utopian ideals he himself had dreamt of for humanity—and himself had fallen short of.

As you look out from the grounds of the Mir Centre toward the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers, you may understand that the reasons we are sitting here today relate to deep human culture on the landscape—the First Nations people who followed these water ways for millennia drawn by the salmon and game and seasonal plants, and the Doukhobors who left behind from their great communal spiritual undertaking the red brick communal homes and the orchards and fields. Selkirk College has become a latter day caretaker of these lands and these cultural histories; the Mir Centre for Peace—housed in one of those traditional homes—is the physical space where we may begin to imagine the meaning of this history, these visions of a more fully realized human community.

In this brief talk I want to travel with you through time and space following the Doukhobors through their history and their search for utopian community. I want to leave you with just a few images, and the first is the linked pair of words: exile and consolation. The Doukhobors, from their beginnings in 17th century Russia, have been a people of exile and homelessness—searching on two continents for a physical manifestation of the spiritual home dreamt of in all their early psalms.

The Doukhobor psalm asks: “What Manner of Person art Thou?” and the response comes: we are a people of a wandering, pilgrim nature because we are always moving from a symbolic land of oppression—from a state of confusion—towards attainment of the promised land, a land of enlightenment and truth.

What manner of people were the Doukhobors? They were a people who were willing to give up their lands, possessions, human connections, and financial wealth at least five different times in order to follow their own vision of a collective, spiritual future. The psalm asks: What manner of person art thou? The Doukhobors were not weak, were not timid, not afraid, whatever else one might say. They were “spirit wrestlers” as Archbishop Ambrosius called them in 1785—*Doukho-bortsi*—unafraid to take the road less travelled.

What follows is a brief historical overview of a people of exile and homelessness:

#### *1802-1841—Exile to Molochnaya Voda*

Milky Waters just north of the Sea of Azov. Tsar Alexander I, relatively sympathetic to the diffuse groups of new believers, *Bozhie Liudii* (People of God), who were forming throughout Russian lands and suffering persecution, allows early Doukhobors to leave their original Russian lands and re-settle communally here in the fertile lands near the Sea of Azov. For some decades, the Doukhobors are remarkably successful in their first exile; and resentment at their achievements builds. The death of Alexander I in 1825 leads to the accession of Nicholas I who is far less sympathetic to sectarian groups such as the Doukhobors. By the late 1830's, Doukhobors are being exiled from their rich lands.

<sup>3</sup> See Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, pp. 17–34. Also Popoff, *Historical Exposition on Doukhobor Beliefs*.



#### *1841–1898/99 Exile to Caucasus*

In the Wet Mountains and other regions such as Kars which now are on the borders of Georgia and Armenia, the Doukhobors re-settle in lands of harsh extremes of summer heat and winter snows. Nevertheless, they are successful as a community again, though dissension grows between the Large Party of Doukhobors—those who are inclined to hold more radical utopian beliefs—and the Small Party, which shows a willingness to reach accommodations with the Tsarist government. This is the time of Peter Lordly Verigin who is groomed for leadership by the gifted female leader Lukeria Kalmykova. Verigin is exiled to Siberia in 1887 for his radical beliefs, and begins to read Tolstoy's spiritual philosophy—especially "The Kingdom of God is Within You" (1893)—which has an immense influence on future Doukhobor spiritual practice concerning violence, the bearing of arms, vegetarianism, pacifism, and communal social structures. Out of Peter Lordly's vision of a reformed Doukhobor community, comes the directive to destroy all guns and weapons of aggression. Known as the Burning of Arms, on the night of June 28/29, 1895, in three different Doukhobor villages, people bring together all their weapons, place them in large piles and set fire to these instruments of aggression as a symbolic rejection of all forms of violence and militarism. Extreme government repression follows, and this moment still lives in Doukhobor memory as the proudest expression of their lived philosophy of non-violence — a beacon to non-violence movements in the modern world.

#### *1898/99—Exile and Mass Emigration to Canadian Prairies*

With the help of Lev Tolstoy who gives all royalties from his last novel *Resurrection* and from the Society of Friends, or Quakers, approximately 7,500 Doukhobors come as communal, utopian, homesteaders to the Canadian prairies in what would later become Saskatchewan. The Canadian Prairies at this time are still largely virgin soil; there is an evident need for strong backs, and people suited to the harsh conditions of the prairie landscape. Once again, the land is tilled, and Doukhobor communities begin to thrive, but very quickly there is disagreement and misunderstanding about what the Doukhobors have been promised in Canada. From their side, the Doukhobors believe they have won the right to live and work communally, the right to give allegiance first and only to their spiritual beliefs and to God. From the government side, growing pressure is brought to bear on the people to leave off communal holding of land, and for the Doukhobors to swear allegiance to the King as citizens of Canada. From 1905-07 increasing unrest, confusion, and radicalism grows. Mass marches begin and the first instances of public nudity occur amongst the Doukhobors. Beginning in 1908 several thousand Doukhobors, believing there is no future for them in Saskatchewan, begin moving to land purchased for them in the name of Peter Lordly Verigin in the Kootenay region of British Columbia.<sup>4</sup>

This exodus marks the fourth mass emigration or exile of the Doukhobors within 100 years.

#### *1908—Early April, Exile to Kootenay Region of British Columbia*

With snow still on the ground, Peter Lordly Verigin, and his assistants, Simeon Ribin and Nikola Zibarov, come to a place called Waterloo Siding near present-day Kinnaird in Castlegar. They are accompanied by one Claude Laing Fisher, a speculator and land developer from Nelson. The Doukhobors take test samples of the soil and are not impressed with the sandy thin ground, but Laing (perhaps apocryphally) is said to have told Verigin that he has other buyers waiting in Nelson if the Doukhobors cannot decide at the low price he is offering. Against the advice of his people, Verigin decides to purchase a first 2800 acres across the river from Waterloo at what now is

<sup>4</sup> As the symposium "Being on the Land" has as its focus the history of relations between Doukhobors and First Nation people, it is appropriate to include recently identified material concerning early Doukhobor relations with Cree people in Saskatchewan. See Appendix A at the conclusion of this article for little known information concerning Doukhobor contact with Plains Indians in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Appendix is extracted from the MA thesis — *The Mir Centre for Peace: A Search for Values in An Age of Transition* — of Linda Wilkinson completed at the European University for Peace in Schlaining, Austria in December 2006.



Ooteshenie—and a further 2700 acres in West Grand Forks, at Fructova. In an irony of history, the Doukhobor contingent never does continue on to view lands in Oregon and California as had earlier been planned.

Later that spring the first groups of Doukhobors begin arriving to live in the Kootenays, and very quickly the community purchases vast tracts of land (they still retained approximately 50,000 acres on the prairies out of an original homestead of 400,000 acres). In B.C. by 1910 the community holds 10,000 acres; by 1912—14,400 acres (approximately 5,000 Doukhobors had migrated from the prairie communities); by 1924 (at the time of Verigin's death in a train explosion)—21,648 acres.

Soon after making his first community purchases in the Kootenays, Verigin writes to his friend Leo Tolstoy:

I hasten to inform you that this spring the Doukhobor Community purchased some 2,700 acres of land in B.C. for growing fruit trees. The land . . . is at the confluence of two rivers—the Kootenay and the Columbia. The place is characterised by fresh air, clean fresh water and a rather mild climate, where we can grow apples, plums, and a delicious and abundant variety of sweet cherries—right on the banks of the Columbia River, which is one of the most beautiful rivers I have ever seen. The colour of the water, for example, is equal to that of the river in Geneva. (13 June 1908)<sup>5</sup>

And with these words the Doukhobors come very close to us, to where we are living now—to *Dolina Ooteshenie*—the Valley of Consolation, a land which finally was going to provide a lasting home for these spiritual wanderers, a hoped for place of safety and consolation for past losses and defeats. Exile and Consolation—from Brilliant on the far side of the Kootenay River, so named because Peter Verigin loved the beauty of the sparkling river and watched it from his home on the hillside near where his tomb is today, to Glade, and Raspberry, Thrums and Blagodatnie, Shoreacres and Ostrov—the latter named "Island" because of the flooding rivers which periodically separated it from the other Doukhobor villages.<sup>6</sup>

This time, the Doukhobors who had come to the mountain valleys of the Kootenays were going to do things differently. They did not want to lose their lands for a 5th time. The many thousands of acres of land which stretched from Grand Forks to near Nelson and up the Slocan Valley were all purchased legally in the name of one person—Peter Verigin—and his people set to work with a will to do what they knew best—turn the soil, irrigate the land, plant grains and lovely orchards, and harvest the berries which made their Jam Factory known throughout North America.

Very soon, the small community which was already settled at the confluence of the rivers began to see the now familiar Doukhobor villages rising up and dotting the landscape—the red brick communal homes which have become symbols of the Kootenays, physical markers of a utopian dream. And the Doukhobor orchards and fields began to ripen and mature.

While this social transformation was occurring, there were a handful of people at the confluence of the rivers who went on living much as they had for hundreds, if not thousands, of years—I am speaking of the Christian family, Sinixt First Nations, and their most well known representative—Alex Christian. One can only wonder what Alex Christian and his family would have thought when the Doukhobor community began arriving in the valley. The Doukhobors had Russian names for the

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Donskov (ed). *Leo Tolstoy – Peter Verigin Correspondence*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Ostrov Village now has been transformed into the grounds and buildings of Selkirk College. The last remaining communal home of the village has become the Mir Centre for Peace—one hopes a fitting evolution in time.



landscape—*Ooteshenie, Brilliant, Blagodatnie*—the aboriginal peoples had their own older name for the point of land—*Kp'itl'els* (with a possible meaning of “come to the end of the mountain ranges”). The story of what happened when these utopian exiles and First Nations peoples met is full of meaning for history and the future.



I want to turn now to one particular moment in the history of the Doukhobors in Canada—1909-1912—which involves the point of land just across the river known as the Lower Brilliant Terrace or Brilliant Flats. Some of you may know it—this lovely isthmus of land bounded by two great rivers—where history whispers audibly, whether of First Nations, Doukhobors, explorers or early settlers. The land—(District Lot 9, Group 1, Kootenay Land District, originally some 198 acres) now largely unoccupied except for weekend walkers, fisher people, and boaters—is administered by the Regional District of Central Kootenay Area I. At the turn of the 20th century, although the land was very fertile it was subject to severe flooding; near the confluence of the two rivers—at the site called *kp'itl'els*—there were just a few people, almost all belonging to the Christian family—Sinixt whose people had arguably been living on these lands for several millennia. Alex Christian is still remembered in historical accounts as a remarkable hunter, a woodsman, “Indian Alex” as he was known by white settlers in the area. Fewer people know that his aboriginal name was “White Grizzly”, that he was a man of noble character, whose grandchildren have gone on to do remarkable things in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Alex Christian's story, his attempts to have his people and their ancestors recognized at the confluence of the rivers, remains a cautionary tale for all people who attempt to understand the realities of traditional peoples when they come into contact and conflict with other cultures. One might say that the Christian story, along with that of the Doukhobors, carries within it every element—political, cultural, even spiritual—which has been played out in the settlement of North America by European immigrants often unaware of, or uncaring about, the people they were displacing. As such there is a great deal to be learned concerning what a real community might consist of by reading this narrative with care, honesty, and sympathy.

Somehow, without the Christian family knowing it, by 1884 the *kp'itl'els* lands were transferred as a Crown Grant to one J.C. Haynes.<sup>8</sup> At the same time as Christian worked with people such as the anthropologist James Teit (and earlier with Indian Agent Robert Galbraith, Reverend John McDougall, and Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, J.D. Maclean) to have a small reserve set aside for his people, the Doukhobors were purchasing lands throughout the Kootenays, creating orchards and grain fields, and building communal villages of the type many people are familiar with up to today.

By spring 1912, the Doukhobors had acquired the lands at Brilliant where the Christian family and

<sup>7</sup> Lawney Reyes, Alex Christian's grandson, had a successful career as a designer and corporate art director for Seafirst Corporation, and more lately has gained a reputation as a gifted artist and writer. His book, *White Grizzly Bear's Legacy: Learning to be Indian*, is a moving account of the Christian family history both in Canada and the United States. Lawney Reyes' brother, Bernie Reyes, was a nationally prominent First Nations activist in the Seattle area before his death in 2000. See Lawney Reyes, *Bernie Whitebear: An Urban Indian's Quest for Justice*.

<sup>8</sup> It is still unclear how J.C. Haynes managed to have the land transferred to his ownership through a Crown Grant in spring, 1884, especially when a number of years earlier—October, 1861—there were initial steps taken by the Gold Commissioner, Archibald Cox, to have the lands set aside as a Reserve. Cox is reported in Bouchard and Kennedy as having “posted notices” on “the North point at the mouth of the Kootenais— . . . and also along the banks of the Columbia River in the immediate neighbourhood of same”, warning people not to trespass or camp there, “it being an Indian Reserve until instructions come to the contrary from the Government” (p. 123).



their forebears had lived for centuries.<sup>9</sup> Lawney Reyes, a grandson of Alex Christian, in thinking about the sale and purchase of kp'itl'els land in Brilliant asked this author: "How can you purchase land which was never properly owned by the person who sold it?"

The written record is scant at this point. The Doukhobor community was asked in 1912 if it would sell back to Indian Affairs a small amount of land at the point to be set aside as a reserve for the First Nations people still living there. The response from Alex Sherbinin on behalf of the Doukhobor community was as follows:

I have took this matter with Mr. Verigin and Society, and they do not wish to sell 5-10 acres to the Government for Indians. But they willing so as Indians can stay on the same spot, where they been staying for years, we would not mind if they will have garden two or three acres, as they wish longer as they will be have [behave] him self, and from our side we will be good neighbours to them . . .<sup>10</sup>

And soon the Doukhobor community was ploughing land for grain fields, fencing in orchards, until the Christian family was left with a small enclosed space on what had been open land beyond recorded time.<sup>11</sup> I will let others in our panel discuss some of the details of that difficult, even tragic time; the result was that members of the Christian family, in records left behind by Alex Christian, felt themselves to be disregarded and pushed off their traditional lands.

Through all the discussion, and all the efforts of two generations of bureaucrats, 1915 may have marked the closest moment the lands ever came to being officially designated a reserve. A sign apparently was erected on the few acres where the Christian Family had their homes and family cemetery. It read: "Temporary: occupied by consent of the Doukhobors".<sup>12</sup>

Reflecting on his life, and the lives of his people, Alexander Christian wrote in a Statement to the 1914 Royal Commission on Indian Affairs:

I am one of the few survivors of the band of the Lake tribe living at the mouth of the Kootenay River. The lower Kootenay River has been occupied by my people since time immemorial. . . I wish to state that I was born there and have made that place my head quarters during my entire life. Both of my parents were born there and three of my grandparents . . . I want to stay in the home where I have always been and want that I have a piece of land made secure for me there.<sup>13</sup>

Christian was not to gain his wish; he and his daughter became wanderers, exiled from their birthplace. Together they moved to various homes along the Columbia River on either side of the international border.

We are left with an image of Alex Christian and his daughter Mary travelling the river system, returning periodically to kp'itl'els into the 1920s to hunt and fish, and then finally returning no

<sup>9</sup> The Doukhobors purchased lands legally which had perhaps been unethically gained by the first purchasers. This historical complexity raises questions about the potential transmission of ethical responsibilities through time and across cultures.

<sup>10</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Records indicate that eventually perhaps 2-3 acres of land bounded on three sides by fences was left to the Christian family. See Bouchard and Kennedy pp. 131-32.

<sup>12</sup> See Sutherland, *Castlegar A Confluence*, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Bouchard and Kennedy, pp. 130-31.



more.<sup>14</sup> All that was left was a simple wooden angle-roofed house which had been his last home at kp'itl'els.

A deep irony of history follows. The Doukhobors, these people of exile who worked so hard to bring fertility to the land—who built community buildings, bridges, saw mills, jam and preserve factories transforming the face of the Kootenays forever, and who displaced the Christian family at kp'itl'els/Brilliant—were to lose all their communal lands for a fifth and final time between 1937-39. The communal spiritual dream was broken though a combination of debt, mismanagement, and the manipulations of Government and large financial institutions. On property worth over 6 million dollars—with an outstanding debt of less than \$300,000—the Doukhobors found themselves dispossessed and exiled one final time, their communal dreams shattered, never to return.

As for kp'itl'els, or the Brilliant flats—it now exists as an unofficial park.<sup>15</sup> The communal homes of the Doukhobors—Trubetskoff village which once stood hard by Alex Christian's last home at kp'itl'els, Plotnikoff village, and Gorkoff village—have either disappeared entirely beneath the whispering grasses, or exist only in the remnants of stacked rock foundations surrounded by the lilac bushes the community Doukhobors loved so much.

Now we face toward the future. And one may ask: out of the experience of exile and homelessness—whether Doukhobor, First Nations, or other—what kind of consolation we may find collectively in our time, and what kind of future justice may we build together? The answers to these questions remain unclear, but one trusts they will reveal themselves in time, perhaps through the support of institutions such as the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College and certainly from the collective will to peace and social justice which still runs deeply within the Doukhobor community and within the First Nations people themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Lawney Reyes reports that his grandfather Alex Christian died near Omak, Washington, in 1924 of complications related to tuberculosis. He was buried at St. Mary's Mission near Omak Lake on the Colville Reservation.

<sup>15</sup> Following formal presentations of the "Being on the Land Symposium" at the Mir site, participants were invited to walk the land at the former site of kp'itl'els at the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers. Long time resident of Brilliant, and local historian Bill Trubetskoff expertly led the walk and pointed out sites of abandoned railway and shipping lines, Doukhobor villages, and most importantly the last wooden home inhabited by Alex Christian and his family. Amongst the people present that afternoon was John Voykin, Regional District Director of Area I—which includes the Brilliant bench lands. He spoke openly with the group about his desire to see these lands devoted to cultural and interpretive purposes, perhaps in the form of a Park. He asked that the organizers of the "Being on the Land Symposium" formulate a letter requesting that Regional District recognize the cultural significance of the landscape at the confluence of the rivers and to ask that the lands be saved as an interpretive site for the peoples of the Kootenay region. At publication of these Symposium proceedings, the letter had been written and delivered to Mr. Voykin.



## Appendix A

### The Doukhobors and the Plains Indians

Extract from Linda Wilkinson's MA thesis

European University for Peace  
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Spring 2007

... the work of Lawney L. Reyes, *White Grizzly Bear's Legacy: Learning to be Indian* (2002), sheds new light on the life of Alexander Christian's family. Unlike Bouchard and Kennedy who record documents that trace historical records of events, Reyes is the grandson of Alexander Christian and tells his family's history as related to him by his mother and his own experience. What emerges is the story of Alexander Christian as a man of personal integrity, deeply committed to his family and the environment. The pages that tell of the Doukhobor settlement of Sinixt land<sup>1</sup>, although legal, show a missed opportunity for a peaceful integrated community with many shared values. Instead it will take many more years to approach reconciliation of the dislocation of an entire people who had lived in a particular environment for centuries, with those who were themselves exiled and evicted not once but several times from place to place in Russia and then again in Canada.

It is interesting to note that the first Doukhobor settlers in Saskatchewan also lived in close proximity to other First Nations people. Their lack of a common language and outward looking perspectives made it impossible for these communities to communicate or approach each other easily. They remained alienated from one another and from the general 'Canadian' population in Saskatchewan and later in British Columbia.

Some Doukhobors and First Nations individuals, however, did become friends in Saskatchewan in the early 1900's. Kathryn Soloveoff-Robbie (interviews, Oct/Nov, 2006), a poet of Doukhobor background, remembers that her paternal great-grandmother, 'Baba Soloveova', spoke Cree fluently. The family heard many stories of her deep friendship with a Cree neighbour in Saskatchewan. This Cree woman stayed with her Doukhobor friend for many days when a close member of the Soloveoff family died, helping with the grieving process and the daily chores. This act was of tremendous importance in the friendship as it showed a deep understanding, not only of shared traditions in helping 'family' members in times of need and sorrow, but also of the understanding of the role of women, whose daily tasks only increased during such times.

<sup>1</sup> "In 1912, Doukhobors, members of a religious sect from Russia, arrived ... hoping to find a better way of life. The Doukhobors settled where the Christian family lived. ... In August 1913, the Christian family went to Red Mountain for the huckleberry harvest. While they were there my mother was born. During their absence, the Doukhobors erected a barbed wire fence to mark the boundaries of their land and then plowed right up to the fence. ... The Christian family was angered when they returned to find the fence. They were outraged when they discovered that the graves of their relatives and ancestors had been plowed over."

Reyes continues with his mother's story with details not found in Bouchard and Kennedy: "My mother was five years old when the family was forced from their land. Before they left their home, Teresa Bernard Christian, my mother's mother died of pneumonia. It was a very sad day for Alex Christian [and] my mother. ... They placed her in the burial ground which had been plowed over by the Doukhobors, next to her children, Louis, George, and Julia ... Christian, Antoinette, St. Peter, Marianne, and other members of the family rested nearby. Today, the burial ground is unmarked and neglected" (p. 36).



The fenced-in farm had been a traditional path linking the Cree that the Soloveoff family recognized and respected. The Cree continued to walk through the farmyard as they had previously walked but now slept in the barn en route. Whenever Baba Soloveova knew there were people who had stayed the night, she took food out to them for breakfast.

Her husband also learned to speak some Cree and was known to race his horses against those of the Cree neighbors for sport. The Doukhobor and Cree boys played together at the river. Fred Soloveoff, a vegetarian Doukhobor, remembers that the only time he was tempted to eat fish was when he saw the way the fish were caught by the Cree, coated in clay, and put in fires to bake.

Another signal act in this family's history of relationships with their Cree neighbours, was the exposure of a burial site when the Soloveoff men were plowing their fields. Kathryn's father, Fred Soloveoff, still remembers this incident even though he was quite young at the time. The plowing stopped immediately as the Doukhobors in this instance recognized the importance of this and someone was sent to inform the Cree that bones indicating a gravesite had been unearthed. The response was immediate. A pow wow that then lasted several days took place on the spot and the bones were moved with great ceremony and respect.

This family's stories are not well known but are of great importance. The present writer was able to tell Marilyn James of the Sinixt Nation of this friendship between women, who learned to speak to each other and to share intimate traditions. Marilyn then spoke of another Doukhobor who is a personal friend, Marie Planedin, (interview, Nov 16, 2006) who has written about her own history, *My Life as a Doukhobor* (December 31, 1999), that includes photos and details about aboriginal friendships in Alberta (pp 32-33) and British Columbia (pp.171-176). Marie states that she wrote her family story as a gift to her children and grandchildren. Her book opens with a quote from her father, William Planedin: "*There is only one God and all men are brothers.*" Marie Planedin's openness to personal friendships with First Nations individuals seems to stem from her parents' and grandparents' friendships with aboriginal neighbours in the 1920's. Her own friendships date from the early 1990's:

A few years ago I also went to see the Native Sinixt People in Vallican and saw how they were staying in a tent in cold weather. They were trying to protect their cemetery and their ancient village site . . . My heart bled for them. . .

I have so much in common with the Native People here. We have both had our children taken away and put in residential schools, we have been persecuted for how and what we believe, and we live simple lives as best we can. The government even made laws to make their spiritual ways illegal to practice at one time. It is important to acknowledge the truth of what happened on these lands for the First Peoples just as it is important to acknowledge the truth of what happened to The Doukhobours also.

When I get together with my Native friends it feels like I am with my family and it feels good. . . (p. 171).

Marie Planedin's strong sense of identification with her 'Native friends' illustrates their many points of shared values.

It may bode well for future relations as stories such as these emerge and may yet be remembered and re-told to trace a different or 'hidden history' of peace (Boulding, 2000) that underlies the current one.



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## **"Being On the Land": Afterthoughts**

**Prepared by: Marilyn James,**  
Appointed spokesperson Sinixt Nation/  
Aboriginal Advisor Selkirk College



This was one of those occasions where my professional, tribal and personal responsibilities touched each other through involvement with this event. As a member of the Selkirk College community contacting the tribal members who would participate and attend is a function of my position as the Aboriginal Advisor at Selkirk College and the Mir Programming Committee on which I have a seat. Following protocol and fulfilling my responsibility to the Committee I contacted the Christian family members living in the United States. The Mir event was to focus on the history of the Brilliant area where the Alex Christian family was the last of the Sinixt peoples who attempted to maintain contact with their home and protect the burials at that site. My responsibility as the appointed spokesperson for the Sinixt nation is to make sure that invitations are extended, people know what is expected of them, offer them support and liaison, and often debrief tribal members who participate in events. Personally I am committed to community building and broadening the understanding of multi-cultural communications, sensitivity and reconciliation processes. Unfortunately none of Alex Christian's family members were able to attend the event and no other Sinixt tribal members except for Lola Campbell, the headman's daughter, and Agnes (Lola's one year old daughter) attended. Although tribal attendance was sparse the attendance by non-native community members was impressive for an event of this kind. You may wish to review the written materials submitted by other members of the Selkirk College community who provided written testament to the research and contemplation processes involved in considering this topic.

One of my major purposes for participating in this event was to witness, on behalf of my ancestors, Alex Christian and other ancestors disturbed in and from their burial places and what had happened to them on this landscape known as Brilliant. I believe that landscape holds memories of events that take place on them. If people and relationships are to be healed in such places there must be an examination and an acknowledgement that disturbing events took place. I acknowledge, on behalf of my ancestors, that the events were sordid and iniquitous and that no justification or rationalization can be erected around the incident. I believe an examination of these events will be difficult and uncomfortable for those who are present; however the process is necessary. I also believe that it is necessary for all parties to be present and if possible give voice to feelings of pain, regret, sadness, sorrow, anger, if not, to witness. I believe that one should attend these kind of events with an expectation to experience levels of emotional challenge and have the strength to develop a benevolent and forgiving demeanor. I also believe that it is necessary for anyone who is attending these events to attend with an openness for changing personal attitudes and reasons that are held to their very core of being and to be willing to let go of deeply held pain, hate, sorrow, guilt, etc. I understand that not all of those who attend will have the strength to give a voice to their feelings and indeed some will not even have the strength to attend and that those of us who



do have the strength and capacity to serve the community in this function have a responsibility to do so. I also wanted to be there to support any and all participants who might need clarification or someone to receive comments.

The actual historical context was one which had caused some turmoil between contemporary members of the Doukhobor community and the Sinixt. The turbulent beginnings between my Sinixt ancestors and the first Doukhobor settlers stretched both contemporary perspectives to a taut compulsion of position where neither was willing to move toward resolution. It took both time and will to overcome the historical context that had created a modern day barrier in communication and community relationship building. I applaud community members and those who are in educational and leadership positions who see the value of a commitment to community building through these public events where they model very necessary skills for community relationship building. From my own experiences, I know and understand that these reconciliation events are difficult, emotionally taxing and exhausting work. As we are all members of the community it is in effect the work of us all. I reiterate that those of us who have the capacity to do the work are largely responsible for doing the work and exemplifying for those who may move toward and eventually gain the capacity to also participate. I am glad to report that even though there were turbulent beginnings in the Sinixt/Doukhobor relationship those turbulent beginnings have blossomed into a broader understanding based upon supportive and compassionate premise. I also acknowledge that there is a long way to go. There is much work still to be done and with that acknowledgement is my commitment to participate to my fullest capacity in future events that present themselves as vehicles to growth and understanding between cultures and their landscapes.

I would like to take an opportunity to offer some insight and feedback on this event as the Sinixt witness. I was initially disappointed that the members of the Alex Christian family would not be present to witness on behalf of their grandfather. I have since altered my disappointment to allayment. As I listened to the perspectives that were presented that day (documents, photos anthropological/archeological, historical, and dialectic analysis) I felt those perspectives were suspended in some very powerful sensitivity, including my own. I found that even though I knew this story, had read the heart-wrenching letters and pleas, knew even a little more than what was revealed, such as Alex Christian's sister Mary Ann being murdered<sup>1</sup> and found on the railroad tracks there, my emotions became very tender. I am Sinixt. Alex Christian is my Sinixt ancestor. His story is in very close proximity to my tribal being. I was completely impacted and can only imagine how much more severe the impact would have been if I had to translate that emotion to my own grandfather. As I listened I realized that Alex Christian's direct family members may have been spared some very painful retrospection. I do not try to shield my people from these experiences when I know that there will be a very emotionally charged event. I do worry at times about how it will affect them. I worry because I know how it affects me personally; I know the price that is exacted, and I know how difficult it is to find a clear path from desolation and disparity. I am lucky because I have developed over a long experience a great many skills, tools and a support system that allows me to enter some very critical fields that I know would devastate someone who did not have capacity. I know this because there are times that I struggle even though I have some experience and some skills to draw upon. I also know that when I am responsible for inviting Sinixt people to participate in these events I also hold some responsibility in making sure that they are relatively unscathed and/or have ample opportunity to debrief and process any emotional fall-out. The presentations were challenging, but because I have a lot of experience with processing words and dialogue I am able to handle that aspect of my work and commitment. I tuck my emotional

<sup>1</sup> *Editor's note:* The events surrounding Mary-Ann Christian's death remain obscured in history. For more detail see Duff Sutherland, note 14, in this volume. Also, *Nelson Daily News*, 3 & 4 March, 1911 and *The Trail News*, 4 March, 1911.



response away internally then exhume, examine and process as I review an event. I feel a strong responsibility to process these presentations and the dialogue from all perspectives because that is what a witness does.

The aspect of this event that had the most profound effect on me was the walk about the land at Brilliant. As I stated earlier I believe that landscape holds memory of events that have taken place there, and as much as we witness for the living/dead we are often called to witness for the land. The experiences that I have had in this realm are awash with emotions that are held in a heightened state and will completely deluge one's being in a highly charged response that one is not in control of. It just happens. I was with the group close to Mr. William Trubetskoff where I would be able to hear what he was saying about building and railway placement and luckily the poison ivy warning. People within the group were walking and conversing with me and then moving away as others moved in to take their places so the activity level was high. I was aware of an emotional breeze that kept brushing up against my being and threatening to take me to a dark place. We walked to the place where the Alex Christian home sat, and I could see the exact layout that was reflective of the photo that had been displayed on a board at the Mir Centre. I had some tobacco with me and laid down an offering to the ancestors in an expression of regret about what had happened to them. I was still involved in conversations, including with the RDCK representative, about the land being turned into some type of park or interpretive walk with culturally appropriate signage. I stayed in the group as long as I possibly could and then excused myself. As I walked away the tears began to flow and I could not stop them. My being wanted to wail and wail but I would not allow the sound, only the silent sobbing that shook my body and brought me to the edge of the Columbia River where I wept. I wept and wept and at last was given something beautiful to see . . . a little dance between three Monarch butterflies and five bumblebees . . . and I was given a stone from the water. Then I was released. When I made my way back to the car all the others were gone. I will visit that place again, tell Alex Christian's family and other tribal members about that place, and maybe one day will be witness to that place being an interpretive site that witnesses the Sinixt with honor and respect.



## **"Being on the Land, Being Devout"**

**Presented by: John J. Verigin,**  
Executive Director USCC Doukhobor Community



**D**ear Brothers and Sisters, Friends and Neighbors, it is a pleasure to be here with all of you in such a beautiful environment! At the outset I wish to express my appreciation to Selkirk College and those department heads and academics responsible for organizing and hosting this gathering. It is indeed fitting that we are meeting at the Mir Centre for Peace, dedicated to building and understanding cultures of peace, and promoting healing, reconciliation, and respect for our human and natural environment.

These are noble ideals. They are also inherent to the heritage of the Sinixt Nation, and the many ethnic backgrounds and spiritual traditions represented by all of you present today, including members of the Doukhobor community.

I also wish to thank those of you who have extensively researched the sensitive issues we are addressing today for sharing your findings with us. In particular I wish to thank our Sinixt brothers and sisters for bringing forth painful memories in the hope of putting to rest the troubled spirits of those who initially walked on this special land at the confluence of two mighty rivers.

The motto of Selkirk College is "When in doubt inquire". It is taken from a Doukhobor psalm called "Be Devout", and it is with this spirit of honest inquiry that we hope to reconcile the past and build a better future. I believe this is the promise represented by the Mir Centre for Peace and the hope shared by all of us present today.

To inquire is to raise one's awareness, to educate oneself in the hope of improving one's understanding, one's condition in life. Among many things in common that we Doukhobors share with our Aboriginal and Indigenous brothers and sisters including spiritual beliefs, outlook on the world, and efforts to sustain our culture and customs, is the fact that we both come from an oral tradition. Stories of our respective histories and heritages have been passed down orally from generation to generation. Most of the early material about us was written by others. As rich as our stories and oral tradition may be, on occasion it becomes difficult to distinguish facts from fiction, particularly when the facts may be unpleasant.

In this connection I wish to express my appreciation to Lawney Reyes, grandson of Alexander Christian, for putting his recollections down on paper. They represent a crack in official history which lets in the light of truth, as uncomfortable as that truth may be.

Several years ago, the troubled history of the Sinixt nation and the Doukhobor community was brought to my attention by Marilyn James the Sinixt spokesperson. In June 2001 at the ceremonial



blessing of the Mir lands by Sinixt elders, I apologized on behalf of the USCC and the wider Doukhobor community for any wrong-doings or ill-will directed toward living Sinixt, or their forebears, by my people. For those of you present today I must repeat that such actions or even thoughts reflect neither the heritage of Doukhobors, nor the teachings of those who led our community during the time of the CCUB, or for that matter its offspring the USCC.<sup>1</sup>

We offered our regrets and apologies to these Elders in the hopes of settling their spirits and to ensure that the new beginning of our relationship with the Sinixt nation and all those with whom we intend to work together here is based on the truth, respect for each other and good will to all. In this same spirit and in the hope of bringing peace to the spirits of those members of the Sinixt nation that we have heard about today, I again offer my sincere apologies to the Sinixt nation and emphatically declare that what some members of a Christian community did to members of the Christian family was definitely not Christian.

It is disturbing and even ironic to note that those who have endured persecution are more often than not, capable of inflicting it on others. One would think the lessons learned would lead one to extend compassion. Sadly that appears not to be the case here, nor in far too many other places on our planet.

This tragic reality underscores the need for and the importance of this Mir Centre for Peace. Through honest inquiry and focused education, and the respectful sharing of the knowledge inherent in our traditions and practices, and those of others, we can learn and apply ways to heal hearts, mend minds, and soothe spirits. We can develop techniques that promote reconciliation and non-violent resolution of conflict, both at home and abroad. We can draw on our heritage and history, and that of others, to learn and put into practice manners of living that reflect our respect for our human and natural environment. We can validate our common desire for true freedom and real justice, and in this manner brothers and sisters, harness the wisdom and the will to build a world that is at peace, a peace which is sustainable because it is based on the power of love rather than the love of power.

This would be a most worthy gift to our children and their children. It would also honor all of our elders and make the trials and tribulations of all of our ancestors worthwhile. May God bless all of us with the love and the light to see this noble task through.

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<sup>1</sup> The forerunner organization to the current Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC) was the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB).





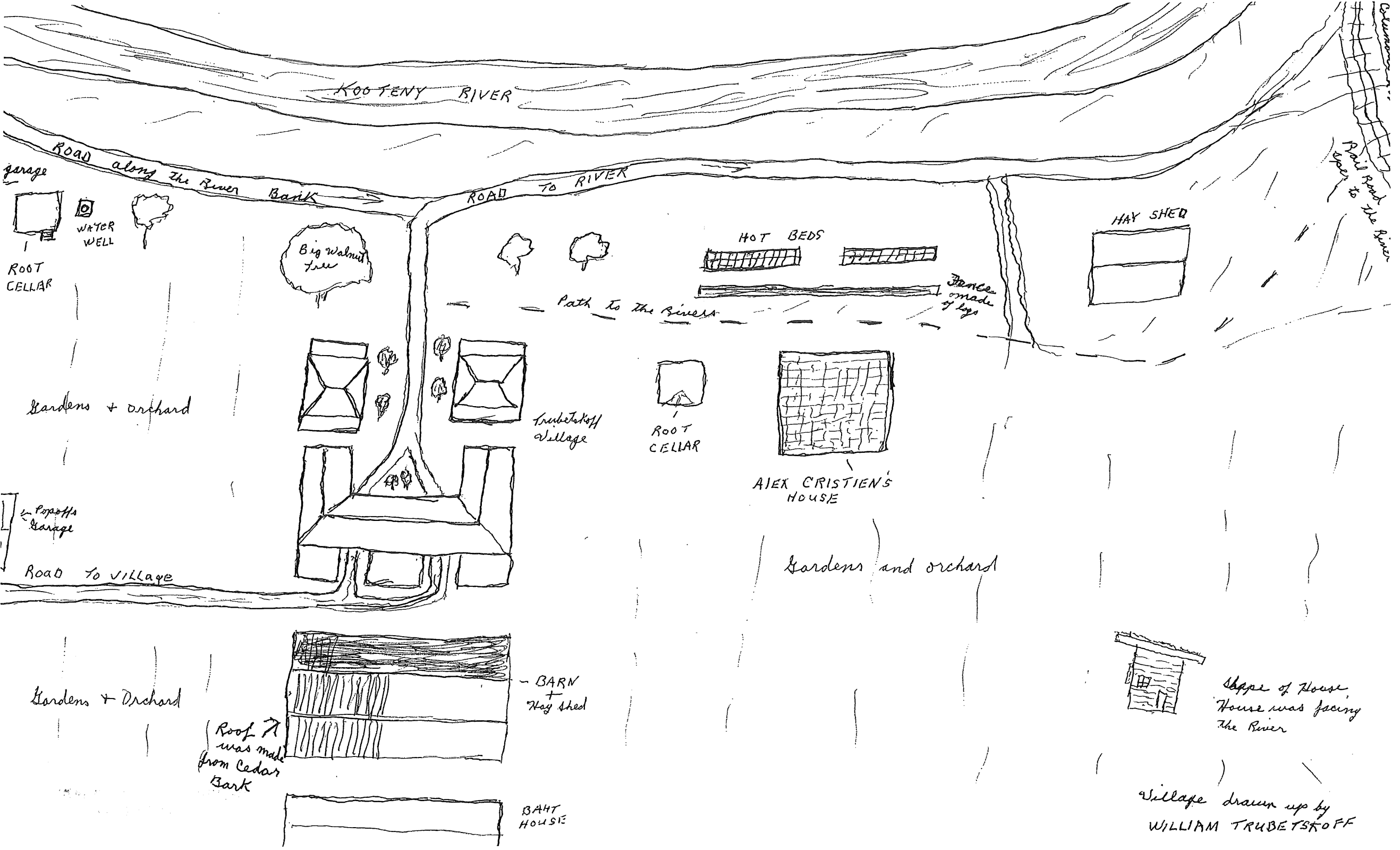
*"...I believe that landscape holds memory of events that have taken place there and as much as we witness for the living/dead we are often called to witness for the land."*

*"....in the hope of putting to rest the troubled spirits of those who initially walked on this special land at the confluence of two mighty rivers."*

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OLD ROAD TO NELSON

ROAD TO TOP  
VILLAGES

Y-7

4-8

OLD HWYWAY TO NELSON

PETER VERIGIN  
1 SY. HOME

VERIGIN

THUMB  
CARB TAKER  
MAKORTOFF

BRILLIANT  
CPR STATION

PLAVER MILL

197. BRILLIANT SCHOOL

CPR RAIL ROAD

BRILLIA  
INDIAN  
HOUSE

ROAD TO UPPER VILLAGES

FROM PASS CREEK WATER WAS PUMP UP TO  
SAW MILL + VILLAGES ACROSS KOOTENAI RIVER

ROAD TO BRILLIANT  
JAM FACTORY

PACKEN  
HOUSE

 **WCC STORE**

ROAD TO BRILLIANT  
BRIDGE

LIEBING

GORKOFF  
VILLAGE

212  
SETLE

v.3

R

BLACK SMITH  
SHOP

KOOTENY

LOWER BENCH

PLOTNIKOFF  
VILLAGE



VILLAGES

ROAD TO LOWER BENCH

TRUBETSKOFF  
VILLAGE

WOODEN  
CPR  
BRIDGE

INDIAN  
HOUSE

← MAN MADE  
DIVERSION DYKE  
MADE FROM LOGS + ROCK  
SO SHIPS TO GO THROUGH

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